

Concordia Seminary - Saint Louis

## Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary

---

Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

Concordia Seminary Scholarship

---

5-1-2010

### **“Made in Each Other:” John Scottus Eriugena’s Conception of the Human Person as a Unifying Vocabulary for Trinitarian Metanarrative and Anticartesian Phenomenology**

Carey B. Vinzant

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir\_vinzantc@csl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/phd>



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

#### **Recommended Citation**

Vinzant, Carey B., ““Made in Each Other:” John Scottus Eriugena’s Conception of the Human Person as a Unifying Vocabulary for Trinitarian Metanarrative and Anticartesian Phenomenology” (2010). *Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation*. 141.

<https://scholar.csl.edu/phd/141>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Concordia Seminary Scholarship at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact [seitzw@csl.edu](mailto:seitzw@csl.edu).

“MADE IN EACH OTHER:”  
JOHN SCOTTUS ERIUGENA’S CONCEPTION OF THE HUMAN PERSON AS A  
UNIFYING VOCABULARY FOR TRINITARIAN METANARRATIVE AND ANTI-  
CARTESIAN PHENOMENOLOGY

---

A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of  
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Systematic Theology  
in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

---

By  
Carey B. Vinzant  
May 2010

Approved by

---

Dr. Joel P. Okamoto      Advisor

---

Dr. Leopoldo A. Sánchez M. Reader

---

Dr. Paul W. Robinson      Reader

To my wife and son, Allene and Patrick, who have loved and supported me and prayed nightly for Dad to finish his book. Here it is.

# CONTENTS

PREFACE .....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	xxv
ABSTRACT .....	xxvi

## PART I: ERIUGENA AND THE FATHERS

Chapter

INTRODUCTION TO PART I .....	1
1. ERIUGENA'S DOCTRINAL FRAMEWORK .....	4
2. THE TRIUNE IMAGE.....	38

## PART II: PERSONHOOD AND EPISTEMOLOGY

Chapter

INTRODUCTION TO PART II .....	58
3. DYNAMIC INTEGRATION .....	62
4. ENGAGING THE KNOWER .....	79
5. THE MIND'S LIMITS .....	99
6. THE CONSEQUENCES OF KNOWING .....	129

## PART III: UNIQUENESS, RELATION, AND TELEOLOGY

Chapter

INTRODUCTION TO PART III .....	160
7. BEING KNOWN.....	163
8. THE INTEGRITY OF PERSONS IN RELATION .....	188
9. PERSONHOOD CONSUMMATED .....	214
EPILOGUE .....	245

Appendix

1. ERIUGENA AND GREGORY NYSSSEN ON GENESIS .....	248
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	251
VITA .....	258

## PREFACE

In this study I have set forth an account of John Scottus Eriugena's conception of the human person as both relevant and useful to the contemporary discussion of personhood. In particular, Eriugena is useful to this discussion in that his thought is strongly consonant with both the metaphysical account of personhood set forth by Trinitarian Theology and also with the phenomenological account offered by certain Anti-Cartesian philosophers. Both the Trinitarian and the phenomenological approaches emerge in and inform Eriugena's account of the human person. The Scot's project as a whole might be described as a grand experiment in communicating the content of doctrine through interaction with the vocabulary of philosophy and his usefulness in drawing together the Trinitarian and Anti-Cartesian accounts of the human person lies precisely therein.

One of the chief difficulties of writing about a thinker like Eriugena arises from the nature of scholarly writing itself. Eriugena is a profoundly integrative thinker, which makes reading his works an education in itself, but that drive to integrate also means that isolating an individual element of his thought can be challenging, to say the least. To present a "narrowed" study of the Scot immediately runs the risk of being unduly reductive. I have tried, therefore, to present Eriugena in a way which, rather than simply isolating a single aspect of his thought, deals with that aspect by emphasizing it, while also paying attention to the ways in which that aspect relates to the Scot's thought as a whole. One might argue (and be correct in doing so), that this is just good reading of any text, but this point is especially important with Eriugena. His writing is quite often dense, and his line of thought can be difficult to follow. At the same time, however, the Scot is a thinker with a remarkable aptitude for developing the implications of doctrine, not only for the further articulation of doctrine itself, but also for how we understand the Christian life itself.

As a way of drawing out and highlighting the profundity and relevance of Eriugena's reflection on the human person, I have emphasized the ways in which he evokes both the patristic stream with which Trinitarian theologians like Zizioulas are concerned and the phenomenological richness of the Twentieth Century "Anti-Cartesians" as the predominant theme in this study. In short, I believe that Trinitarian theologians (most importantly Zizioulas) have done a great deal to set forth a metaphysical account of personhood that is both important and rigorous. It does not take the reader of Zizioulas long, however, to realize that his primary concern is ecclesiological and hopefully to recognize that the implications of a Trinitarian conception of personhood extend well beyond the bounds of what we usually consider to be ecclesiology proper. If we are, as Zizioulas argues, beings for whom both uniqueness and relationality are constitutive, this reality should inform every aspect of our lives exactly because our lives are the lives of *persons*. At especially this point, the Twentieth Century Anti-Cartesians (especially Buber, Macmurray, and Marcel) are very helpful, because they have considered the human person within the sweep of human experience as a whole. They help us to see the myriad implications of personhood as a central category in reflection on what it means to be human. At the same time, however, the Anti-Cartesians do not offer the sort of metaphysical rigor, comprehensiveness, and coherence that we see in Trinitarian theology.

That the parallels between these two streams in the discussion of human personhood are striking needs no demonstration; these thinkers recognize the affinities for themselves at least to a sufficient extent that they feel the need to allude to one another. We need only to observe Zizioulas' interaction with Buber's ideas or Marcel's attempts to express what are finally theological motifs in the language of philosophy. The problem, however, is that despite these

recognitions, Trinitarian theologians and Anti-Cartesian philosophers still seem in significant measure to be talking past one another. It is my hope in offering this reading of John the Scot that his thought might serve as a sort of unifying vocabulary through which those involved in the discussion of human personhood might interact with a clearer understanding of the different categories and concerns that motivate the theological and philosophical streams in that discussion. In other words, this study has at its heart a concern for translation. This is not a guarantee of agreement, but it is a step toward further clarifying the parameters of the discussion.

To say that this is our primary focus, however, is not to deny the importance of other concerns in this study. Another concern is to do justice to the richness and complexity of Eriugena's thought. As I said at the outset, Eriugena is driven by the urge to integrate, and it would be a disservice to oversimplify his thought. Because of this, before we begin to consider Eriugena's reflection on the human person, I would like to point out three motifs that I believe are important as what we might call *subtexts* in our study of the Scot. The first of these subtexts is the fundamentally hermeneutical nature of Eriugena's thought as a whole. It is no overstatement to say that, as I have tried to show, Eriugena's project is driven at every turn by his concern for the centrality and importance of the interpretive act in life as a human person. His lengthy exegeses of Scripture and the Fathers are an obvious examples of this concern, but this impulse reaches much further; it finds further expression in his conception of creation as revealing God (as a piece of art reflects its creator) and comes to its fullest expression in his eschatology, which centers on the crucial importance of interpretation in the individual person's experience of the *Visio Dei*.

This brings us to our second subtext: the concept of eschatology as a framework within which the Scot develops his ontology from a teleological perspective. Eriugena places the absolute reality and primacy of God at the center of his system. For us as human persons, the eschaton represents the clearest and most comprehensive expression of this principle. In the eschaton, God's design is manifest with a clarity and fullness that surpasses anything that has gone before. It is therefore in the eschaton that human persons will most fully come to see who they truly are. For Eriugena, the eschaton represents the fullest emergence of the human person; this process, which is begun in this life, is brought to its culmination in the eschaton. Because this is so, we need to pay careful attention to the Scot's eschatology in order to see what it tells us about his ontology. For the Scot, we must consider the human person in a teleological context before we can properly engage the ontological question. In considering what we are now, what we will be must take precedence. In this light, we can very rightly say that, in Eriugena, the importance of faith and hope as theological virtues finds expression as a driving theological principle.

The third subtext I would like to suggest for our study of Eriugena emerges as a practical outworking of the theme of becoming. Students of the Christian mystical tradition will be familiar with the idea of a progression in the contemplative life. In the East, this progression emerges as an important motif in the thought of Maximus Confessor, who was, as we will see, an important influence on the Scot. It later emerges as a central principle in Nicholas of Cusa, whose *De docta ignorantia* represents one of the fullest and most systematic developments of this idea in the Medieval tradition. I want to suggest that in Maximus, and on through Eriugena to Nicholas, this idea takes a distinctive shape, even as it becomes progressively clearer in its transmission through these thinkers. The typical account of this progression runs something like this: In the first stage, the thinker considers the created world and, as it were, collects data. In the second, the thinker begins to consider the reasons and relationships that lie behind those data. In the third, the thinker encounters God in an experience that transcends understanding. Even in Maximus, however, (and progressively more clearly so in Eriugena and Cusanus) I believe that

there is an implied moment between the second and third stages, in which the thinker reaches the limits of his capacity to understand and is confronted with how much it is simply not possible to know. It is in the ensuing silence that God meets the thinker and the third stage happens. It is this third stage which Cusanus describes as *docta ignorantia* and to which he devotes the work of that name.

I have made this point in order to underscore the importance of what we might call “silence,” or perhaps “humility,” in the maturation of the Christian thinker. One of the most important parts of theology consists in not allowing it to degenerate into a mere thought exercise. The urgency of the questions, coupled with the absence of clear and verifiable answers to some questions that we might consider to be important, demand that the Christian theologian both think and speak with great respect for what cannot be said.

It is in this light that I suggest our third subtext: the growing sense of silence in Eriugena’s works. We will be considering three of the Scot’s works in this study: the *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, the *Periphyseon*, and the *Homily on the Prologue to John’s Gospel* because these works are (1) theological in character (as opposed to the Scot’s Latin poetry), (2) complete works (as opposed to his unfinished commentary on John’s Gospel), and (3) clear and positive articulations of the Scot’s own thought, driven by his own concerns (as opposed to his commentaries on the pseudo-Dionysius and Martianus Capella). The *Treatise* is an early work, while the *Homily* is from the later years of Eriugena’s life, and the *Periphyseon* is chronologically situated in between these two. From the sharp and confident tone Eriugena employs in the *Treatise*, we find that he moves to a more sober and expansive inquiry in the *Periphyseon*. The *Homily* is less speculative than either of the other two works, and it is characterized by a sort of grave dignity that is less pronounced even in the *Periphyseon*. This progression from the almost arrogant assertiveness of the *Treatise* to the more careful reflection of the *Periphyseon* to the doxological confidence of the *Homily* suggest a maturation in Eriugena himself, and a principle which I believe should inform our reading of his thought.

The four-stage narrative of the contemplative life that we have just outlined (contemplation of created things; contemplation of reasons and relations; silence; illumination) seems to describe admirably what we see in the works of Eriugena. A great deal has been said about Eriugena as one who dealt almost equally in theology and philosophy, but what seems to be less emphasized is the gradual shift of emphasis which we see in the Scot’s thought. His first commentary is on Capella, a philosopher. The second is on the *Celestial Hierarchy* of the pseudo-Denis, a theologian. The third (unfinished) is on the Gospel of John. This parallels the movement we see from the *Treatise*, which places great emphasis upon the liberal arts, to the more balanced integrative approach of the *Periphyseon*, and thence to the *Homily*, which is certainly touched by the language of philosophy but is through and through a work of exegesis and proclamation. In short, what we seem to see if we consider Eriugena’s works in light of our four-stage narrative is a gradual reassessment of the relationship between reason and faith. If it is an overstatement to speak of an evolution in Eriugena from philosophical polemicist to speculative dialogician to preacher, the overstatement is not a great one. At any rate, we see in the *Homily* a quality of quiet joy and the diction of a man who has asked the hard questions and speaks in the end with confidence that he knows Whom he has believed. Eriugena’s works, then, ought to be read not just as an account of personhood in general, but also of one particular person’s spiritual development. It is in light of the considerations spelled out here that the reader is invited to join me in examining the thought of John the Scot.

Eriugena is, to say the least, an unusual and somewhat enigmatic figure. The known details of his life are few and the subject of some debate, and his works were so thoroughly atypical of the time and place in which he wrote (mid-Ninth Century France) that he found himself quickly

marginalized in the theological discussions of his day. His unique combination of broad familiarity with both Eastern and Western patristic sources, probing intellect, and the deep piety, which shines clearly through the dense philosophical explorations in which he engages gives birth to a system of thought which is provocative and, to put it mildly, uncharacteristic of Carolingian France. Henry Bett sums it up nicely when he describes Eriugena as "born out of due time."<sup>1</sup>

The immediate impression when reading Eriugena is of a man unafraid to pursue any question, one willing to ask about big issues and determined to integrate the insights of every discipline into a coherent whole. One of the singular strengths of Eriugena's thought is his synthesis of systematic reflection with insightful analysis of the mind's operation. That the mind ought not to live in opposition to faith is a deep and abiding concern for the Scot. Werner Beierwaltes provides a name for and a salutary account of the type of project in which Eriugena is engaged, as well as a clear indication of Eriugena's significance. He describes Eriugena as

the father of speculative theology. Speculative theology attains its end in constituting the unity of divine and human spirit, in establishing the real oneness of revelation and reason in their deepest life and being, and in reconciling the Incarnation (i.e., the second creation) with creation: then only is salvation fully achieved. Since Eriugena holds the mutual relation of faith and knowledge 'in such a favourable and lively connection in which they condition and strengthen one another in the human mind,' he is regarded as prototype of speculative thought.... Through him Christian speculative thought has gained self-consciousness once for all; that is his epoch-making achievement.<sup>2</sup>

In this light, this study will engage Eriugena's thought with the intention of beginning to develop such a speculative account as Beierwaltes has described which specifically focuses on the question of human personhood.

### **Personhood in Modern Discussions of Philosophy and Theology**

More specifically, in this study I seek to contribute to the contemporary discussions of personhood as they have emerged on the one hand in the context of philosophy and on the other in that of theology with a view toward offering a way to integrate the two. To establish the significance of this contribution, I will begin by bringing out some common themes in the theological and philosophical discussions. In the contemporary philosophical discussion, one key figure is John Macmurray, former professor of moral philosophy at Edinburgh. His Gifford Lectures, published as *The Form of the Personal*, offer a point of entry into this discussion in that they both point out some key issues and suggest a way forward. We will also consider some ideas from Martin Buber, whose thought both parallels and compliments that of Macmurray.

Before discussing Macmurray, however, I might explain why, given that a number of

---

<sup>1</sup> Henry Bett, *Johannes Scotus Eriugena: A Study in Mediaeval Philosophy* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Werner Beierwaltes, "The Revaluation of John Scottus Eriugena in German Idealism," in *The Mind of Eriugena: Papers of a Colloquium Dublin, 14-18 July 1970*, ed. John J. O'Meara and Ludwig Bieler (Dublin: Irish University Press, 1973), 191.

thinkers have reflected on personhood in the contemporary discussion, Macmurray and Martin Buber<sup>3</sup> have been selected as points of entry for this study. The answer to this question touches upon a core concern, which this dissertation will seek to address. The discussion of personhood seems to move along at least two different, although parallel, lines. The first of the two is the Trinitarian discussion that has lately found expression in, among others, Zizioulas, who would nevertheless claim that its origins lie much earlier—in, most especially, the thought of the Cappadocians and Maximus the Confessor. The second is the philosophical reaction against Cartesian individualism that has emerged in such Twentieth Century thinkers as Macmurray, Martin Buber, Wojtyla, Berdiaev, and others.<sup>4</sup> Certain of these thinkers have recognized that there are significant affinities between the contents of the Trinitarian and the philosophical discussions and have interacted at some length across the divide between the two (although I would argue that there is still something of a communication gap between the two sides of the discussion, hence Eriugena’s usefulness). Zizioulas and LaCugna have each interacted with Macmurray’s thought, and Zizioulas has also interacted with that of Buber. While the insights of other thinkers might indeed be germane to the discussion, I have selected Buber and Macmurray specifically because their relevance is already acknowledged within the Trinitarian conversation. Wojtyla, for example, might be relevant, but his relevance to the specifically Trinitarian discussion would have to be established by another study. This study seeks specifically to establish *Eriugena’s* relevance as a means of bringing together these two streams in the discussion of personhood (the Trinitarian and the Anti-Cartesian). To this end, I have begun with Macmurray and Buber because they are figures with whom the Trinitarian discussion is already in dialogue. That being said, we will now see how Macmurray helps us begin to frame the discussion.

We begin with Macmurray because he argues convincingly how “personhood” has become an ignored issue in modern philosophy and why this constitutes a significant and unavoidable problem. As he says in the first volume of his Gifford Lectures (later published as *The Self as Agent*):

If science moves from an established physics to the foundation of scientific biology, we find that philosophy moves from a mathematical to an organic form. We should expect, then, that the emergence of a scientific psychology would be paralleled by a transition from an organic to a personal philosophy. The form of the personal will be the emergent problem.<sup>5</sup>

What Macmurray is arguing is that hitherto the question he calls “the form of the personal” has been inadequately addressed, if it has been addressed at all. He explains the problem he sees in the preceding three and half centuries of philosophy as a problem both of methodology and of livability:

The traditional point of view is both theoretical and egocentric. It is theoretical in that

---

<sup>3</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1950).

<sup>4</sup> Karol Wojtyla, *The Acting Person* (Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1979); Nikolai Berdiaev, *The Destiny of Man* (London: G. Bles, 1954).

<sup>5</sup> John Macmurray, *The Self as Agent* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 37.

it proceeds as though the Self were a pure *subject* for whom the world is *object*. This means that the point of view adopted by our philosophy is that of the Self in its moment of reflection, when its activity is directed towards the acquirement of knowledge. Since the Self in reflection is withdrawn from action, withdrawn into itself, withdrawn from participation in the life of the world into contemplation, this point of view is also egocentric. The Self in reflection is self-isolated from the world which it knows.<sup>6</sup>

The problem, then, is that the “traditional” approach to which Macmurray refers (which has its genesis in Descartes, whom we shall shortly examine) fails to reckon with the mutuality which exists between the self and the world. The need to acknowledge the reality of this mutuality becomes especially acute when we speak of relations which exist between persons; at this point the tension between the lived experience of interpersonal contact and the solipsistic tendencies of the tradition Macmurray is critiquing becomes a real and urgent problem. He frames his argument this way:

Human behaviour is comprehensible only in terms of a dynamic social reference; the isolated, purely individual self is a fiction. In philosophy this means . . . that the unity of the personal cannot be thought as the form of an individual self, but only through the mutuality of personal relationship.... [This] compels us to abandon the traditional individualism or egocentricity of our philosophy. We must introduce the second person as the necessary correlative of the first, and do our thinking not from the standpoint of the ‘I’ alone, but of the ‘you and I’.<sup>7</sup>

It is from this concern that Macmurray states, “Against the assumption that the Self is an isolated individual, I have set the view that the Self is a *person*, and that personal existence is *constituted* by the relation of persons.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, Macmurray is putting forward the proposition that to be personal is to be *inter*-personal. There are no truly isolated persons, so any viewpoint which treats personhood as autonomous individuality is fundamentally at odds with the lived reality of personhood.

Two major figures in the history of philosophy, René Descartes and Martin Buber, help us to understand the import of Macmurray’s argument that “the form of the personal will be the emergent problem.” Descartes’ significance in the development of the European philosophical tradition needs no real defense, as Jeffrey Stout tells us: “We still allude to his name or to his metaphor when we need a tag for a theory of knowledge to propose or oppose... Descartes is, as the textbooks tell us, the father of modern philosophy.”<sup>9</sup> Macmurray would not disagree with this analysis; he would simply add that Descartes has been a poor “father.” In *The Self as Agent* he rejects the very foundation on which Cartesianism (and, as Stout has just pointed out, the entire philosophical tradition which has followed in its train) is built when he says,

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>9</sup> Jeffrey Stout, *The Flight from Authority* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 25.

Any philosophy which takes the ‘Cogito’ as its starting-point and centre of reference institutes a formal dualism of theory and practice; and... this dualism makes it formally impossible to give any account, and indeed to conceive the possibility of persons in relation, whether the relation be theoretical—as knowledge, or practical—as cooperation. For thought is essentially private.<sup>10</sup>

A brief examination of Descartes’ *Discourse on Method* shows the tendencies toward abstraction and egocentrism that Macmurray describes. While Richard Bernstein (among many others) views the *Meditations* as the Cartesian *locus classicus*,<sup>11</sup> it is nevertheless true that the *Meditations* lack the personal, narrative character of the *Discourse*. The *Meditations* represent the articulation of Descartes’ thought after the fact. The *Discourse*, because of its autobiographical character, would seem to be more helpful for understanding the development of Descartes’ thought and the concerns from which his conclusions follow. Descartes’ method is based in what amounts to a hermeneutic of suspicion in which only one’s own detached thought can be trusted. Any information that comes from anyone other than oneself—and oneself while engaged in the act of individual reflection at that—must necessarily be treated as prejudiced. This is so because the thinker can have no assurance that anyone else is fairly and consistently analyzing the information with which they as individuals are presented. He says early in the *Discourse*,

I thought that we were all children before being men, and at which time we were necessarily under the control of our appetites and our teachers, and that neither of these influences is wholly consistent, and neither of them, perhaps, always tends towards the better. It is therefore impossible that our judgments should be as pure and firm as they would have been had we the whole use of our mature reason from the time of our birth and if we had never been under any other control.<sup>12</sup>

For Descartes, the external world is the source of bias; mutuality is the enemy because it skews the functioning of reason. Because of this he concludes that he must discard everything he has thus far been told because it has all come from sources that, according to the method he has set for himself, can only be treated as prejudiced and suspect. No wheel can be relied upon except the one that the thinker, operating with the methodology Descartes is setting forth, invents for himself. This becomes evident when he says,

As far as the opinions I had been receiving since my birth were concerned, I could not do better than to reject them completely for once in my lifetime, and to resume them afterwards, or perhaps to accept better ones in their place, when I had

---

<sup>10</sup> Macmurray, *The Self as Agent*, 73.

<sup>11</sup> Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 16.

<sup>12</sup> René Descartes, *Descartes: “Discourse on Method” and “Meditations,”* trans. Laurence J. Lafluer (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1960) 11.

determined how they fitted into a rational scheme.<sup>13</sup>

This epistemological act of, as it were, throwing his hands in the air did not emerge *ex nihilo*. Descartes is in fact reacting against the abuse of credibility as a basis for knowledge. The philosophical tradition he has inherited is rife with aberrations born of poor logic built upon incredible assumptions. The academic environment in which he was trained has bequeathed to Descartes a ponderous, top-heavy philosophical edifice that is all too ready to collapse under its own weight. Descartes is experiencing a cognitive dissonance analogous to that of Galileo and Copernicus in the face of the Aristotelian cosmology, which was then the prevailing account, and thus the one with which they had to interact. To make matters worse, there is not even a single prevailing account upon which Descartes can rely because of its universal acceptance. He makes this clear when he says,

I had discovered in college that one cannot imagine anything so strange and unbelievable but that it has been upheld by some philosopher; and in my travels I had found that those who held opinions contrary to ours were neither barbarians nor savages, but that many of them were at least as reasonable as ourselves.<sup>14</sup>

This is the “problem of many authorities” to which Stout refers.<sup>15</sup> For Descartes, this problem has clear practical implications. If the many disagree, then many can be wrong. If many can be wrong, more people could easily be wrong than are right. Furthermore, given that this is so, no additional epistemological weight can be reasonably given to an argument simply because it accords with the prevailing view. Descartes expresses it this way:

Faced with this divergence of opinion, I could not accept the testimony of the majority, for I thought it worthless as a proof of anything somewhat difficult to discover, since it is much more likely that a single man will have discovered it than a whole people.<sup>16</sup>

Because of this problem of many authorities, none of whom can be considered to be trustworthy, Descartes moves increasingly toward an individualized epistemology. The responsibility implicit in that move is daunting, so Descartes begins to articulate a practical methodology within which he can pursue his project. If he is reckless in the ways he acts upon his conclusions, he cannot expect any exemption from their civil and moral consequences. If his conclusions are unsound, there can be no prudent way to act upon them. He therefore requires a safe way of proceeding with his experiment in order that it might not end in disaster. Descartes articulates his practical concern this way:

While reason obliged me to be irresolute in my beliefs, there was no reason why I

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>15</sup> Stout, *The Flight from Authority*, 41.

<sup>16</sup> Descartes, *Descartes: “Discourse on Method” and “Meditations,”* 14.

should be so in my actions. In order to live as happily as possible during the interval I prepared a provisional code of morality for myself, consisting of three or four maxims which I here set forth. The first was to obey the laws and customs of my country, constantly retaining the religion which I judged best, and in which, by God's grace, I had been brought up since childhood. . .<sup>17</sup>

Several things in this passage are both striking and significant in light of what has gone before. First, Descartes tries to make his project livable by compartmentalizing: he divorces his "irresolute" thinking from his praxis, and he says that he does this so that he might "live as happily as possible." One wonders whether these two considerations alone—compartmentalization and the concern for happiness—have not already reintroduced the bias he seeks to escape, but further cause for concern follows. His determination to remain a good French citizen and a devout Roman Catholic seem somewhat inconsistent in light of the dim view he has previously taken toward environmental influences. Descartes is hedging his bet by clinging to France and Christianity, but to him these are both elements of praxis, not thought. He makes this clear when he says, "After thus assuring myself of these maxims, and having put them aside with the truths of the Faith, which have always been most certain to me, I judged that I could proceed freely to reject all my other beliefs."<sup>18</sup> This "putting aside" is significant in that it makes "the truths of the Faith" essentially irrelevant to the further development of Descartes' system.

A divide has clearly emerged between Descartes the man and Descartes the philosopher. He has divorced his thought from his praxis. He is willing to take this step because he sees it as justified by the pursuit of an unassailable philosophical method. Exhausted by the myriad conflicting accounts that simultaneously clamor for his attention and accuse each other of error, Descartes demands a unifying principle, a criterion in light of which all propositions can be evaluated. He relates,

I tried to clear my mind of all the errors that had previously accumulated. In this I did not wish to emulate the sceptics, who doubted only for the sake of doubting and intended always to remain irresolute; on the contrary, my whole purpose was to achieve greater certainty...<sup>19</sup>

Pursuant to this end, Descartes resolves to doubt everything that he can in order to discover that which he cannot doubt. That which is truly indubitable can therefore serve as the criterion Descartes is seeking. What simply cannot be doubted must necessarily be true, and therefore a thoroughly reliable measure of any other claim to truth. No proposition that can be falsified on the basis of differing assumptions can conclusively refute another, so the act of treating as false any proposition which begins with a conditional represents the quest for a datum that requires no justification. Any proposition which begins with "If" can, at least in theory, be falsified. In this process of deliberate and systematic doubt, therefore, Descartes is seeking a truth that is free from the "If," on the basis of which he can construct an irrefutable philosophy. He does, in fact,

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

come through the execution of this method to a conclusion, which he sets forth as follows:

I decided to suppose that nothing that had ever entered my mind was more real than the illusions of my dreams. But I soon noticed that while I thus wished to think everything false, it was necessarily true that I who thought so was something. Since this truth, *I think, therefore I am, or exist*, was so firm and assured that all the most extravagant suppositions of the sceptics were unable to shake it; I judged that I could safely accept it as the first principle of the philosophy I was seeking.<sup>20</sup>

The fruit of this method emerges clearly in the *Meditations*, where Descartes says,

Everything which I have thus far accepted as entirely true... has been acquired from the senses or by means of the senses. But I have learned by experience that these senses sometimes mislead me, and it is prudent never to trust wholly those things which have once deceived us.<sup>21</sup>

Descartes now lives in a world that he can only view as a succession of impressions that might or might not be real, and in which reliance upon the truth of an impression is therefore foolhardy. He is reduced to treating in effect all of his experience as a parade of mirages. Only the fact of one's own existence is truly and irrefutably knowable; anything outside the scope of the self may be illusory. It is therefore most prudent not to rely upon the reality of anything other than oneself. In this light, it is clearly the case that Macmurray's statement that "The Self in reflection is self-isolated from the world which it knows" accurately describes the outcome of Descartes' project.<sup>22</sup>

Martin Buber suggests further, disturbing implications of the Cartesian model. Like Macmurray, Buber believes that the personal is *interpersonal*: "Man becomes an I through a You."<sup>23</sup> Buber helps us by showing that the disconnect between thought and life fragments the self. Therefore this model is by its very nature unlivable, and is therefore of no use. In fact, the Cartesian disconnect is not merely useless; it is actively destructive. Where the actual relation between self and world comes into question, the reality of the self begins to erode. He explains the irreducible necessity of relation to human thinking as follows:

In the beginning is the relation—as the category of being as readiness, as a form that reaches out to be filled, as a model of the soul; the *a priori* of relation; the innate You. In the relationships through which we live, the innate You is realized in the You we encounter; that this, comprehended as a being we confront and accepted as exclusive, can finally be addressed with the basic word, has its ground in the *a priori* of relation.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>22</sup> Macmurray, *The Self as Agent*, 12.

<sup>23</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, 80.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 78.

Buber articulates what amounts to a flat rejection of the Cartesian disconnect between thought and praxis when he says,

The basic word I-You can be spoken only with one's whole being. The concentration and fusion into a whole being can never be accomplished by me, can never be accomplished without me. I require a You to become; becoming I, I say You. All of actual life is encounter.<sup>25</sup>

Buber believes that any adequate account of humanity must encompass the thinker as a whole, integrated being. This is borne out by his statement,

I speak only of the actual human being, of you and me, of our life and our world, not of any I-in-itself and not of any Being-in-itself... the It-humanity that some imagine, postulate, and advertise has nothing in common with the bodily humanity to which a human being can truly say You. . .<sup>26</sup>

A further insight of Buber's helps us to understand Macmurray's assessment of the Cartesian approach. Buber says, "Relation is reciprocity. My You acts on me as I act on it... Inscrutably involved, we live in the currents of universal reciprocity."<sup>27</sup> This sets the stage for a penetrating critique of the Cartesian approach:

The man who has acquired an I and says I-It assumes a position before things but does not confront them in the current of reciprocity. He bends down to examine particulars under the objectifying magnifying glass of close scrutiny, or he uses the objectifying telescope of distant vision to arrange them as mere scenery.<sup>28</sup>

This condition, which is to all appearances the same thing that Macmurray means when he describes the self as "self-isolated," raises a question, which Buber answers pointedly,

Why not call to order that which confronts us and send it home into objectivity? And when one cannot get around saying You, perhaps to one's father, wife, companion—why not say You and mean It? ... in all the seriousness of truth, listen: without It a human being cannot live. But whoever lives only with that is not human.<sup>29</sup>

The act of objectifying the world, of thinking of who and what we encounter only as "It," has consequences: "When man lets it have its way, the relentlessly growing It-world grows over

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 85.

him like weeds, his own I loses its actuality...<sup>30</sup> In this condition of self-isolation the reality of the self begins to fade as the self fragments itself by seeking to objectify itself as it does everything else in the world: “Thus the confrontation with the self comes into being, and this cannot be relation, presence, the current of reciprocity, but only self-contradiction.”<sup>31</sup> Where there is no allowance for encounter as a valid mode of experience, even one’s own self cannot escape its quest to objectify. There is no way to solve this problem within the closed system of the pervasive I-It, as Buber makes poignantly clear when he asks, “How is a being to collect itself as long as the mania of his detached I-hood chases it ceaselessly around an empty circle?”<sup>32</sup>

In her *God for Us*, Catherine LaCugna affirms the significance of Macmurray’s insights, and at least to the degree that there is agreement between them, one might say this also of Buber’s thought. Moreover, LaCugna’s project includes two lines of thought which are of special usefulness to this study: First, she describes in historical terms how the doctrine of the Trinity has moved from the realm of lived experience (as it emerged in the Church’s reflection on the economy of salvation) to the realm of abstract metaphysics (as the Church tended increasingly to base its Trinitarian thought on the *homoousios* rather than the *oikonomia*). Second, she argues that the undoing of this misstep would necessarily include the reentry of Trinitarian thought into the broader discussion. To this end, she suggests several areas in which it might do so, citing thinkers (including John Macmurray) whom she says provide a basis for that reentry. She recognizes an important element of Macmurray’s thought when she points out that “Macmurray’s philosophy of person has a theistic underpinning.”<sup>33</sup> She says later that for Macmurray, “religion is the celebration of the personal and communal.”<sup>34</sup> This leads her to the conclusion that “Macmurray’s philosophy of person is compatible in many respects with the doctrine of the Trinity, or at least it does not openly contradict it.”<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, she is careful to point out that “Macmurray was not a theologian, nor was he concerned with doctrine of the Trinity...”<sup>36</sup> For LaCugna, there are some fundamental questions concerning the nature of personhood that Macmurray leaves unaddressed. Therefore, she offers another thinker as a way forward in the discussion: “For this dimension of the question, we turn to the work of John Zizioulas.”<sup>37</sup>

In his *Being as Communion*, Zizioulas says,

Although the person and ‘personal identity’ are widely discussed nowadays as a supreme ideal, nobody seems to recognize that *historically* as well as *existentially* the

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>33</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity & Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993), 257.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 260.

concept of the person is indissolubly bound up with theology.... The person both as a concept and as a living reality is purely the product of patristic thought. Without this, the deepest meaning of personhood can neither be grasped nor justified.<sup>38</sup>

In a similar vein, Zizioulas says elsewhere,

To answer the question about the being of God, during the patristic period, was not easy... The Platonic conception of the creator God did not satisfy the Fathers of the Church... So it was necessary to find an ontology that avoided the monistic Greek philosophy as much as the ‘gulf’ between God and the world taught by the gnostic systems—the other great danger of this period. The creation of this ontology was perhaps the greatest philosophical achievement of patristic thought ... the being of God could only be known through personal relationships and personal love.<sup>39</sup>

As LaCugna has already made clear, Macmurray is operating from a different set of concerns from those which motivate Zizioulas. Nevertheless, while Macmurray is not a theologian, he is certainly not antagonistic to bringing theological reflection to bear on the discussion with which he is concerned. The secularization of philosophy is an issue he addresses unambiguously:

Religion is the original, and the one universal expression of our human capacity to reflect; as primitive and general as speech. It is atheists and agnostics who have been exceptional and abnormal... religion is the source from which the various aspects of human culture have been derived; and the belief in a radical disparity between philosophy and theology is an exceptional and recent phenomenon.<sup>40</sup>

Another parallel between the two emerges in Zizioulas’ discussion of Trinity:

The being of God is a relational being: without the concept of communion it would not be possible to speak of the being of God. . . It would be unthinkable to speak of the ‘one God’ before speaking of the God who is ‘communion,’ that is to say, of the Holy Trinity. The Holy Trinity is a primordial ontological concept and not a notion which is added to the divine substance or rather which follows it. . . The substance of God, ‘God,’ has no ontological content, no true being, apart from communion.... Nothing in existence is conceivable in itself, as an individual... since even God exists thanks to an event of communion. In this manner the ancient world heard for the first time that it is communion which makes things ‘be’: nothing exists without it, not even God.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1993), 27.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>40</sup> Macmurray, *The Self as Agent*, 20.

<sup>41</sup> Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 17.

This seems strikingly compatible with MacMurray's statement that "personal existence is constituted by the relation of persons."<sup>42</sup>

Still, however, the question remains: How can we address the concerns Macmurray, Buber, LaCugna, and Zizioulas have raised in an integrated way? In his introduction to Mary Brennan's translation of Eriugena's *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, Avital Wohlman offers an intriguing possibility: "What is striking about the debates, as well as a measure of what one may call the humanism of the Carolingian Renaissance, is the linkage uniting theology, psychology, and anthropology for the intellectuals of this period."<sup>43</sup> Wohlman's suggestion that Eriugena represents such a synthesis opens the possibility that Eriugena offers a way to integrate the concerns of these thinkers. What Eriugena offers is a way of looking at human personhood both from above and from below. In his *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, Dermot Moran adds another layer to the discussion: "... the imaginative, speculative system of John Scottus Eriugena is worthy of serious scrutiny in its own right, as a daring and innovative synthesis of Latin logical procedure with the mystical outlook of the Greek Christian Platonists."<sup>44</sup> That Eriugena's thought is germane to the contemporary discussion of personhood is lent further credence by Eriugena's anticipation of the Cartesian *cogito*, which has been shown both by Moran<sup>45</sup> and by Brian Stock.<sup>46</sup> Eriugena's usefulness becomes more apparent when we remember that he is in fact drawing upon a particular patristic stream; namely, Gregory of Nyssa, the pseudo-Dionysius, and Maximus the Confessor, all of whom Zizioulas treats at some length in *Being as Communion*. That Eriugena is, as Wohlman describes, drawing together the discussions of theology, anthropology and psychology provides a point of contact with Buber's and Macmurray's efforts, while his patristic sources connect him with Zizioulas' project.

### A Speculative-Theological Reading of Eriugena

As already said, this study intends to contribute to the two parallel discussions of personhood that have emerged in philosophy and theology. More specifically, this study uses the ideas of John the Scot to bring these two discussions into dialogue with each other with a view toward their integration. Major voices in both of these discussions—Buber and Macmurray in philosophy and Zizioulas and LaCugna in theology—have criticized contemporary talk about the "self." They have argued that the idea of relationship is constitutive of personhood, and also that much of the contemporary talk about personhood fails to take account of this key insight and thus is doomed to failure both intellectually and existentially.

The Trinitarian ontology of personhood set forth by Zizioulas and LaCugna offers a useful way forward, but a significant gap still exists between theology and philosophy where talk about personhood is concerned. All four of the thinkers mentioned have spoken of the relation that the

---

<sup>42</sup> Macmurray, *The Self as Agent*, 13.

<sup>43</sup> Avital Wohlman, "Introduction," in John Scottus Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, trans. Mary Brennan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), xix.

<sup>44</sup> Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena: A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), xi.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>46</sup> Brian Stock, "Intellego me esse: Eriugena's *cogito*," in *Jean Scot Erigene et l'histoire de la philosophie: Actes du II Colloque international Jean Scot Erigene*, ed. René Roques (Paris: CNRS, 1977), 327–36.

philosophical and theological discussions *ought* to have to one another, but none of them has taken significant steps toward establishing that relation; none has provided a constructive synthesis. Pannenberg has made a substantial (but not the final) contribution to this endeavor with his *Systematic Theology*<sup>47</sup> and his *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*,<sup>48</sup> but more remains to be said. To do this, Eriugena offers us far-reaching but largely unexplored insights. Eriugena is a fairly early medieval thinker whose works are informed by the patristic witness at every turn.<sup>49</sup> He is directly connected to the stream of thought on which Zizioulas and LaCugna most often lean: the Cappadocians, the pseudo-Denis, and Maximus the Confessor. Although Eriugena has hitherto gone unrecognized as a thinker whose insights could be germane to the discussions of personhood in both theology and philosophy, this study will argue that he represents a useful, possibly unique, resource. He is profoundly connected to the theological discussion through the same patristic stream being tapped by Zizioulas and LaCugna. He is similarly connected to the philosophical discussion pioneered by Buber and Macmurray both because his work is rigorously philosophical and because he shares many common themes with both thinkers. In spite of these important points of connection, his thought has yet to be utilized in the endeavor to bring the two discussions of personhood together. More importantly, the gap between the two discussions has still not been comprehensively addressed; there is still more that needs to be said. This study proposes to further bridge that gap with the aid of Eriugena's very helpful but largely overlooked insights.

A survey of literature in the area of Eriugena studies lends weight to the possibility that he might serve as a way to bring these discussions together. John O'Meara says in his *Eriugena*: "[The *Periphyseon*] is a synthesis of what we might now call philosophy and theology... To theologians he is too philosophical; to philosophers, too theological."<sup>50</sup> In fact, the tendency of Eriugena scholars is to read him either from a strictly historical perspective or from a philosophical one which more or less excludes the significance of his theology. Neither of these approaches addresses Eriugena in the way this study proposes to do. It would probably be most accurate to say that the problem this study seeks to address with regard to Eriugena studies is one of genre. The disciplines of philosophy and history have their own respective scopes and concerns, which are useful in the discussions they seek to engage. Neither, however, includes in its scope all of the concerns that motivate this particular study. It must also be said that this study does not intend to address all of the concerns of either philosophy or history. This difference of scope demonstrates the usefulness of "speculative theology" as a category under whose rubric Eriugena's ideas can fruitfully be explored precisely because it happens to include in its scope the concerns that this study intends to engage.

The historical approach does justice to the intentional integration of philosophy and theology in Eriugena's thought, but it differs from this study in that its aim is simply to set forth an accurate summary of what Eriugena wrote. In comparing the historical and philosophical

---

<sup>47</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991–1997).

<sup>48</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985).

<sup>49</sup> Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, (New York: Random House, 1955), 127.

<sup>50</sup> John J. O'Meara, *Eriugena* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), vii.

approaches to reading Eriugena, the historical approach is the more accurate and comprehensive of the two but, because of its nature as historical inquiry, it is not concerned to draw implications for the contemporary discussion from his thought. This approach, while valid, does not move Eriugena's ideas beyond their Ninth Century context or deal with them as other than an intriguing moment in the history of Christian thought. Bett, Gilson, McGinn, and O'Meara all provide summaries of Eriugena's thought with varying degrees of detail. On the whole these summaries are accurate, but they do not intend or seek to connect Eriugena with the contemporary discussion. Willemein Otten proffers what she claims to be a different approach with her *The Anthropology of Johannes Scottus Eriugena*, but it turns out that what she produces is essentially a historical reading, albeit a more specialized one. Although she presents her "anthropological" reading of Eriugena as a corrective to both the historical and philosophical readings,<sup>51</sup> she does not bring Eriugena into dialogue with contemporary anthropological discussions. Lest it be objected that this is blaming historians for doing what historians do, let me say clearly that it is not my intent to suggest that historians ought to be other than historians. This study benefits substantially from historical studies of Eriugena. My pointing to the void left by the historical reading is intended merely to show that those who have most accurately represented Eriugena have been *historians*, and were thus unconcerned with some of the key questions, *speculative* questions, which motivate this study.

The philosophical reading of Eriugena falls short in that, although it strives to connect Eriugena with contemporary discussions, it does so in a way that ignores the necessary role of Christian orthodoxy in the outworking of Eriugena's project. To read Eriugena as strictly a philosopher is to ignore the fact that he is self-consciously doing theology. Again, the objection might be made that philosophers need not concern themselves with theology, but this objection fails on two counts. First, the fact that philosophers are studying Eriugena as merely a philosopher necessarily means that they cannot allow Eriugena to speak with his own voice. He says on more than one occasion that philosophy and theology are both rooted in God's truth, and he strives to integrate the two. Second, the objection is somewhat disingenuous in that it deliberately ignores the strong affinity between theology and philosophical metaphysics.

The philosophical and historical readings, which account for the overwhelming majority of writings on Eriugena, each fail to address exactly what this study seeks to draw out. Eriugena has yet to be read in a way that presents both the essentially theological character of his works and his profound relevance to contemporary discussions. We have already addressed the void left by the strictly historical reading. It remains to show the deficiencies which result from the strictly philosophical reading. To this end, we ought to interact briefly with a major proponent of such a strictly philosophical reading: Dermot Moran.

Moran leads the charge among those who advocate a secularized reading of Eriugena. This approach tends to treat the theological aspects of Eriugena's thought as mere products of his historical context and thus as irrelevant to the modern discussion. Moran is not concerned with Eriugena as a theologian; he prefers to interact with Eriugena's work only in terms of its philosophical implications. He argues that Eriugena is best described as an idealist philosopher: "... Eriugena's system... presents a *subjectivist* and *idealist* philosophy, in the sense that all spatiotemporal reality is understood as immaterial, mind dependent, and lacking in independent

---

<sup>51</sup> Willemein Otten, *The Anthropology of Johannes Scottus Eriugena* (Leiden, the Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1991), 2.

existence...”<sup>52</sup> While this analysis is not entirely inaccurate, Moran does not give sufficient weight to what turns out to be a key question: On *whose* mind is spatiotemporal reality dependent? For Eriugena, the *logoi* of all things (a concept he appropriated from Maximus the Confessor) exist fundamentally in the mind of God, an idea which should sound familiar to students of Aquinas. For this reason, the term “idealist” can be accepted as at least somewhat appropriate, but the description of Eriugena’s system as “subjectivist” in anything like the usual sense simply does not fit. Even Moran is forced to concede that, “In some respects Eriugena is a realist... Eriugena is committed to a realistic theory of universals.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, it would seem more appropriate to describe Eriugena as a moderate realist than as a subjective idealist. Even though Moran persists in describing Eriugena as an “idealist,” he has to qualify carefully what the term means:

Eriugena’s idealism is, as we shall see, not simply a version of German idealism, as many of the German nineteenth-century commentators assumed, but it is a more difficult and problematic formulation of idealism, which struggles with the ultimate reduction of everything to infinite subjectivity without wishing to let go of difference.<sup>54</sup>

Moran is missing an important concept, again because he sees Eriugena as “philosopher.” Eriugena can, in fact, talk about all things as existing most importantly in God’s knowledge without undermining their particularity because of the central place Trinitarian concerns occupy in his thought. Augustine’s distinction between the mind, its knowledge, and its love of knowing (*De trinitate*) was known to Eriugena, as were the reflections of the Cappadocians. Moran tells us, “Eriugena expanded Dionysian and Cappadocian negative theology into a general negative dialectic, which continues to assert difference even at the heart of identity, transcendence and immanence being thought together in the one intellectual concept.”<sup>55</sup> At this point, the question immediately arises: How can immanence and transcendence be “thought together?” Macmurray offers a helpful suggestion:

God... as the infinite Agent is immanent in the world which is his act, but transcendent of it. The terms ‘transcendent’ and ‘immanent’ refer to the nature of persons as agents, and they are strictly correlative. Pure immanence, like pure transcendence, is meaningless. Whatever is transcendent is necessarily immanent; and immanence, in turn, implies transcendence.<sup>56</sup>

The key point here is that the two terms are best understood in the context of *personhood*. In light of what we have already heard from Zizioulas, this lends credence to the idea that Eriugena ought to be read through a theological lens. A purely philosophical reading does not do justice to

---

<sup>52</sup> Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 81.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 89.

<sup>56</sup> Macmurray, *The Self as Agent*, 223.

the breadth of his thought. Given this, it is true *a fortiori* that a specifically idealist philosophical reading such as Moran presents is even more narrow and, commensurately, less adequate.

Macmurray offers an intriguing insight that suggests why Moran might be making this mistake: Cartesian dualism. Macmurray says: "... reflective thought tends to operate within a dualist framework, classifying all possible entities or events as material or mental; and classifying all philosophies as either idealist or realist, mentalist or materialist."<sup>57</sup> That Moran is firmly lodged in the Cartesian trap is borne out by his own statement: "... when the self becomes an object to itself in the *cogito*, it is, strictly speaking, no longer an object but turns into a subject."<sup>58</sup> Buber, as we have already seen, would contend that when the self becomes an object to itself the outcome is "self-contradiction." The objectification of the self is precisely what Buber seeks to avoid. Eriugena's strongly apophatic treatment of the *imago dei* would seem to place him closer to Buber than to Moran in this regard. No matter what the outcome of that particular question might be, it is indubitable that Eriugena's treatment of the self is based in Gregory of Nyssa; it is a theological rather than a philosophical answer. Moran, in reading Eriugena as a philosopher rather than a theologian follows the Cartesian pattern of "putting aside the truths of the faith." It would seem that the primary reason for Moran's identification of Eriugena as an idealist philosopher is the fact that Moran does not transcend the Cartesian matrix he has inherited. This mistake serves as a warning that the epistemic weight of Catholic doctrine in Eriugena's system ought not to be minimized, as tends to happen when he is read primarily as a philosopher.

It would seem best to recognize that Eriugena represents neither strictly theology nor strictly philosophy to the exclusion of the other, as McGinn makes clear when he says, "That John was a philosopher and a theologian cannot be doubted..."<sup>59</sup> We have already seen that O'Meara concurs with this analysis and implies a bit more. He suggests that Eriugena represents a *tertium quid*, an attempt to integrate philosophy and theology. In a similar vein, Carabine makes the point that, "Eriugena the philosopher cannot be separated from Eriugena the theologian. We cannot read the works of Eriugena from the modern viewpoint that philosophy and theology can be distinguished clearly."<sup>60</sup> Beierwaltes, as we saw at the outset, presents Eriugena's project as "speculative theology," a useful description for understanding what Eriugena is attempting. It should be made explicit that an important aspect of speculative theology as a project is its connection to the milieu in which it is presented. This study will argue that Eriugena represents a useful resource in the development of a speculative theology of human personhood precisely because he is relevant to discussions happening in our own place and time. He provides a way to bring the discussions spearheaded by Zizioulas and Macmurray into dialogue with one another precisely because he speaks in an integrated way to concerns raised on both sides. He is not a mere dogmatist, nor is he simply a philosopher.

That this study is oriented toward the theological import of Eriugena's work ought not to

---

<sup>57</sup> Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), 83.

<sup>58</sup> Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 187.

<sup>59</sup> Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God*, vol. 2, *The Growth of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), 93.

<sup>60</sup> Deirdre Carabine, *John Scottus Eriugena* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 111.

be interpreted as an assertion that Eriugena was a dogmatician, plain and simple; that would be a misunderstanding of Eriugena and of the intent of this study. Because much ink has already been spilled on the topic of Eriugena's philosophical contribution, this study is a first step toward balancing the scales. (At this point it ought to be noted that Deirdre Carabine does in fact offer some reflections on Eriugena's relevance for contemporary theology in the epilogue to her *John Scottus Eriugena*, but those few pages can hardly be said even to scratch the surface. Again, much more remains to be said.) Eriugena should be read through a theological lens as a necessary precursor to reading Eriugena properly as a speculative theologian. To this end, a more adequate reading of Eriugena must take into account the overtly catechetical and mystical themes in his *Homily on the Prologue to the Gospel of John*. It must also reckon with the central place of doctrinal themes in Eriugena's works and the ways in which they define, limit, and inform his endeavors. In the process of offering such a reading, this study will show how Eriugena works out the synthesis of theology, anthropology, and psychology alluded to by Wohlman, Moran, and O'Meara. It will also show specifically how Eriugena represents a synthesis of Augustine, Maximus the Confessor, the pseudo-Denis, and Gregory of Nyssa, as mentioned by O'Meara and Moran. Finally, it will show how Eriugena's work is a significant resource for fleshing out the discussion regarding what Macmurray calls "the form of the personal." To this end, several significant elements of Eriugena's thought will be engaged with a view toward offering him as such a resource.

Our exploration of Eriugena's thought will move through three stages. Eriugena is both patristic in his rootage and contemporary in his relevance, so both the Scot's debt to the Fathers and his usefulness to the contemporary discussion will be addressed in the course of this study. In Part I, our primary emphasis will be on the patristic character of Eriugena's thought. In chapters 1 and 2 it will be our chief concern to consider the Scot's debt to Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, the pseudo-Denis, and Maximus the Confessor. The way in which the Scot juxtaposes and utilizes these sources, however, carries him into territory that his predecessors have not trod. It will therefore be our project in part 2 (chapters 3 through 6) to consider how the Scot frames questions and grapples with the concept of the human person in light of the doctrinal framework set forth in part 1. Having done this, it will be the focus of part 3 (chapters 7 through 9) to set forth and explore a number of key ideas in Eriugena's thought which seem to represent cogent responses to the questions raised in part 2.

The reader will notice a gradual shift in emphasis through the course of this study, from an emphasis primarily upon the patristics in the beginning to much broader interaction with contemporary thinkers toward the end. This is appropriate in that it is precisely the themes that we will consider in the latter part of this study which are most strongly consonant with the contemporary discussion. It is these themes which need especially to be presented in dialogue with thinkers closer to our own time and situation. At the same time, however, these themes cannot properly be understood if they are divorced from their origins in the Fathers, hence our care in the earlier stages to consider Eriugena's debt to his sources.

As we will see, in the Scot's thought we find both a great concern for Christian orthodoxy and a driving inquisitiveness. The interplay of these two motivations leads to a body of thought that is exceptional precisely in its tendency to evoke thinkers from vastly different times. There can be no question that Eriugena was shaped by the Carolingian period, but his thinking is unusual in that it is also profoundly influenced by patristic sources at a level that sets him apart from his contemporaries. At the same time, the Scot asks questions and offers possible answers to those questions that are like nothing in his own time or, indeed, like anything for several centuries after his death. It is because of this singular tendency to evoke side by side—and with striking breadth and integration—the ancient and the very contemporary that I have undertaken

to offer to the current discussion of the human person the insights of Johannes Scottus Eriugena.

--Carey Vinzant, Advent 2009.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere thanks to Drs. Joel Okamoto, Paul Robinson, Leopoldo Sánchez, and Kent Bureson for their guidance and assistance all along the way. Each of you has helped to focus and refine the form and content of this study, and your contributions have been indispensable.

My thanks also to those of my fellow grad students who have contributed interdisciplinary perspective, especially Dr. Andrew Herrmann, Fr. Michael Pahls, Greg Lynch, and Jonathan Koefoed. The many hours of nocturnal conversation in smoky rooms have exposed me to sources and ideas that have made an important impact on this work.

## ABSTRACT

Vinzant, Carey B. "Made in each Other: John Scottus Eriugena's Conception of the Human Person as a Unifying Vocabulary for Trinitarian Metanarrative and Anti-Cartesian Phenomenology." Ph.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, 2010. 260 pp.

This study sets forth an account of the human person, drawn primarily from the thought of John Scottus Eriugena, which integrates the metaphysical account of personhood set forth by Trinitarian theology (especially John Zizioulas) with the phenomenological one set forth by certain Anti-Cartesian philosophers (especially John Macmurray, Martin Buber, and Gabriel Marcel). These two schools of thought have in common the conviction that uniqueness and relation to other persons are constitutive of the human person, but this study seeks to provide further common ground for more effective dialogue between them.

Part 1 addresses Eriugena's use of his patristic sources, especially Augustine, Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the pseudo-Dionysius. Chapter One addresses the themes of Trinity, Christology, Eschatology, and Apophaticism as ways to clarify Eriugena's relation to Christian orthodoxy. Chapter Two addresses the concept of humanity as created in the Image of the Trinity, an idea Eriugena appropriated from Augustine, and suggests ways in which this concept is useful for developing an account of the human person.

Part 2 considers Eriugena's discussions of what can be known about a human person as raising the question of personal identity. Chapter 3 examines Eriugena's conception of the human person as an integrated simultaneity of the animal nature (biological embodiedness) and the divine image (personhood), emphasizing the dynamic nature of this integration, the ambiguities introduced by this dynamism, and the significance of these two aspects of the human person. Chapter 4 sets forth Eriugena's conception of self-awareness and the limits thereof with special emphasis upon his debt to Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus Confessor. Chapter 5 examines Eriugena's general epistemology, recognizing that it also emerges in his views of language and theological method. Eriugena's debt to Augustine, Maximus, Gregory of Nyssa, and the pseudo-Denis in these areas is also considered. Chapter 6 examines the fundamentally interpretive character of Eriugena's eschatology as an indication of his broader epistemology and the centrality of epistemic responsibility in his thought.

Part 3 develops the ideas of interpersonal encounter, *perichoresis*, and intersubjectivity as ways in which Eriugena addresses the questions about human identity that have emerged in Part 2. Chapter 7 develops the idea of interpersonal encounter in the contexts of the relation between the moral and the interpersonal, and of the relation of the human person to God in light of the thought of Buber, Macmurray, and Paul Tournier. Chapter 8 examines Eriugena's eschatology with special emphasis upon the point that it is perichoretic rather than monistic in character. Chapter 9 examines Eriugena's conception of *theosis* as divergent from much of the Christian mystical tradition and more consonant with the modern notion of intersubjectivity, especially as it emerges in the thought of Gabriel Marcel and Mikhail Bakhtin.

## INTRODUCTION TO PART 1

The concept of the person has emerged as an important theme in both theology and philosophy over the course of the last century. On one hand it comes to the fore through the phenomenological account of the human person set forth by several twentieth-century philosophers, while on the other it emerges as a central motif in the project of Trinitarian theology. Both of these accounts call into question the Cartesian view of the person, pointing out the tendency toward solipsism, which arises directly from the conception of the person primarily as an individual. Both accounts recognize the seriousness of this problem and argue instead that relation to other persons is in fact constitutive of the person. Although the Trinitarian account and the Anti-Cartesian one share some important convictions about the nature of personhood, there does not seem to be a clear awareness of just how much common ground these two accounts share, nor of their mutually complimentary nature. As a first step toward bridging this communication gap, this dissertation presents Johannes Scottus Eriugena's account of human personhood as a valuable contribution to the contemporary discussion of personhood as it has emerged in Trinitarian theology and the twentieth-century Anti-Cartesians.

Eriugena's relevance to this discussion lies in his being a thinker who is engaging crucial issues in strikingly contemporary terms, but is at the same time doing so within a thoroughly patristic perspective. Eriugena serves as a basis for dialogue between the Fathers and the twentieth-century Anti-Cartesians precisely because his thought provides a vocabulary whereby important observations made by the Anti-Cartesians can be understood within Patristic parameters. It is therefore an important part of this study to demonstrate the Patristic character of Eriugena's theology. Part 1 of this study engages this question by exploring the ways in which

the Fathers, especially Augustine, Maximus the Confessor, the pseudo-Denis, and Gregory of Nyssa, inform and guide Eriugena's endeavors as he seeks to articulate what I have called a speculative theology of the human person.

Chapter 1 will focus on several key themes in Eriugena's thought and their rootage in the thinkers just mentioned. This is significant because this study seeks to offer Eriugena as an orthodox Christian thinker whose insights can serve as a way to integrate philosophical and theological reflection upon the human person. Examination of, on the one hand, his essential agreement with creedal tradition and exegesis and, on the other, his dependence upon patristic sources, both present lines of inquiry by means of which this claim to orthodoxy can be evaluated. The discussion in Chapter 1 will focus on four important themes in Eriugena's thought: Trinity, Christology, Eschatology, and Apophaticism. Since it is our aim to evaluate the claim that the Scot is an orthodox Christian thinker, it is obvious that careful attention should be given to his views of Trinity and Christology. We need also, however, to consider his views of Eschatology and Apophaticism in this discussion precisely because it is in these areas that his thought seems to take a different direction from his Carolingian contemporaries. The mystical theology which the Scot appropriated from Gregory of Nyssa, the pseudo-Denis, and Maximus the Confessor does a great deal to differentiate him from other thinkers in his own time and place. Nevertheless, careful reading of Eriugena reveals that his thought is grounded in a familiarity with these figures—so influential in the Eastern Church, but little known in ninth-century Western Europe—which, even as it sets the Scot apart from his contemporaries, also marks him as a Christian scholar of uniquely broad reading in his own time and place. At the same time, Eriugena's vision of the eschaton, while it is unusual, is also an outworking of a number of themes which he has appropriated from these Eastern sources, and from Augustine as

well. Thus, while the Scot's employment of Apophaticism and his vision of the eschaton are atypical of his own time and place, we will see that they are nevertheless orthodox and patristic in their rootage.

Chapter 2 will explore a particular motif from Augustine with an emphasis on its significance as a key principle in Eriugena's methodology. In the course of the chapter we will both explicate and critique the Scot's employment of the Triune Image as a theological concept. As we will see, Eriugena's attempts to explicate the significance of this concept include a number of what seem to be false starts. What persists, however, is Eriugena's sense that the Triune Image is an important concept. It would be difficult to explain why the Scot would try repeatedly—with uneven results—to develop this idea without a strong sense of its importance to drive these attempts. Within this collection of attempts to explicate the Triune Image, however, we find a number of insights which are both useful and evocative of the contemporary discussion. Having considered these, we will suggest how this concept comes to bear upon the contemporary discussion and offer some useful implications.

Through the course of part 1 our intent will be to relate Eriugena first and foremost to his patristic sources. In so doing we will establish the basis for one aspect of his relevance, the Christian, orthodox, and patristic character of his thought. The other aspect of that relevance, his striking affinities with contemporary philosophical reflection upon the human person, will be more strongly emphasized in part 2, and especially in part 3.

## CHAPTER ONE

### ERIOGENA'S DOCTRINAL FRAMEWORK

Eriugena is most commonly characterized as either an eccentric or a genius (or perhaps on occasion as both). His *Treatise on Divine Predestination* created nothing short of a scandal in his own time, effectively rendering him a marginal figure in subsequent theological discussion. The intervening centuries, however, have been kinder to Eriugena, as his works have enjoyed the appreciation of several important thinkers in the Western tradition, most especially Nicholas of Cusa, through whom Eriugenian themes were passed along essentially unchanged to Pascal, among others. Nevertheless, the stigma of Eriugena's condemnation lingers whenever his name is mentioned. The fact that his ideas were misunderstood by his contemporaries and later mistakenly claimed as support by Berengar (who attributed a work probably written by Ratramnus to Eriugena)<sup>1</sup> as well as Amalric of Bena (who was condemned for pantheism) led ultimately to the placement of the *Periphyseon* on the Papal Index.<sup>2</sup> Eriugena, then, as a source of systematic reflection from an orthodox perspective, comes to the discussion at something of a disadvantage. This chapter will demonstrate that Eriugena's characterization as a heretic and the accompanying dismissive attitude toward his thought are less than justified, to say the least. It might be more accurate to describe Eriugena as idiosyncratic, but if this description is to be accepted, it must also be admitted that his idiosyncrasies are largely the result of his unusual breadth of reading. Eriugena seems strange in comparison to the majority of medieval thought—

---

<sup>1</sup> Nikolaus M. Häring, "John Scottus in Twelfth-Century Angelology," in *The Mind of Eriugena: Papers of a Colloquium Dublin, 14–18 July 1970*, ed. John J. O'Meara and Ludwig Bieler (Dublin: Irish University Press, 1973), 158.

<sup>2</sup> John J. O'Meara, *Eriugena* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 217.

and indeed he is very different from the mainstream—precisely because he was unusually well-read, especially for his own time and place. From a more recent perspective, however, and with a more creedal and centrist conception of Christian orthodoxy, his categorization as an orthodox theologian is clearly proper and warranted.

The accusations leveled at Eriugena are typically (1) that he is a pantheist, (2) that he is a universalist, and (3) that he is too “Neo-Platonic.” The charge of pantheism has been repeatedly refuted by, among others, Etienne Gilson,<sup>3</sup> Willemein Otten,<sup>4</sup> and Bernard McGinn,<sup>5</sup> all of whom attribute the charge to a failure to look at Eriugena’s system as a whole. We will address and refute the charge of universalism in a later chapter, so the reader’s patience is requested on this point. As for the charge of “excessive Neo-Platonism,” the question does arise at this point why this anathema is leveled at Eriugena but not at Augustine, Clement of Alexandria, Maximus the Confessor, or the Cappadocians, just to name a few. Even Origen, whose ideas on certain points were flatly rejected by the Church precisely because of the excessive influence of platonic themes in his system, continued to enjoy wide, though careful, use by Christian thinkers even after his condemnation. Certainly, Eriugena is “Neo-Platonic” in his vocabulary, but is his thought “Neo-Platonic” in such a way that its assumptions contradict Eriugena’s profession that his works are fundamentally Christian and orthodox in their substance? It is this particular question that this chapter seeks to answer.

We shall explore Eriugena’s thought with two concerns in mind: First, we shall examine Eriugena with special attention to his views of Trinity, Christology, Eschatology, and

---

<sup>3</sup> Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955), 116.

<sup>4</sup> Willemein Otten, *The Anthropology of Johannes Scottus Eriugena* (Leiden, the Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1991), 80.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, vol. 2 of *The Presence of God* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), 100.

Apophaticism. These are all major themes in Eriugena's system, and if his understanding of these ideas can be shown to stand within the orthodox tradition, this would constitute significant evidence that Eriugena should also be considered so. Second, we shall at the same time examine Eriugena with a view towards better understanding his debt to four major thinkers: Augustine, Maximus the Confessor, the pseudo-Denis, and Gregory of Nyssa. Our aim in examining Eriugena through this lens is to show that his thought is not only orthodox in a broader sense, but patristic as well. This phase of our study is an integral part of my thesis that Eriugena is a thinker whose ideas are both patristic in their rootage and contemporary in their relevance. To provide an exhaustive account of Eriugena's reflection on Trinity, Christology, Eschatology, or Apophaticism would represent a study in itself. This chapter is not intended to provide such an account; rather, it is intended to show that Christian orthodoxy does in fact motivate and guide Eriugena's thought by presenting the reader with examples of Eriugena's reflection on these themes. Scholarship on Eriugena has at times focused on his distinctiveness at the expense of recognizing his profound debt to the orthodox tradition. While it is not untrue to characterize Eriugena as an innovator, it is a central thesis of this study that he is not a *doctrinal* innovator. It is in the philosophical implications he draws from orthodox dogma that the Scot breaks new ground. The way he handles the fundamental dogma of the faith is, to use Gilson's phrase, "guaranteed at practically every point" by the Fathers.<sup>6</sup> In the examples provided hereafter, that essentially patristic and orthodox character will hopefully be clear.

### **Augustinian and Eastern Accents in Eriugena's View of the Trinity**

As a point of entry to our examination of Eriugena's doctrinal framework, we might ask what should be considered central to Christian doctrine, keeping in mind that Eriugena would

---

<sup>6</sup> Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 127.

most probably pursue his project from a perspective that would incline more toward the philosophical dimensions of the question. Additionally, we might also expect that Eriugena's breadth of reading would incline him to a more ecumenical perspective than would be typical in his own time and place. From these two criteria, the philosophical concern and the ecumenical one, we could inquire whether the Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon would figure prominently in Eriugena's thought. In the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedonian Definition we find succinct statements of Christian orthodoxy that are both philosophically profound and thoroughly ecumenical. The question, then, is whether we can observe in Eriugena (1) that he recognizes their centrality, and (2) that they have significantly informed his method and content. With regard to the first question, Eriugena speaks clearly to the centrality of Trinity and Christology in both the *Periphyseon* and the *Homily on the Prologue to the Gospel of John*. In the *Periphyseon*, he expresses deep disappointment about what he describes as

the slothfulness of simple believers who do not sufficiently consider the depth of the Catholic faith. They think that our Lord Jesus Christ is composed of two substances, although he is one substance in two natures... How many there are who are either wholly unaware or wholly deny that the Divine Essence is in three Substances and the three Substances in one Essence... How many there are who so divide the Lord Jesus Christ that they neither believe nor understand that His divinity is united to His humanity and His humanity to His divinity in a unity of substance—or, as it is more customarily expressed in Latin, in a unity of person. Actually, though, His humanity and His divinity are one and inseparable, with the reason of each of his natures unimpaired.<sup>7</sup>

The usage of the term “substance” might seem odd at first glance, but Eriugena clarifies what he means immediately by equating it with the term “person.” At this point, it is helpful to remember that, as Gilson has expressed it, “Eriugena writes in Latin but he thinks in Greek.”<sup>8</sup> This is worth pointing out because “substance” translates the Greek term *hypostasis* with some

---

<sup>7</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, trans. Myra Uhlfelder with summaries by Jean A. Potter (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976), 354.

<sup>8</sup> Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 121.

accuracy. In English the preferred term is “subsistence,” but this distinction is not so clear in the Latin Fathers, who typically used the term *persona* instead. In any case, Eriugena’s equation of “substance” with “person” demonstrates that he, at least, understands the two terms as synonymous.<sup>9</sup> It might be objected at this point that terminology is important, as the *homoousian* debate at Nicea demonstrates, but even this objection is somewhat shortsighted in that the Arian objection to Nicea seems to have been rather more conceptual than semantic.<sup>10</sup> It is also important to remember that Eriugena (because of his thorough familiarity with the Dionysian corpus) understood well the limitations of language in the realm of theological discourse, a topic we shall address in depth in a later chapter. For Eriugena, in any case, language about God is never completely precise or comprehensive. His vision of theological speech is one of a struggle to articulate that which cannot be fully articulated. In light of this, it seems only fair to listen to Eriugena’s words with the goal of getting at the ideas behind his choice of terminology. If we do this, Gilson’s observation and Eriugena’s own equation of substance and person place him squarely in the orthodox camp. Indeed, his expression of Nicene and Chalcedonian dogma is not even one that could be called daring, but merely a very ordinary statement of the catholic faith.

Further, we can observe that for Eriugena, the context in which he makes these statements is significant for our assessment of the place of orthodox parameters in his thought. His point in setting forth the doctrines of Nicea and Chalcedon in this passage is that they are the most rudimentary truths of the Christian faith. Anyone who knows anything about Christianity should

---

<sup>9</sup> This is not to say that the Scot is necessarily correct in asserting that person and substance are the same; it is simply to point out that, since he considers them to be the same, when Eriugena says “substance” he often means “person.” The point here is not to defend the Scot’s equation of substance and person but to show how his remarks concerning substance can at times broaden and enrich our understanding of how he thinks about personhood. For further explanation of differences between the Eastern and the Western conceptions of Trinity and person, see Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (New York: Seabury, 1983).

<sup>10</sup> Timothy Ware provides a useful example of a doctrinal controversy in which the primary disagreement was semantic in his account of the rapprochement of Chalcedon by the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches between 1964 and 1971. See *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 311.

know the basics of Trinity and Christology. His lament is occasioned by the fact that people who call themselves Christians are ignorant of even the most basic truths of the faith. This conviction regarding the centrality of Nicea and Chalcedon finds further expression in the *Homily*, where Eriugena spends considerable space reflecting on these two themes. In fact, the argument might be made that the *Homily* is as much a catechetical sermon as it is a mystical one. In his exposition of John 1:1, Eriugena reflects on the grammar of the text, showing how it necessarily entails the orthodox understanding:

And lest anyone should think that the Word subsisted in the Principle in such a way that one would understand that there was no difference of ‘substance’ there, he immediately added: ‘And the Word was with God.’ That is, the Son subsists with the Father in unity of ‘essence’ and distinction of ‘substances.’

And again, lest such poisonous contagion should creep upon one to the effect that the Word was only in the Father and only with God, but that the Word in itself did not subsist as God substantially and coessentially with the Father—for this error invaded perfidious Arians—he added immediately: ‘And the Word was God’.<sup>11</sup>

In the first paragraph, Eriugena refutes the modalist view, while in the second he refutes the Arian one. Again, Eriugena has presented the content of Nicea and that of Chalcedon side by side, this time as the plain truth of Scripture. For Eriugena, Nicea and Chalcedon are not merely fundamental teachings of the Church; they are the clear teaching of the Bible. Given these statements from the *Periphyseon* and the *Homily*, it seems at least reasonable to regard Trinity and Christology as themes that Eriugena considers to be central and is concerned to set forth in an orthodox fashion. Now it remains to ask whether Eriugena’s understanding and development of these themes is within the parameters of orthodoxy. To this end, we will now examine a number of his remarks regarding the doctrine of the Trinity.

---

<sup>11</sup> O’Meara, *Eriugena*, 162.

In the *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, Eriugena already shows signs that the Trinity is an important concept in his thought. The *Treatise* is the earliest of the three major works with which this study is concerned. It is especially valuable as an aid to understanding Eriugena in that it shows in great detail how he interacts with his most important Western influence: Augustine. The *Treatise* was written, at the request of Hincmar of Rheims, as a refutation of Gottschalk's doctrine of double predestination. Since Gottschalk adduced Augustine as support for his argument, the argument had another layer: how ought Augustine to be understood? In other words, which side in the predestinarian controversy could rightly claim that their position was the "Augustinian" one? Because of this additional question, Eriugena strongly emphasizes Augustine in his refutation of Gottschalk's teaching. (As an interesting side-note, with only one exception—a single brief quotation from the pseudo-Augustinian *Hypomnesticon*—all of Eriugena's citations of Augustine in the *Treatise* are from authentic Augustinian works. Whether Eriugena did or did not believe the *Hypomnesticon* to be a spurious text attributed to Augustine, he at the very least did not depend on it as a cornerstone of his system, as some other Carolingian thinkers seemed more inclined to do.) Because of the particular circumstances under which Eriugena wrote the *Treatise* it represents his most extensive (and intensive) interaction with Augustine. It provides, therefore, a clear picture of how Eriugena understood and employed Augustine. This is useful for the present study precisely because it helps to show what we mean when we speak of Eriugena's project as driven by an "ecumenical" concern. Some studies of Eriugena tend to focus almost exclusively on his debt to the Eastern church, but close reading of the *Periphyseon* shows that Augustine's ideas have not failed to leave a lasting mark on the Scot. That being said, the *Treatise* represents, as I said earlier, an earlier stage in the development of Eriugena's thought than does the *Periphyseon* or the *Homily*, yet even here the reader can discern

Eriugena grappling with Trinity and its implications for the broader theological enterprise. Early in the *Treatise*, he says, “But if the divine nature... although it is simple and one, is most soundly believed to be multiple, it follows that it must be believed not to allow any division within itself.”<sup>12</sup> In saying this, Eriugena is reasoning from the principle of distinction-without-separation within the Godhead. Although the divine nature is multiple (i.e., Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) to posit division within it is to advocate a kind of polytheism. Whether the reader agrees with this conclusion or Eriugena’s fairness in applying it to Gottschalk, this is clearly an early example of Trinitarian logic finding expression in Eriugena’s thought. Nor is this a lone example or a passing utterance; Eriugena revisits this idea shortly thereafter when he says,

With what impertinence, then, do you not hesitate to proclaim predestination, which is God, and charity to be divided in two, adding the explanation: that it is double? Accordingly, just as none of the faithful dares to call God twin, or divided in two, or double, because it is impious, so also it is sacrilege to declare predestination and charity to be twin, or to double them, or to divide them in two. For whatever is believed of God must needs be believed also of his predestination and charity.<sup>13</sup>

Here again the reader can see this Trinitarian logic at work, but this time with an additional consideration. Predestination and charity are things that are rightly attributed to God, but not in such a way that they can be said to constitute a multiplicity within God. God’s predestination (or, if the reader prefers, His sovereignty) and His charity are not of the same order as the multiplicity of the Divine Persons, and ought not to be spoken about in the same way. Eriugena’s concern, then, is that the multiplicity of the Godhead ought only to be framed in terms of the distinction-without-separation between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Persons are not “attributes” or “characteristics” of the Godhead; such a view would at the very least tend toward modalism. Rather, the Persons, both in their distinction and in their unity *are* the Godhead. They

---

<sup>12</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, trans. Mary Brennan with an Introduction by Avital Wohlman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 19.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

are not in any sense secondary, nor are they abstract, nor are they deducible; the Divine Persons are primary, concrete, and revealed as the most fundamental of truths about God.

This concern for proper speech about the oneness and threeness of God finds further expression in the *Periphyseon*, where Eriugena remarks that “even the Divine *ousia* itself, which is believed to be not only simple but More Than Simple, has an essential differentia; for it contains within It the Unbegotten, the Begotten, and the Proceeding substance.”<sup>14</sup> Eriugena has here expressed in radical terms both the oneness and the threeness of the Godhead. The divine *ousia*, as he has remarked, is not only “simple” (meaning undivided) but “More Than Simple” (a turn of phrase appropriated from the pseudo-Denis, meaning that the unity of the Godhead is of an order more true and profound than any human notion could comprehend or any human words could express) but at the same time it contains within it an “essential differentia,” a fundamental distinction that in no way allows the Persons to be reduced to one or confused with one another. He offers us further insight into how he thinks of this tension between “More Than Simple” and “essential differentia” when he says,

within the very Cause of all causes, I mean in the Trinity, there is understood (to be) some kind of precedence—for the Deity which begets and which sends forth is prior to the Deity which is begotten and the Deity which proceeds... although it is one indivisible Deity.<sup>15</sup>

Here we see that Eriugena is beginning to grapple with the single question that most clearly divides the Church in the East from that in the West: the question of precedence within the Godhead. Eriugena’s logic here is not daring; he is almost quoting the Nicene Creed, with its professions that the Son is eternally begotten of the Father and that the Spirit proceeds from the

---

<sup>14</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 61.

<sup>15</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon, Liber II*, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 9, ed. I. P. Sheldon-Williams with the collaboration of Ludwig Bieler, (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1972), 83.

Father. But what about the *filioque*? How does Eriugena deal with this most controversial of formulations? Henry Bett tells us that

On the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit, Eriugena adopts a mediating theory... He held that the Spirit proceeded from (*ex*) the Father through (*per*) the Son, as the love uniting both, and as the Gift given by both. *Est enim Spiritus amborum, quoniam es Patre per filium prodedit, et est donum utriusque, quoniam ex Patre per Filium donator, et est amor utriusque, Patrium et Filium jungens*. This is precisely the doctrine of John of Damascus, who used the metaphor of the sun, the ray, and the light, beloved by Eriugena, and held that the Spirit was the Spirit of the Son, not as proceeding from the Son (ἐκ τοῦ Υἱοῦ) but as proceeding from the Father (ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς) through the Son (διὰ Υἱοῦ). This is also the doctrine of the formula of union at the Council of Florence in 1439, which established a brief peace between the Eastern and Western Churches. The *filioque* was retained, and the Procession was defined as *ex Patre per Filium*.<sup>16</sup>

This might seem an audacious statement for Bett to make, but Eriugena gives clear evidence that he is aware of this question as it has been engaged by both the Eastern and the Western Church:

God is Trinity and Unity, that is, three Substances in one Essence and one Essence in three Substances or Persons. For as the Greeks say μίαν οὐσίαν τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις or τρία πρόσωπα, that is, One Essence three Substances or three Persons, so the Romans say *unam essentiam tres substantias* or *tres personas*; but they appear to differ in that we do not find the Greeks saying μίαν ὑποστάσιν, that is, one Substance, whereas the Latins most frequently say *unam substantiam tres personas*.<sup>17</sup>

The linguistic disconnect between Greek and Latin formulations concerning the Trinity is one which Eriugena recognizes, and indeed points out explicitly. Here again we see Eriugena opting for a Greek way of understanding the terminology—“thinking in Greek”—in his equation of *substantia* with *hypostasis*. His way of framing the concept is idiosyncratic when viewed against the backdrop of the Latin tradition, but he demonstrates a clear understanding of the terms and deliberately opts for a way of speaking that echoes the Greek idiom. Eriugena is aware that his choice of words is not typical, but again, it appears that he chooses the terminology that he does

---

<sup>16</sup> Henry Bett, *Johannes Scotus Eriugena: A Study in Mediaeval Philosophy* (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1964), 108.

<sup>17</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon, Liber II*, 95.

because of his familiarity with important Eastern formularies that, to say the least, would not have been standard reading in the West in his own time. This being said, it ought not to be supposed that Eriugena has discarded the Western Fathers in favor of the East. As Russell observes, “A fuller treatment of Augustinian influences on Eriugena’s *De diuisione naturae* would have had to include... Eriugena’s presentation of Trinitarian theology.”<sup>18</sup> This presents us with something of a puzzle. If we find on the one hand that Gilson characterizes Eriugena as “thinking in Greek,” while on the other Russell sees clear Augustinian influence on Eriugena’s Trinitarian reflection, this would seem to lend some credence to Bett’s idea that Eriugena does represent a sort of “mediating position” between East and West.

Furthermore, Eriugena’s treatment of the Trinity in the *Periphyseon* includes another key element that places him not only in the orthodox tradition but also squarely within the mainstream of contemporary Trinitarian reflection:

Although the operation of the three Substances of the Divine Goodness is believed and understood to be one and the same and common (to all), yet it must be said that it is not without difference (in each) or property (of each). For there are things which are attributed by God’s holy word to each of the Persons as though by proper right.<sup>19</sup>

Eriugena understands and values the concept of *taxis* among the Divine Persons, and he bases this understanding in Scripture. In other words, the *taxis* of the Persons is reflected within the economy of salvation. To say the least, Eriugena’s grounding of the Trinity on the narrative of Scripture rather than on the *homoousios* is reminiscent of much of the current literature on the topic. One suspects that in this regard Eriugena is likely indebted to Maximus, with whom Eriugena was familiar because of his work translating some of Maximus’ writings into Latin, and

---

<sup>18</sup> Robert Russell, “Some Augustinian Influences in Eriugena’s *De diuisione naturae*,” in *The Mind of Eriugena: Papers of a Colloquium Dublin, 14–18 July 1970*, ed. John J. O’Meara and Ludwig Bieler (Dublin: Irish University Press, 1973), 38.

<sup>19</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon, Liber II*, 85.

whom LaCugna describes as a notable exception to the tendency of post-Nicene theologians to begin Trinitarian thought with the *homoousios*.<sup>20</sup>

In the *Homily* Eriugena gives us cause to revisit a point we made in the previous section: for him the Trinity is nothing less than a central element of Christian orthodoxy. The *Homily* is not only a useful but a beautiful work in that it gives us a clearer and more palpable sense of Eriugena's own devotion. While the *Treatise* is framed in the sharp language of polemical discourse, and the *Periphyseon* is a dense and meandering work of speculative theology, the *Homily* is by comparison a work of art, a reverent and impassioned meditation on the prologue to John, perhaps the Gospel most beloved by the mystical theologians of the Eastern Church. In the *Treatise* we see Eriugena as a man hotly zealous for the truth, while in the *Periphyseon* he appears as a tenacious and expansive thinker, but in the *Homily* Eriugena appears in the roles of enraptured mystic and meticulous catechist. In short, the *Homily* shows us Eriugena as a *preacher*, and in doing so it gives us a sense of what he believed was imperative to communicate to his audience from this passage of Scripture. In light of this, Eriugena's thoroughly Trinitarian reading of John cannot be lightly set aside. Two passages in particular help to demonstrate the centrality of the Trinity in Eriugena's theology. Eriugena begins the *Homily* with the metaphor (familiar to students of Celtic Christian spirituality, and given vivid expression in the illustrations in the Book of Kells) of John as the Eagle, extending the metaphor by describing John as flying upward to encounter with the mysteries of the Godhead. Eriugena then remarks,

The holy theologian John, then, flies above not only the things that can be understood and spoken, but is borne aloft even to those things that surpass all intelligence and meaning and is raised aloft beyond all things... to the secrets of the one Principle of all. He clearly perceives the incomprehensible unified superessentiality and distinct

---

<sup>20</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity & Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), 170n1.

supersubstantiality of that Principle and Word, that is, of the Father and the Son, and begins his Gospel, saying ‘in the Principle was the Word.’<sup>21</sup>

In other words, the deepest truth which is revealed to the Apostle John is that the Word and the Father were together “in the beginning.” Eriugena presents this truth as one that has so profoundly marked the Apostle that he is compelled to begin his Gospel by stating it. Later in the *Homily*, Eriugena reaffirms the doctrinal centrality and spiritual profundity of the Trinity when he says,

John was, therefore, not just a man but more than a man, when he rose above himself and all things that are and, raised aloft by the ineffable virtue of wisdom and the pure keenness of the mind, entered into those things that are beyond all things, the secrets, that is, of the one ‘essence’ in three ‘substances’ and three ‘substances’ in one ‘essence.’ For he could not otherwise ascend to God, without first becoming God. . . And so the holy ‘theologian’ transmuted into God, participating in truth, declares that the Word subsists in God the Principle, that is, that God the Son subsists in God the Father: ‘In the Principle,’ he says, ‘was the Word.’ Look upon the heaven revealed, that is, the mystery of the great and holy Trinity and Unity manifested to the world.<sup>22</sup>

For Eriugena, then, the Trinity is not just *a* mystery, but perhaps *the* mystery. It is “heaven revealed.” (In light of Eriugena’s eschatology, upon which we shall shortly touch, and which we will engage repeatedly hereafter, the characterization of the Trinity as “heaven revealed” has the ring of more than poetry, but more on that later.) This sense that the Trinity is not merely an abstract doctrinal stopgap but rather a vital (meaning both “necessary” and “living”) reality of the Christian life begins to give the reader a hint of why Bett argued that:

The chill sterility which besets the Neoplatonist conception of God as the Superessential Unity is largely escaped, in Eriugena’s system, by his treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity. He conceives of the Trinity as the life-process of the Deity, the self-birth of God. It is not a process that begins and ends, but an ever-present and eternal act. The Son is eternally begotten of the Father and the Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father, through the Son. The existence of God is therefore

---

<sup>21</sup> O’Meara, *Eriugena*, 158.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

represented as a *life*—not as the bare unity of abstract being, but (in the Scot’s own phrase) as ‘a fruitful multiplicity.’<sup>23</sup>

Here Bett further confirms what has already emerged in our examination of the *Homily*: the Trinity is far from a theological footnote in Eriugena’s system. On the contrary, in light of Bett’s observation and what we have read from the *Homily*, we can see that Eriugena understands the Trinity to be not only essential but actually central both to the doing of Christian theology and to the living of the Christian life. It is central not only to his doctrine, but also to his piety. The Trinity is not only a matter of truth (although it certainly is that) but also, to use Bett’s word, an underpinning reality in “life.”

As a final note in our examination of Eriugena’s Trinitarian reflections, we turn to a passage from the *Periphyseon* in which Eriugena discusses Trinity in terms of its implications for several key themes in this study. Eriugena remarks,

Unity and Trinity are not such as to be conceived of by even the most serene intellect of angels. But that the religious impulses of devout minds might be able to reflect and predicate something about an ineffable and incomprehensible matter... these words, symbolic of the faith, have been devised and handed down by holy theologians in order that we may believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths that the Divine Goodness consists of three substances of a single essence... When... they gazed upon the one, ineffable Cause of all things, the one Beginning, simple, undivided, and universal, they declared the Unity. On the other hand, observing that Unity not in a barren singularity but in a remarkably fruitful multiplicity, they understood the three substances of the Unity: viz., the Unbegotten, the Begotten, and the Proceeding. They gave the name *Father* to the Unbegotten substance in relation to the Begotten; *Son* to the Begotten in relation to the Unbegotten; *Holy Spirit* to the Proceeding in relation to the Unbegotten and the Begotten.<sup>24</sup>

The first thing that emerges in this passage is Eriugena’s conviction that “Trinity” is a name for a mystery. As we observed earlier, Eriugena sees the doing of theology as an attempt to express in words what cannot be fully expressed. Finite words cannot convey the fullness of the infinite.

---

<sup>23</sup> Bett, *Johannes Scotus Eriugena*, 102.

<sup>24</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 19.

This conviction, which we shall further engage in our examination of apophaticism and its role in Eriugena's system, pervades the Scot's works. That same conviction governs the way Eriugena understands and uses language and speaks about the nature of knowing, which will be the focus of a later chapter. At the same time, the faith is not merely an intellectual truth, but a reality to be believed and declared. Because this is so, it is the task of the Church to find words that, if they do not fully express the reality of the Divine nature, at least do not mislead those who seek to live as faithful Christians. Here again we see the link in Eriugena's thought between doctrine and piety, between the content of the faith and the living of the faith.

In sum, we find as we examine Eriugena's treatment of the Trinity that it is not only orthodox, but perhaps even something more. We find that Eriugena does not merely pay proper lip-service to catholic dogma. Instead, he sees the Trinity as central to Christian faith. He sees it as a living reality that encompasses all of the Christian life. His concern for proper speech about God is tempered by his awareness that language itself is inadequate. Eriugena's reflection on the Trinity is at the same time orthodox, profound, reverent, and humble.

### **Augustinian and Eastern Accents in Eriugena's Christology**

Having examined Eriugena's Trinitarian thought, we now turn to his Christology. Especially in the area of Christology, a purely philosophical reading of Eriugena not only fails to recognize the centrality of theological concerns in his thought, but in doing so presents a fundamentally distorted picture of the Scot. Careful reading of the *Periphyseon* shows that Christ is not an afterthought with which Eriugena must reconcile a preexistent philosophical scheme; rather, Christ is an integral part of Eriugena's thought. The problem with a secularized reading of Eriugena is that it seeks to, as it were, distill out the Scot's philosophy from his theology. As

Carabine points out, this is simply not a viable approach to Eriugena.<sup>25</sup> Aside from the fact that this approach directly contradicts Eriugena's own understanding of his project, it leaves the impression that Eriugena is simply "another Neo-Platonist." It ignores the fact that Eriugena's theology does in fact limit and govern the ways in which he proceeds philosophically. His Christology represents one significant example of this. Andrew Louth remarks that Maximus recast the Dionysian vision in more specific and more Christocentric terms.<sup>26</sup> Eriugena benefits in exactly this area from his reading of Maximus. Bett expresses it this way: "It is precisely here that the influence of Maximus... has overpowered the influence of the Areopagite. There can be no doubt that Christ is much more central in the system of Eriugena than in that of the pseudo-Dionysius."<sup>27</sup> Nor can this phenomenon be explained simply as a product of Eriugena's exposure to Maximus. On at least one occasion in the *Treatise*, Eriugena argues from Christological premises: "Those things which are said concerning our Lord Jesus Christ according to the particularity of his humanity can likewise be said of his divinity, because of the inseparability of one person in two substances."<sup>28</sup> At this point, it is interesting to note that Eriugena's later equation of substance with person is not yet present; he is at this early stage still using the term to mean nature or essence. When he remarks later on the relation between substance and person, he uses the idea of substance in the Boethian sense. He says, "The will is according to nature human... But since we see that it shares in the highest reason, we cannot doubt that it is a

---

<sup>25</sup> Deirdre Carabine, *John Scottus Eriugena* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 111.

<sup>26</sup> Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 31.

<sup>27</sup> Bett, *Johannes Scotus Eriugena*, 106.

<sup>28</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, 61.

rational substance.”<sup>29</sup> And again, “The true definition of man is: ‘Man is a rational substance receptive of wisdom.’”<sup>30</sup>

In the *Periphyseon*, however, as we have already seen, Eriugena explicitly equates “substance” with “person.” This shift in his use of terminology would seem to reflect his turn to a perspective more in line with his Eastern sources. That being said, it remains the case that even as early as the *Treatise*, he is beginning to explore the broader implications of Christology. What emerges in the *Periphyseon* and the *Homily* is a mature exposition of what is merely nascent in the *Treatise*, but it cannot be doubted that even when he wrote the *Treatise*, Christology was a concern for the Scot.

Much has previously been written regarding Eriugena’s view of Christ as the creative Word. This is indeed a major emphasis in Eriugena’s Christology, but it is hardly the only one. Eriugena says a great deal about Christ as the creative Word, but it must be remembered that Eriugena is attempting in the *Periphyseon* to set forth what might today be called a “theory of everything.” Because of this struggle to set forth a comprehensive account of reality, Eriugena focuses on the cosmic dimension of Christology, following in the steps of Maximus, not to mention Irenaeus. The cosmic Christology of Maximus, whatever Eriugena’s reason for adopting it, serves as a major integrating theme in his system. From a methodological point of view Eriugena is struggling, as we have said already, to put into words what cannot be fully expressed (the Dionysian concern). He knows at the outset that language cannot entirely do what he is attempting. The dilemma might be expressed in this way: comprehensiveness or specificity? If a term delivers particular information, it is more specific, more clear, but less comprehensive. On the other hand, if a term is broad enough to encompass a wider range of ideas, it is more

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 53.

comprehensive, but less clear or specific. Eriugena tackles the question of Christology from both ends. He attempts to speak about Christ in a way that both affirms the mystery of the Incarnation (which has implications for everything) and sets forth those particulars necessary to an orthodox faith. Eriugena seeks to be both intellectually rigorous and pastoral. His language about Christ as the preexistent and creative Word addresses the need for comprehensiveness. To use the words of John's Gospel, "Apart from Him not one thing came to be." It is a strong argument for the centrality of Christ in Eriugena's thought that, in articulating a "theory of everything," the Scot reflects extensively on the cosmic dimension of Christology.

That being said, Eriugena has more to say about Christ than "In the beginning was the Word." He reflects repeatedly on key motifs of orthodox Christology in the course of the *Periphyseon*, and the *Homily* is essentially an extended Christological reflection with a few digressions concerning what reflection itself is. The tendency has emerged in some veins of Eriugenan scholarship to present the Scot as one who saw cosmic Christology as a way to baptize his preexisting Neoplatonism. For Eriugena Christ was more than a philosophical solution, as a look at the particulars of his Christology will show. Eriugena does not merely present a minimally orthodox Christology, he offers a rich one, one that shows understanding of key questions in the Christological discussion, and also one that presents Christ *pro nobis*.

Of course, any orthodox Christology must necessarily provide a proper account of the hypostatic union. Eriugena does this more than once; apart from the aforementioned passages in which he all but quotes Nicea and Chalcedon, he discusses the reality of Christ as God-Man on several other occasions, such as this passage from the *Periphyseon*:

The Word united to the flesh and the flesh united to the Word in an inseparable unity of one and the same substance from two natures, divine and human, receives only those who gaze at the unity of its substance with the simple eye of perfect contemplation. So, as man in the Word is truly the Son of God, and the Word in man

is truly the Son of Man without any transformation of natures, our Lord Jesus Christ is understood as one and the same Son of God and Lord of man.<sup>31</sup>

It is noteworthy that in this passage, confession of an orthodox understanding of the theandric union is wedded to Eriugena's contemplative concern. There is both the concern for properly saying what can be said and at the same time respecting the mystery of the Incarnation, which can be "contemplated," but not comprehended. This is merely a single example of the way in which Eriugena integrates theological motifs. Christology and apophaticism are not compartmentalized in Eriugena's thought; they inform each other. In a similar way, the Scot connects the theandric union to eschatology in this passage from the *Periphyseon*:

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, by rising from the dead, brought this whole to completion in Himself and gave a prior example of all things to come.... He is wholly God and wholly man, one substance, or-- to speak in more customary fashion-- one person.... The humanity of Christ, made one with deity, is contained in no place, moved in no time, circumscribed by no form or sex because it is exalted above all these things. . .<sup>32</sup>

In this brief passage, Eriugena presents (1) the idea that Christ is the *telos* of all things, (2) the doctrine of the hypostatic union, and (3) the *Christus Victor*. Again, integration is an important dynamic in the Scot's thought. At this point it might be useful to note that this sort of interweaving of ideas pervades the Eriugenian corpus. This might account, at least in part, for the frequency with which Eriugena has been misunderstood. His thought exhibits the same density as that of his hero Maximus, coupled with intense inquisitiveness and a propensity for surprising turns. These characteristics do not make the Scot either quick or easy reading. Nevertheless, the sometimes frustrating frequency with which Eriugena segues from one motif to another is an indication of the extent to which he has reflected on the relation of these themes to one another. Eriugena's juxtaposition of hypostatic union with eschatology and Christ's victory over death is

---

<sup>31</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 355.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

not random; it echoes the ways in which Maximus further developed the Irenaean motif of recapitulation. In another Christological passage from the *Periphyseon*, Eriugena displays the same propensity to juxtapose ideas, this time beginning with patristic exegesis and moving thence to teleology and then to a moment of reflection on the pathos inherent in Christ's redemptive love. He says,

But what is that way which leads to the tree of life? And what is that tree to which it leads? Is it not that same Son of God, who says of Himself: 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life?' .... He is called *Cherubim, flaming, flashing sword, Way, and Tree of Life* in order that we may understand that the Word never withdraws from the sight of our hearts and is always immediately present to enlighten us. In no place and at no time does it allow us to lose the memory of the bliss which we lost by transgression, but always wishes us to return to it. Until that end is achieved, it sighs while sharing our grief and goads us on as we take the road which leads there.<sup>33</sup>

For an overview of the Tree of Life's significance in Eriugena's exegesis of Genesis, the reader should consult the appendix to this study, but suffice it to say at this point that Eriugena is not the first to speak of Christ as the Tree of Life. This idea appears in the *De opificio hominis* of Gregory of Nyssa, which Eriugena translated into Latin.<sup>34</sup> Eriugena goes on to draw teleological and moral implications from this passage. Again, we will reflect at greater length on how Eriugena understands the place of tropology in a later chapter, but let it suffice for now to observe the connection Eriugena draws between the witness of Christ within the conscience and human destiny. He then proceeds to speak of the dimension of pathos inherent in the Incarnation. Eriugena's language here is evocative of the passage in Hebrews 4:15, which says, "We do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who was tempted in all ways that we are, yet without sin" (NIV). This element of pathos is part and parcel of the

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 277.

<sup>34</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5 of *On the Making of Man*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).

narrative of redemption, a consequence of the Incarnation occurring within a fallen world. That Eriugena recognizes this connection is apparent when he says elsewhere in the *Periphyseon*,

Not that He Himself is subject to suffering in His divinity, but the capacity for suffering and the suffering and the death of human nature, which He alone had taken on, fall to Him and He suffered with the human nature which He had taken into the unity of His substance. Since, then, He is deservedly said to have suffered with it [i.e., His human nature], He is correctly said to have suffered. In the Passion, the single substance of Word and Man was not separated.<sup>35</sup>

The way in which hypostatic union and *kenosis* are set together here bespeaks a particular sensitivity not only to the concerns of dogma, but also to the spirit of the biblical narrative. The passage echoes Leo the Great and Gregory Nazianzen, both of whose ideas were transmitted to Eriugena through Maximus. This sensitivity to the biblical narrative finds further expression in another passage from the *Periphyseon* wherein Eriugena explores the idea of Christ as the Second Adam (a motif rooted in Paul), the sinless yet completely human being in whom and through whom fallen humanity is offered a new genealogy, a lineage that is not trapped in the course the first Adam set for his descendants:

That Man who alone was born in the world without sin—namely, the Redeemer of the world—nowhere and never endured such ignorance... Not that He received a humanity different from that which He restored, but He alone remained undefiled in it... Humanity perished wholly in all except Him, in whom alone it remained incorruptible.<sup>36</sup>

This Second Adam language carries over into the *Homily*, to which we now turn. In this passage from the *Homily*, Eriugena (characteristically) weaves together hypostatic union, Second Adam language, a reference to Christ as Head of the Church, a mention of Christ as the One who deifies humanity, and a charge to follow Christ (*imitatio Christi*):

‘Full of grace and truth.’ ... can be understood of the humanity and divinity of the incarnate Word, so that the plenitude of grace is referred to the humanity, and the

---

<sup>35</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 210.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

plenitude of truth to the divinity. For the incarnate Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, received the plenitude of grace according to his humanity, since he is the head of the Church and the first-born of the universal creature, that is, of universal humanity, which is in him cured and restored... ‘we have all received from his plenitude’ the grace of deification in exchange for the grace of faith, by which we believe in him, and action, by which we keep his commandments.<sup>37</sup>

In this relatively brief space, Eriugena provides the reader with a summary of major themes in the Christology of the Eastern Church. (As we have seen earlier, Eriugena is also aware and appreciative of the kenotic emphasis that tends to be more prominent in Western Christology.) The language of deification appears again in the *Homily* when Eriugena states, “For this purpose did the Word descend into the flesh. . . that many should become adopted sons through him who was the only-begotten Son by nature. . . he possessed our nature so as to make us share in his nature.”<sup>38</sup> Eriugena seems not to have known Athanasius directly, but this passage unmistakably echoes the great Alexandrian bishop’s ideas. What Eriugena has presented here is a concise restatement of the classic Eastern idea of deification as accomplished through Christ. One other key motif appears in the *Homily*: Jesus as the One who reveals the Father. Eriugena says,

But you also called him light and life, because the same Son is the light and life of all things that were made through him. And what does he illumine? Nothing other than himself and his Father. He is, therefore, the light and illuminates himself, makes himself known to the world, and shows himself to them that do not know him.<sup>39</sup>

Here Eriugena is setting forth a variation on the Pauline idea, much cited in the Eastern Church, that “Christ is the *eikon* of the invisible God,” i.e. , the One who discloses the Father.

To summarize, Eriugena’s Christology reveals a familiarity with and usage of a wide range of biblical and patristic themes. He speaks of Christ as: (1) the God-Man, fully human and fully divine, one person in two natures (hypostatic union), (2) *telos*/eschatological destiny of

---

<sup>37</sup> O’Meara, *Eriugena*, 175.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 174; O’Meara’s translation of the *Homily*.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

humanity, (3) example of perfect humanity and human life (*imitatio Christi*), (4) God who out of love empties Himself by becoming human and dying on the Cross (*kenosis/Christus Victim*), (5) second Adam, (6) Head of the Church (*corpus mysticum*), (7) the One who deifies human nature, (8) *Christus Victor*, and (9) Revealer of the Father. What he presents, then, is not merely an orthodox Christology, but as we said earlier, a rich and expansive one. That Eriugena's Christology is rich is due at least in part to its expansiveness; it is striking precisely because of the sometimes surprising theological connections the Scot makes. As we shall see repeatedly in the course of this study, Eriugena's project proceeds with the understanding that theological themes do not stay docilely in the neat compartments we build to contain them. The implications of a given doctrine will in one way or another come to bear on other doctrines. To offer one notable example, because Christology and Trinity are central in Eriugena, they cannot be compartmentalized. Thus, the Scot's eschatology has a particularly Christocentric character. To that eschatology we shall now turn.

### **Teleology and Subjectivity in Eriugena's Eschatology**

Eriugena's eschatology is in some respects difficult to separate from the other aspects of his thought because it is a ubiquitous theme in his writings, especially the *Periphyseon*, and one from which he draws implications in a multitude of connections. For this same reason, it is also difficult to treat it briefly. Much of Eriugena's eschatology may seem unfamiliar, but its essential elements can be found in his sources. The Scot, as I have said earlier, is an innovator, but not a *doctrinal* innovator. The fact that he is so thoroughly dependent upon his sources for his theology is exactly what makes his philosophical innovations such fertile ground for systematic reflection. It is precisely because he took seriously and pursued ambitiously the philosophical implications of orthodox dogma that Eriugena is a significant figure in the history of Christian

thought, one who offers important insights for the contemporary discussion of human personhood. In this section, we will review some aspects of Eriugena's eschatology that bear especially on his understanding of the human person with a view to showing their essentially orthodox and patristic character. In keeping with this direction, we begin with an observation from Willemein Otten:

The most important association evoked by the figure of man in the *Periphyseon* is the theme of nature's return. As we have said before, in Genesis human nature represents the apex of creation... Only when complete in himself, is man able to fulfill his responsible task as God's representative on earth and lead creation back to God.<sup>40</sup>

Eriugena's thesis regarding the eschatological significance of the human person is not as revolutionary as it might seem at first blush; he is following the course charted by Maximus. In order to understand why Maximus and Eriugena see this connection, an observation from Karl Rahner helps to clarify the question:

Human nature in general is a possible object of the creative knowledge and power of God, because and insofar as the Logos is by nature the one who is "utterable" (even into that which is not God); because he is the Father's Word, in which the father can express himself, and, freely, empty himself into the non-divine; because, when this happens, that precisely is born which we call human nature. In other words, human nature is not a mask . . . assumed from without, from behind which the Logos hides to act things out in the world. From the start it is the constitutive, real symbol of the Logos himself. So that we may and should say, when we think our ontology through to the end: man is possible because the exteriorization of the Logos is possible.<sup>41</sup>

This observation from Rahner leads to another element in Eriugena's eschatology: the Christological element. In short, humanity exists because of and with a view toward Christ; Christ is the climax of human history because it is in Christ that humanity is uniquely united to the divine. Eriugena is here developing a theme in Maximus, as Zizoulas helps us to see

the importance and unique character of Maximus' theology rest in his success in developing a christological synthesis within which history and creation become organically

---

<sup>40</sup> Otten, *The Anthropology of Johannes Scottus Eriugena*, 140.

<sup>41</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 32.

interrelated. . . Maximus arrived at this christological synthesis: Christ is the *logos* of creation and one must find in him the *logoi* of all created beings.<sup>42</sup>

This observation from Zizioulas helps to clarify the Maximian contribution to the Scot's thought. Eriugena's Christology, as we have already observed, deals extensively with Christ as the creative Word. We have seen also that Christ is also the *telos* of all things.<sup>43</sup> This passage from the *Periphyseon* explicitly juxtaposes these two ideas:

The beginning and end of the world subsist in God's Word and, to speak more clearly, *are* the Word Itself, which is multiple End without end and Beginning without beginning (*anarchon*) except the Father... Everything comes from Him and goes toward Him, for He is Beginning and End. The Apostle shows this up very clearly in the words: 'Since everything is from Him, through Him, in Him, and directed toward Him.'<sup>44</sup>

This passage underscores the centrality and ubiquity of Christological reflection in Eriugena's thought. His eschatology centers on Christ, just as does his understanding of creation. This raises the familiar question, however: Has Eriugena crossed the line into a kind of pantheism? As we said earlier, this charge has been refuted repeatedly, but one of these refutations in particular is interesting for our discussion here. Willemein Otten observes that one characteristic feature of pantheistic systems is their tendency toward a cyclical view of history. Eriugena, she points out, does not share this tendency. History for Eriugena is not repeatable; it is telic.<sup>45</sup> Wohlman observes this linear view of history in the *Treatise*.<sup>46</sup> McGinn speaks similarly of the Scot, putting it this way:

The Word stands at the beginning and end. But the end is different from the beginning, and it is perhaps in this aspect of his thought that John Scottus Eriugena

---

<sup>42</sup> John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993), 96.

<sup>43</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 296.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

<sup>45</sup> Otten, *The Anthropology of Johannes Scottus Eriugena*, 80.

<sup>46</sup> Avital Wohlman, "Introduction," in *John Scottus Eriugena, Treatise on Divine Predestination*, trans. Mary Brennan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), xxi.

proves himself not just a clever synthesizer of East and West, but one of the creative minds of the Christian tradition.<sup>47</sup>

In a word, Eriugena takes with the utmost seriousness the Johannine statement that Christ is “the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Revelation 22:13 NIV). What emerges, then, in Eriugena is reflection on the significance of recapitulation as an eschatological motif. Christ is the destiny of human nature, not just in the context of the Incarnation, but eschatologically as well. Creation happens through and by Christ, and it comes to its fulfillment through and in Christ. Nevertheless, as McGinn reminds us, “The end is different from the beginning.” For Eriugena the Garden of Eden and Heaven are different because humanity is different. Because of God’s redemptive self-disclosure, humanity grows through the course of history, even though that history is marred by the reality of sin. In the *eschaton*, man will experience God through the lens of redemption. More than that, the redemption of humanity by Christ is brought about in the context of union with Him. This union shares the same scope as the Incarnation and the Atonement—it touches all humanity, meaning that all of humanity ends in a different place from where it began. McGinn says this:

From the perspective of present humanity... there will also be a real development because true humanity—the union in difference of all humans who have ever lived—will be raised to a higher level of the endless search that is the nature of the created *imago Dei*.<sup>48</sup>

What, then, does the Scot have to say concerning the biblical accounts of Heaven and Hell? Does Eriugena’s final return amount to a *de facto* universalism? This question will be more addressed more fully in a later chapter, but the short answer is “no.” The Scot holds that there will be a real difference between the condition of the saints and that of the damned. The difference lies in the disposition of the individual in question. In the end, God’s lordship will be

---

<sup>47</sup> McGinn, *The Presence of God*, 2:117.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

clearly apparent to all; there will be no question about the reality that God is God. At the same time, some will experience their final and eternal encounter with God as the fulfillment of their hopes, while others will experience that encounter as a reality that is hateful, inescapable, and unending. This is why Eriugena can remark, “Being, living, and being eternally will be common to all, both good and evil; but well-being and being in a state of bliss will be proper and special only to those perfect in action and knowledge.”<sup>49</sup> When Eriugena says this, it points again to his concern both with right doctrine and right praxis. McGinn’s language regarding the “created *imago Dei*” as containing within it the destiny of seeking God is somewhat appropriate, but it would be more proper to say that the divine image *is* that destiny. Through the formative processes of contemplation and moral purification God makes of man the divine image which human nature is intended to be. The *imago* is not for Eriugena a faculty or an intrinsic property of human nature, but rather its destiny, the purpose for which humanity was made. That purpose and destiny draw and drive humanity to its eschatological completion in Christ. The Scot puts it this way: “Scripture does not say ‘Let us make man Our image and likeness’ but ‘according to Our image and likeness.’ It is as though it were clearly saying, ‘Let us make man to become Our image and likeness if he guards Our precept.’”<sup>50</sup> Humanity as the Divine Image is neither a present reality nor a given for Eriugena; rather, it is an eschatological possibility that conditions how we ought to understand what it means to be a human person. In sum, Eriugena sees humanity as (1) created with a view toward Christ, (2) designed (because of Christ’s human nature) with a view toward bringing all creation into union with God (as in Maximus) and, (3) created for, but not compelled to, loving relationship with God. It is within this framework that Eriugena’s more general statements concerning the return of all things ought to be understood.

---

<sup>49</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 280.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 349.

Rather than seeing the consummation of human destiny as part of the return of all things to God, Eriugena would have us see the return of all things as part of humanity realizing its destiny (firstly and most importantly in Christ and then in a secondary way through and in those who are united to Christ). In the *Periphyseon*, he remarks,

Though [the Divine Power] remains unchangeably and eternally by itself and in itself, It is said to move all things since through It and in It they subsist and have been brought from non-being into being. Its being is its own source, but everything else proceeds from nothing to being. It also attracts everything to itself.<sup>51</sup>

These are Eriugena's own words and, taken in isolation, it is understandable that some readers have branded him as a pantheist but, as we have seen, Eriugena's ontology and his eschatology are more subtle than they might appear at first blush. The categories of Nicea and Chalcedon shape the ways in which he reflects on the final return of all things, so that he can speak of, as McGinn puts it, "the union in difference of all humans who have ever lived." The distinctiveness of the individual will not be lost in the eschaton. Further, the Scot's notion of the final return is patently Christocentric; it is through and in Christ that the return happens. (To those who would characterize Eriugena as "another Neoplatonist" we might remark that this sounds rather more like Irenaeus.) That being said, this passage underscores the central role of eschatology in the Scot's thought; Eriugena's system is driven by the return to Christ just as it is by the creation of all things through Christ. Very simply, Christ is where God joins creation to Himself; there is no other avenue through which that joining can happen, no way to bypass Christ's mediation. Because this is so, God's final embrace of creation can only happen through the mediation of the Son. Because all things were created through the Son (or, to use the Johannine terminology, the Logos) that final embrace is a sort of return. Eriugena's conception of the final return is not the result of philosophical presuppositions about the nature of history;

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 101.

rather, it is the conclusion that follows from his radical Christological emphasis. In short, the return needs to be understood within the context, as we saw earlier, of Christ's person and work, and of humanity realizing its own destiny. Reflection on humanity, Christology, and eschatology are thoroughly integrated in Eriugena's thought.

### **The Significance of Apophaticism in Eriugena**

Finally, the motif of *apophaticism* in the Scot's thinking bears examination because it informs so much both in the content and the form of his writings. There is the sense that rhetoric and poetry are always ready to hand for Eriugena. Even when he digresses into dense reflections on seemingly tangential questions, there is an urgency in his writing that seems to be more than mere speech in the indicative. This persistent rhetorical-poetic quality in the Scot makes perfect sense if we remember one of his most important debts to the Eastern Church: the richly developed conception of apophatic theology he encountered most especially in his reading and translation of the pseudo-Denis. Eriugena well understood the experience that Thomas Oden has referred to as "Theo-Comedy," and it seems always to be just beneath the surface in his writings.<sup>52</sup>

One of the more interesting ironies in Eriugena studies lies in the seemingly contradictory ways in which various scholars characterize the Scot. In the eyes of some scholars he is a mystic, while to others he is a rationalist. In fact, to say that Eriugena is a sort of mystic is not wholly inaccurate, just as the characterization of Eriugena as a sort of rationalist is not wholly inaccurate. That these are both somewhat accurate descriptions means, however, that neither of these terms can signify exactly what we typically think they do. Eriugena is certainly a mystic in that his thought is moved and permeated by the idea of personal encounter with God. At the

---

<sup>52</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *The Living God*, vol. 1 of *Systematic Theology* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992), 406.

same time, he has very clear parameters within which he understands the nature of that encounter. Reason plays a definite role in Eriugena's understanding of Christian mysticism. Because of the rigor and depth with which the Scot reflects on the role of reason, he has not unjustly been characterized as having rationalistic tendencies. At this point, however, it becomes important to ask how the Scot understands the role and the limits of the mind.

Bett offers us a place to begin by reminding us that "Eriugena borrowed the method of the *theologia affirmativa et abnegativa*... from Dionysius."<sup>53</sup> Eriugena's extensive reading of the pseudo-Denis influenced him in a number of ways, but perhaps the most important is in the theological method he adopted from the Areopagite. The Dionysian corpus sets forth a three-phase model for speaking about God. In the first phase, the theologian speaks of what God *is*, as revealed in Scripture. In the second, the theologian recognizes the disconnect between God as conceived by the human mind and God as He truly is. Speaking by negation, then, speaking of God in terms of what He *is not*, is a rejection of idolatry, even when the idols in question are not physical things but ideas. In the third stage, the theologian proceeds out of humility to say that some things can be attributed to God in a positive sense, but with the caveat that the reality of the term in God Himself must always take precedence over human understanding of it. In this way, the theologian comes to speak of God as *more than*. God does reveal Himself to human beings, and that revelation can be trusted to be true, but neither of these truths should be construed so as to mean that God is understandable because God Himself is always infinitely greater than the symbols employed to portray Him. Bett makes this clear when he states,

[Eriugena] is only concerned to deny that any human language can be adequate to define God, or any human thought to comprehend Him. The Areopagite is merely emphasising the same truth when he says epigrammatically: 'All human thought is a kind of error, when tried by the stability and durability of the Divine and most perfect

---

<sup>53</sup> Bett, *Johannes Scotus Eriugena*, 164.

conceptions.’ Augustine is expressing it again when he says that “God is more truly thought than He is uttered, and he exists more truly than he is thought.”<sup>54</sup>

The practical consequence of this methodology is that the most important use of reason is to recognize its own limits. Neither rank speculation nor abdication of the responsibility to seek is acceptable; only reason pressing forward with scrupulous awareness of its own limitations is proper.

McGinn tells us, “To call the Irishman a rationalist in any of the traditional senses would convey a false impression... if only because he emphasized the priority of what reason could *not* know over what it could.”<sup>55</sup> That McGinn is getting at one of Eriugena’s key concerns is clear in light of the foregoing sketch of Denis’ methodology. At this point, McGinn’s statement concerning the “priority” of the unknowable needs a bit of unpacking. In the *Periphyseon*, we find the Scot saying this: “Reason does not allow the Cause of all things, which surpasses all intellect, to be known by any created nature.”<sup>56</sup> For Eriugena, the unknowable to which McGinn alludes means God. (Eriugena would say that God is not knowable to human beings because human knowing depends upon circumscription and God cannot be so limited.) Eriugena is not arguing that priority is a consequence of unknowability. Instead, the relation between priority and unknowability is simply that both are true of God. God is first because He is God; at the same time, He simply does exceed the limits of human understanding. O’Meara offers further insight:

God is in himself inaccessible, but faith is a way, the only way, to approach him. Faith allows us to love him, that is, to find him, to be united with the incomprehensible. We can never share God’s infinity, but we can imitate that infinity in progressing continuously from one elevation to another. This idea is summed up in the term *επεκστασις*. It conveys the notion of a progress in the participation in what

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>55</sup> McGinn, *The Presence of God*, 97.

<sup>56</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 7.

is divine. Eriugena, believing with the Pseudo-Dionysius in the absolute unknowableness of God, seized upon an idea similar to Gregory's in his teaching on a progression of theophanies, of manifestations of God, which allowed one to come ever nearer, but never attain, to the incomprehensible essence of God.<sup>57</sup>

At this point, Eriugena has moved beyond what we would generally consider to be the bounds of "rationalism." While steadfastly maintaining that God cannot be "known" in the sense of comprehension or circumscription, the Scot affirms that God can be met, experienced, or encountered in a way that is more profound than knowledge. While God cannot be known, He can be believed. Furthermore, this act of belief has consequences for what can actually be known. Because of God's absolute priority, the trail of causality leads ultimately back to Him. Bett observes that "the consistent tendency in Eriugena is to think of the spiritual side as the real side and of the material side as the false one, though the eternal reality is still, in a sense, unknowable."<sup>58</sup> Things are real but they are contingent, real only insofar as God grants them being. The gift of being is not something that Eriugena believes can be explained. It is merely a fact that things *are*; God knows why and how. Eriugena asserts that "*ousia* considered in the innermost recesses of the creation made by Him and existing in Him, is incomprehensible."<sup>59</sup> Perhaps at this point the reader will begin to sense the force of Gilson's remark: "A strange rationalism indeed, whose first affirmation is that faith is the only way which leads to intellection!"<sup>60</sup> Eriugena walks a difficult line in affirming both the limits of reason and the imperative to use reason rigorously within those limits. Creation is given to humanity to be known, but creation itself points back to God, who is unknowable. God reveals Himself through what He has made, but what He has made can never reveal Him fully because all created things,

---

<sup>57</sup> O'Meara, *Eriugena*, 78.

<sup>58</sup> Bett, *Johannes Scotus Eriugena*, 127.

<sup>59</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 3.

<sup>60</sup> Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 114.

and indeed the sum of all creation, are finite, while God is unlimited. The task of humanity, then, is not so much to attain knowledge of God as it is to seek Him. The seeker can never find God, but the seeker *will* be found because God invariably reveals Himself to the one who seeks. This impulse motivates Eriugena's project at every turn. Wohlman describes it as "the courage to continue the never-ending task of breaking every idol, exposing every false identification, to return to the place of one's true identity, the 'nonbeing' *par excellence*, to live in an 'unknowing' analogous to the 'unknowing' of God."<sup>61</sup> Knowing for Eriugena is always in the end symbolic. This does not negate the truth of what is known, but it does limit the degree to which it is possible to relate things "known" to one another. The old saw that "analogies break down" applies equally to the symbolic character of knowledge, and especially of language. "*Periphyseon* can be seen as a single massive experiment in expressing the inexpressible, that is, in using language as a sort of self-consuming artifact whose limitations are more important than its advantages in the task of attaining God."<sup>62</sup> Eriugena's work represents in a sense a monumental expression of *dictum heroicum* as necessary vehicle for theological speech.

### Summary

We have examined four major loci in the Scot's writings: Trinity, Christology, eschatology, and apophaticism. Trinity and Christology set parameters for the content of theology. Christian speech about God must be governed by God's self-disclosure as Triune. Additionally, Eriugena recognizes that Christian speech about God must give proper emphasis to Christ as the ultimate instance of that self-disclosure and also as the ultimate means by which God draws humanity to Himself. This necessitates careful reflection upon what may be truly said

---

<sup>61</sup> Wohlman, "Introduction," xxix.

<sup>62</sup> McGinn, *The Presence of God*, 2:98.

about Christ in his humanity, in His divinity, and as the personal union of the two. This concern is not an abstraction, but rather arises from the Scot's clear sense that Christianity really does center around Christ, through whom all things have been made and in whom all creation is moved toward its ultimate purpose of fellowship with God. This notion of purpose motivates Eriugena's reflection throughout his writings, finding clear expression in his Christocentric and perichoretic eschatology. At the same time, the Scot recognizes the daunting scope of the project he has undertaken. Because he knows that he is a very small being speaking about very large realities, he carefully and humbly guards his words by means of the apophatic method he has learned from Denis. To say that Eriugena is unusual is to state the obvious; nevertheless, we have seen upon closer examination that when he is viewed from a perspective that encompasses both the Eastern and the Western Church his premises are not unusual. They are raw material which he has inherited from his patristic sources. What is truly remarkable is the seriousness with which the Scot pursues, integrates, and develops those premises.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE TRIUNE IMAGE: A LINK BETWEEN THEOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

In chapter 1 we considered Eriugena's relation to his patristic and creedal sources from a number of angles. In this chapter we will focus on a particular motif which he appropriates from Augustine: the idea of humanity as created in the Triune Image. This idea is an important one in that we will set forth in this chapter a number of themes that will resurface repeatedly through the course of this study. In brief, we can say that Eriugena's consideration of humanity as created in the Triune Image speaks directly to the nature of the human being as *person*, and that this personal nature carries within it the key ideas of purpose, uniqueness, and relationality. Part 3 of this study will be devoted to developing the theological implications of these ideas, especially in connection with the concept of interpersonal encounter (chapter 7) and in the context of Eriugena's eschatology (chapters 8 and 9). We need to begin, however, by considering both Eriugena's debt to Augustine in this area and the Scot's development of this theme in his account of the human person.

In exploring how Eriugena deals with human personhood, a question immediately arises: what warrant does the Scot have for proceeding along the lines that he does? How can he speak in the depth that he does about the human person without venturing into rank speculation? Doubtless, some readers of Eriugena have come to exactly that conclusion, but those readers miss an important methodological linchpin in the Scot's thought. Eriugena, as we shall see, thinks of humanity not just as made in the Divine image, but more specifically as made in the Triune image. The significance of this concept might seem opaque at first glance, but upon

further reflection it emerges that Eriugena has shifted the discussion into a direction that is not merely viable but fruitful. One concept that arises immediately in connection with the doctrine of the Trinity is that of personhood. The concept of the Triune image carries with it the implication that humanity reflects God's *personal* nature. By adopting Eriugena's focus upon the Triune character of humanity, we find that this focus moves the discussion from the parameters of what we typically consider to be "Theological Anthropology" (i.e., nature and grace, sin and the human will, etc.) to reflection upon the nature of the human being *as person*. By establishing the linkage that he does between the personhood of God and the personhood of man, Eriugena bridges the gap between *theologia* and *oikonomia*, and in so doing he opens a new sphere within which God's revealed personhood can inform reflection upon what it means to be human from a specifically *personal* standpoint.

### **Ambiguity and Promise in the Concept of the Triune Image**

In this chapter we will attempt to explicate, evaluate, and critique Eriugena's understanding and employment of the Triune Image within the discussion of human personhood. The goal toward which we are working is a conception of the human person, which both recognizes the problems in the Scot's reflection in this area and at the same time appropriates those of his insights that can better inform our own reflection upon the nature and significance of the human person. To this end, we will closely examine a number of statements which we find in Eriugena's writings as a means to demonstrate that his thought on this topic is somewhat inconsistent and problematic. At the same time, however, we will find in some of these same statements the seeds of a fruitful path of inquiry, one that helps us flesh out our conception of the human person in some ways that are both helpful for the contemporary discussion and profoundly orthodox. As we shall see, Eriugena never arrives at a coherent, or even a consistent, position with regard to

the significance of the Triune Image. Nevertheless, although his opinion about that significance seems almost to shift from moment to moment, the fact that he tries repeatedly to incorporate the Triune image into his system clearly indicates that the Scot is firmly convinced that the Triune Image is a rich and theologically important concept. In a word, Eriugena is unable to pin down the significance of the Triune Image, but he senses its importance and is therefore compelled to grapple with what it might mean. Thus, our study through the majority of this chapter will take the form of an exploration of the Scot's thought (including some of its more opaque and problematic particulars) on this topic.

We shall begin by pointing to the source from which Eriugena gleaned this idea: Augustine. Our brief interaction with the Doctor of Hippo will point out two key ideas, which the Scot appropriates and attempts to put to work: the Triune Image and the Psychological Analogy. As part of this interaction we shall briefly compare and contrast the Scot's explication of the Triune Image with that of Augustine.

Next, we shall examine a problem that arises from the way in which Eriugena employs Augustine. The Scot pursues a line of reasoning, which, while typical and acceptable in his own time and place, is problematic in light of later developments in Christian theology. We shall look at this problem and suggest a contemporary solution that we find already present in the Scot's own writings.

We shall then examine a number of instances in which Eriugena seeks to set forth the significance of the Triune Image. As we shall see, he is on the one hand sufficiently convinced that the Triune Image is an important concept that he apparently feels obligated to attempt to discover its significance. On the other hand, we shall also see that he seems unable to set forth a unified account. As we have already said, our Irishman has no doubt *that* the Triune Image is

important, but he cannot pin down *what* its importance is. Because this is so, we find Eriugena speculating about what the Triune image might signify.<sup>1</sup>

Having examined in some detail what Eriugena has to say regarding the Triune Image, we will offer critique and then suggest another way in which this idea might be developed. In so doing we shall be carrying on the Scot's own project, although along somewhat different lines from those along which Eriugena proceeds. In so doing, we shall bring Eriugena into dialogue with the contemporary discussion (particularly as it emerges in Zizioulas) and proceed to set forth some useful and timely implications of our proposed reading. Because both Eriugena and Zizioulas are concerned, albeit in somewhat different ways, to interact with Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor, and the pseudo-Denis, it is appropriate that the Scot and Zizioulas be brought to bear upon one another. In the final part of this chapter we shall suggest an approach which incorporates critique of both thinkers and seeks to synthesize (and capitalize upon) their strengths. As a point of entry, then, we shall begin by examining Eriugena's debt to Augustine, in whom the Scot discovers the idea that the Divine Image is the Triune Image.

### **Eriugena's Debt to Augustine**

There can be little doubt but that John the Scot discovered the concept of the triune image in his reading of Augustine. Eriugena's familiarity with both *De civitas Dei* and *De trinitate* is easily recognizable both because these texts were standard reading in his time and place and because he cites them in the *Treatise on Divine Predestination* and the *Periphyseon*. Although, as we have already seen, Eriugena does not adopt Augustine's psychological analogy for the Trinity entirely, it does leave its mark upon his thought. Eriugena did not conduct his Trinitarian

---

<sup>1</sup> We have elsewhere argued that the Scot presents us with what we might call a "speculative theology" of the human person. One incidental benefit which arises from our exploration of the ambiguities in the Scot's thought in this area is the fuller understanding of the practical aspect of this speculative impulse which will naturally flow from our presentation of a particular instance in which it emerges in Eriugena's project.

explorations along the standard Augustinian line (beginning with the unity of God and demonstrating a kind of threeness as a secondary moment) but the analogical connection between the nature of God and the human mind would certainly have appealed to the Scot. Further, the Augustinian argument that one cannot be deceived about one's own existence emerges clearly in the *Periphyseon*, as both Moran<sup>2</sup> and Stock<sup>3</sup> have shown. This is particularly significant in that Augustine presents this argument in a section of *De civitas Dei* in which he is exploring the idea of the Triune image.<sup>4</sup> Both the psychological analogy and the idea of the Triune image appear in the *Treatise*. Of course, this is hardly surprising in light of the fact that the writings of Augustine serve as the battleground upon which the Scot engages his opponent, Gottschalk. The scheme of double predestination which Gottschalk advocated was one he claimed to be the Augustinian view. Eriugena undertook, therefore, to show that Gottschalk did not properly understand Augustine. Both Eriugena and Gottschalk claimed in the predestinarian controversy of the ninth century to be presenting the "Augustinian" view of salvation. Because this is so, the Doctor of Hippo is by far the single most cited authority in the *Treatise*. As we shall see, the variety of uses to which Eriugena puts this concept suggests that he never arrived at a firm conclusion concerning its significance, but his several attempts to engage this idea suggest that the Scot believed it to be an important one, and this in itself suggests a way forward for the present study. The Scot attempts to explicate the significance of the Triune image at several points in the *Periphyseon*, but in his earlier work, the *Treatise*, Eriugena is already beginning to

---

<sup>2</sup> Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena: A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), xi.

<sup>3</sup> Brian Stock, "Intellego me esse: Eriugena's cogito," in *Jean Scot Erigene et l'histoire de la philosophie: Actes du II Colloque international Jean Scot Erigene*, ed. René Roques (Paris: CNRS, 1977), 327–36.

<sup>4</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, vol. 2 of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 1st Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 220.

grapple with Augustine's pregnant (if ambiguous) dictum. He says therein, "As indeed Saint Augustine many times very clearly impresses upon us, it is our belief that the substantial trinity of the interior man is being, will and knowledge."<sup>5</sup> The footnote points out that "this particular triad is not to be found among numerous other triads adduced by Augustine in his writings."<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, that Eriugena is trying to engage Augustine's idea of the Triune image in man is clear from what follows. He continues, "For if the highest wisdom which wished to create human nature like itself is in itself one and three, it duly made man in that way, that is being, will and knowledge, for those three are one."<sup>7</sup> From these words, it is clear that Eriugena is thinking in terms of the Triune image; his statement that God made man in a way that mirrors His own oneness and threeness can mean nothing else.

At this early stage, Eriugena seems to be venturing hypotheses concerning what exactly is meant by the threeness and oneness of man. One possible reason for this might be that it is the result of an attempt to integrate the concept of the Triune image with another famous Augustinian idea, the psychological analogy. This concept appears in the *Treatise*, when Eriugena asserts that "there is a kind of trinity of one essence, namely mind, skill, and discipline."<sup>8</sup> Although this is a different triad from Augustine's famous grouping of the mind, its knowledge, and its love,<sup>9</sup> the methodology Eriugena employs here is thoroughly Augustinian. Eriugena modifies the content of the analogy, but the echoes of Augustine are clear.

---

<sup>5</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, trans. Mary Brennan with an Introduction by Avital Wohlman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 51.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>9</sup> Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity*, 127.

As Eriugena is concerned with the questions of the mind's nature and its operation, it is hardly surprising that he would seek to cement the connection between God and humanity made in His image by presenting that connection from more than one perspective. Arguing from the Triune image, Eriugena says that just as God is both one and three, man is one and three. This might be described as "top-down" thinking, in which what has been revealed about God informs what we ought to think about humanity as made in His image. On the other hand, arguing from the psychological analogy, he says that just as the human mind is both one and three, it is possible to understand a kind of analogy between that oneness and threeness and the oneness and threeness which God has revealed as His own nature. This would be "bottom-up" thinking, in which humanity, as God image, serves as the basis for analogical reflection upon the nature of God. Both of these modes of thought are present in Eriugena, as we shall see in what follows.

This fact, however, raises another question: Is it useful to engage in the sort of "bottom-up" thinking we have just described? Does the presence of this sort of reasoning render Eriugena too problematic to be theologically useful? Augustine used this sort of reasoning, but his purpose seems to have been somewhat different; Augustine seems to have intended the psychological analogy primarily as an apologetic device, a way to explain what he already believed.<sup>10</sup> The

---

<sup>10</sup> Whether Augustine's project was shaped in unexpected ways by his decision to employ this analogy is another question. The trend in contemporary reflection upon the Trinity has been toward critique of Augustine's psychological analogy as tending toward an individualistic, rather than a relational, view of the person. As we shall see (particularly in chapters 7 and 9) the Scot's conception of the person moves beyond the individualism toward which a strictly Augustinian view might tend. It would seem that in this regard the Scot benefits from the more social conception of the Triune life which emerges in his Eastern sources. At the same time, however, there is a contemporary line of thinking which attempts to draw out a more relational reading of Augustine. For this way of developing Augustine, see Heribert Mühlen, *Der Heilige Geist als Person. Beitrag zur Frage nach der dem Heiligen Geiste eigentümlichen Funktion in der Trinität bei der Inkarnation und im Gnadensbund* (Münster: Aschendorf, 1963). It is important to recognize at this point, however, that it is not the intent of this study to present Augustine's contribution to Eriugena's thought as moving the Scot toward a more relational view. The Augustinian contributions upon which this study seeks to focus are 1) the emphases upon the role of sense and the life of the mind, which contribute to similar emphases in the Scot, and 2) the Scot's appropriation of the Triune Image as a useful category in developing a conception of the human person. The implications of this latter appropriation need not (and, in the Scot, do not) develop along strictly Augustinian lines.

Scot, on the other hand, seems to feel free to employ it at the constructive stage, using it as an integrating device as he sets forth his account of theology. Does this methodological decision cause fundamental problems in Eriugena's theology? The answer to that question is that the "bottom-up" mode of reasoning does indeed create problems. Nevertheless, Eriugena's thought is neither solely nor fundamentally dependent on this methodology. By way of explanation, we shall briefly touch upon some of the problems associated with this mode of reasoning and examine other ways in which Eriugena speaks of the human person as made in the image of the Triune God.

### **The Image of God as a Theological Concept in Light of the Protestant Reformation**

As is well known to any serious student of the Protestant Reformation, the reformers developed the theological significance of the image of God along different lines from the mainstream of the earlier Christian tradition. The application of this idea in the Roman tradition, with which they found themselves at odds, and certain strands of Humanism, with which they had an ambivalent relationship, had implications that seemed to the reformers to tend too much toward Pelagianism. The Roman application of philosophical analysis in a theological context was frequently grounded in the assumption that man, as the image of God, could reliably deduce truths about God on the basis of logic. On the one hand, this sort of methodology seemed to the reformers to lose sight of the seriousness of original sin. To provide a single particularly important example, the glibly rationalistic casuistry of Gabriel Biel especially offended Luther. On the other, it seemed to make the truth of revelation subordinate to human understanding.

When confronted with the vast edifice of Medieval Scholasticism, the reformers struck at its foundation by questioning the validity of human logic when applied to God. This idea was not absent from the Medieval tradition; LaCugna argues that the greatest of the Scholastics, Aquinas,

asserted that logic could deduce the existence of God,<sup>11</sup> but that the Trinity could only be known through revelation.<sup>12</sup> This statement, if LaCugna is correct, has clear implications for the limits of reason. Nor was this idea at all uncommon among the mystics, who argued along Dionysian lines that God could not be known, but that he could be encountered in the experience of mystical union. Interestingly, this idea finds an unusual and remarkable expression in Nicholas of Cusa, who grounded the mystery of God in the fact that God's infinity must necessarily be incomprehensible to human finitude.<sup>13</sup> (Nicholas' expression of this problem is particularly suggestive in that he was both a student of Eriugena's writings and an important influence on Luther.) Nevertheless, although this theme is in some measure present in the Medieval tradition, it was muted in the later Scholastics and in the Roman thinkers with whom the Reformers had to contend. Although Roman thinkers at the time of the Reformation might pay lip service to the divine mystery, they seemed not to recognize the inconsistency implicit in the claims they made about God and salvation based on human logic. Because such claims were so often grounded in the assumption that man as God's image could serve as a reliable epistemological anchor, the Protestant tradition has tended more often than not (although notable exceptions such as John Wesley do exist) to set aside reflection upon man as the divine image as an endeavor too fraught with problems to be useful. This approach has been largely normative for Protestant theology down to the present day, finding perhaps its most radical contemporary expression in Karl Barth.

One important contemporary voice who has attempted to recast (and thus salvage) the soteriological significance of the divine image is Wolfhart Pannenberg, who has argued that the

---

<sup>11</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity & Christian Life*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993), 151.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>13</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *Nicholas of Cusa on Learned Ignorance: A Translation and Appraisal of De Docta Ignorantia*, trans. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning, 1990), 5.

image ought not to be understood as either an ontological truth or a human faculty.<sup>14</sup> Instead, Pannenberg argues that the divine image ought to be understood *teleologically*; that is, as the destiny for which and according to which man has been made.<sup>15</sup> According to Pannenberg, the image ought not to be understood as a present reality but as an eschatological one which is nevertheless foreshadowed in human nature, even in its present fallen state. Man is made for fellowship with God, and human nature, even in its fallen state, reflects in some measure this purpose.<sup>16</sup> If we recall one of Eriugena's statements in the previous chapter, we can see that he takes a similar stance; he says in the *Periphyseon*, "Scripture does not say 'Let us make man Our image and likeness' but 'according to Our image and likeness.' It is as though it were clearly saying, 'Let us make man to become Our image and likeness if he guards Our precept.'"<sup>17</sup> Clearly, then, the Divine image is not a present reality which can be treated as a given; on the contrary, it is for Eriugena (as for Pannenberg), a purpose and a destiny. It thus has soteriological significance, but the fundamentally eschatological character of that significance does not permit glib extrapolation. Eriugena further qualifies his understanding of the Triune image when he states:

We do not doubt but that the trinity of our nature... is not the image of God but is made in the image of God—for the only true image of the invisible God, and in nothing dissimilar from Him, is the only begotten Word of God which is co-essential with the Father and the Spirit.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 2:190.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>17</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, trans. Myra Uhlfelder, with summaries by Jean A. Potter (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976), 349.

<sup>18</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon, Liber II*, ed. I. P. Sheldon-Williams, with the collaboration of Ludwig Bieler, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 10 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1972), 123.

Thus, humanity is not the image itself, but is made *in* that image. Christ alone is the image in an unqualified sense. This means that reflection upon the soteriological significance of the Triune image must be framed in Christological terms. Humanity can *become* the image through union with Christ, but that is an eschatological reality which only begins to happen in the present through contemplation and *imitatio Christi*. That being said, God's design *is* for humanity to become His image, and that destiny governs the way in which humanity is made. The Fall constitutes a fundamental assault on God's lordship, but the attack can never be fully successful because God is God. Humanity has not made itself, nor can it truly remake itself; it is still molded according to the purpose for which God made it.

### **The Triune Image in Eriugena**

As we observed earlier, Eriugena's use of this concept is not consistent; he seems to flit from one way of explicating the Triune image to another. The simplest explanation for this would seem to be that he believes the Triune image to be an important idea but is unable to decide what to make of it. He seems to sense *that* the idea is significant, but at the same time he seems unable to clearly articulate *what* it signifies. It is appropriate at this point to examine several instances in which the Scot attempts to put this idea to work.

We have already observed an instance in the *Treatise* in which Eriugena attempts to explicate the significance of the Triune image. At another place in that work, he says,

whether such a difference be found between the free choice of man and his substance, so that by nature a truly free choice in the rational will is constituted in its freedom; or in the movement of the naturally free will; or in the gift of intelligence which is bestowed on all in common; or, as is thought more probable, all three combined—that is the free movement of the intelligence—are the mutual components of free choice, the reason for this is that, as the substance itself in which it is [i.e., has being] is threefold—for it exists and wills and knows—so it also is made threefold, free, moved, intelligent.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, 57.

Eriugena has presented us here with a particular triad: freedom, motion, and intelligence. It is noteworthy that this triad is different from the triad we earlier mentioned, that of mind, skill, and discipline. As we shall see, the Scot never settles completely upon a single triad, which he believes gets to the heart of what the Triune image signifies.

In the *Periphyseon*, he sets forth an account of the movements of the soul (which we shall examine in greater detail in a later chapter) and concludes by reminding the reader that: “It must not be forgotten that because the soul is in the image of the divine Trinity, it is not a collection of three faculties working together harmoniously; it is a unity of essence, with logical priority given to the intellect.”<sup>20</sup> In this instance Eriugena seems to be echoing the Augustinian conviction that, although multiplicity can be discerned within the mind, the mind is yet fundamentally one. Again, we see a different triad from either of the ones the Scot has earlier proffered. In this case, the triad consists of the three motions of the soul: interior sense, reason, and intellect, as is clear from the following excerpt, in which the Teacher asks the Student:

What is your opinion of that very much spoken-of trinity of our nature which is understood to consist of intellect and reason and sense? Is it something different from the one we have just mentioned or are this one and that one and the same, and not two trinities in our nature which is one and the same?<sup>21</sup>

The student responds, “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.”<sup>22</sup> Shortly thereafter, the Student reiterates his point: “We should understand that there are not two substantial trinities, but one and the same, created

---

<sup>20</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 121.

<sup>21</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon, Liber II*, 99.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

in the likeness of the Creator.”<sup>23</sup> (We should observe at this point that Eriugena has appropriated this account practically verbatim from Maximus Confessor but, by framing it in terms of the fundamental unity of the mind, he has placed it in a thoroughly Augustinian context. We shall examine this passage and Eriugena’s synthesis of Augustine and Maximus in more detail in a later chapter.) We see in the Scot’s urge to equate the two proposed trinities in human nature that he senses the lack of coherence in his thought on this topic. Although he never fully clarifies the issue, he does keep trying. At another place in the *Periphyseon*, Eriugena presents us with yet another triad when he tells us: “Our nature, which is called human because all men participate in it, consists of essence, power, and operation.”<sup>24</sup> The Scot does refer to this particular triad repeatedly throughout the *Periphyseon*, but he still feels the need to show that it is really the same as the threefold movement of the soul. He presents the following equation:

Our discourse is not concerned at the moment with the whole of human nature... but only with that part in which the image and likeness of the Creator is seen, that is, with intellect, reason and interior sense, or, so to say, with essence, power, and operation. For it is in this triad that the image of the most high and holy Trinity is known to be expressed.<sup>25</sup>

How intellect, reason, and interior sense are simply different names for essence, power, and operation, however, remains rather unclear at the end of this passage. It would seem at this point that perhaps the Scot “doth protest too much.” To further complicate matters, Eriugena tries to link essence, power, and operation each to one of the Divine Persons. He states, “In the essence of our nature is recognized the property of the paternal Substance; in its power that of the Substance of the Son; in its operation that of the Substance of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>26</sup> Again, it is

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 97.

unclear what is gained by this formulation. It should be clear at this point that Eriugena is positively driven by the need to incorporate the idea of the Triune image into his thinking, but that at the same time he cannot seem to pin down how it ought to fit.

It should be clear from our overview of the Scot's attempts to explicate the significance of the Triune image that he is decidedly ambivalent about that content. This might give the impression that his use of the Triune image is lacking in direction. This would be somewhat inaccurate in that, although he is unable to pin down the doctrinal content of the Triune image, Eriugena does in fact believe that the Triune image has significant methodological content; he argues, in terms that would make the pseudo-Denys smile: "It is impossible for the Essence of the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit, and their Substances to be revealed to the creature directly as they are."<sup>27</sup> The Trinity itself is, then, a mystery. It cannot be probed by human intellect, only accepted as revealed. Any positive explication of the Triune nature can only be conducted by analogy. To this end, Eriugena suggests that the Triune image in man offers a way forward:

No mortal sense, no matter how shrewd its inquiry can give assurance of this without incurring the charge of rashness... For, unless I am mistaken, we are inquiring how we can argue from the substantial trinity of our nature created in the image of God to that most high Trinity which is God, and the distribution to each of the Persons of their proper operations, so to speak, in created nature.<sup>28</sup>

In other words, Eriugena suggests that theological reflection can begin with the Triune image in the human soul and extrapolate upward to the Divine Trinity itself. He makes this clear when he states, "It is by arguing from the image that the very truth of which it is the image must be sought."<sup>29</sup> For Eriugena, then, Trinitarian discourse can and should proceed by analogy

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 107.

beginning with humanity and progressing onward to insight into the divine life. The Scot believes this to be a fruitful direction, as he makes clear when he says,

The substantial Trinity of the Divine Goodness is revealed in the motions of the human soul to those who study them carefully, and manifests itself to those who seek it piously as though in a most limpid mirror of their own made in its image, and although it is removed from every creature and intellect descends through its image and likeness to become, as it were, known and comprehensible and in some measure comprehensible to the eyes of the intellect and of its own accord cleanses the mirror which reflects it so that it may shine forth from it most brilliantly as one essential Goodness in three Substances; for this Unity and Trinity, because it eludes every intellect on account of its exceeding brightness, would not appear in itself and by itself unless it impressed the traces of knowledge of itself upon its image.<sup>30</sup>

In sum, Eriugena believes that the mystery of God constrains humanity to look for insight into the divine life within humanity itself. The impenetrable mystery of an infinite and transcendent God is revealed and explicated (by way of analogy, at least) in humanity, which as God's image reflects his nature. It is only fitting at this point that we pause for a moment in order to take stock of Eriugena's understanding and employment of the Triune image as a theological concept and also to offer critique. We have seen that Eriugena conspicuously employs the concept of the Triune image as the basis for analogical reflection upon the nature of God, the "bottom-up" mode of thinking we mentioned earlier in this chapter.

### **The Triune Image Reconsidered**

In light of what we noted earlier, it is clear that the kind of upward extrapolation Eriugena advocates represents exactly the sort of reasoning that the Protestant Reformation rejected. In this regard, we might say that Eriugena represents an early emergence of what we might call "the Scholastic problem"—overconfidence in the validity of human reason. If the Scot is ahead of his time in terms of his insights, he seems to have borrowed some of the inadequacies of Scholasticism in advance as well. In order for this concept to be a useful one (at least for

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 121.

Protestant thinkers) there must be another possible way in which it might be employed. In fact, another dictum from the *Periphyseon* does suggest an alternate way to proceed. Eriugena says this: “It was necessary for the image of the one and highest Trinity, inseparable, simple, and uncompounded in itself, to be restored to a unity and an inseparable simplicity.”<sup>31</sup> In this instance the Scot (perhaps by accident) makes a theological move that is strikingly reminiscent of the contemporary theological discussion of personhood: he begins with God and argues downward to humanity. If we take a moment to reflect, we can see that this mode of argument implies that *what we confess concerning Divine personhood ought to inform how we understand human personhood*. The Triune character of Divine personhood is *normative* for an orthodox Christian account of human personhood. Because God as Triune is characterized by unity, this must also be true (eschatologically) of the human person as created in the Triune Image. This conclusion is arguable, but the *methodological* move that Eriugena makes here is important in that it places the discussion of human personhood in a Trinitarian context. If we adopt this methodology as a hermeneutic for our reading of Eriugena, recognizing that it brings with it a somewhat different set of parameters from those of the Scot, we can fruitfully read Eriugena in light of thinkers like Zizioulas who have sought to recover the significance of patristic reflection on personhood. This might seem at first to be something of a stretch, but before we draw this conclusion let us remember that Eriugena is deeply influenced by some of the same patristic sources with which the current Trinitarian discussion is concerned, namely, Gregory of Nyssa, the pseudo-Denis, Maximus Confessor, and Augustine. In this context, then, our proposed reading of Eriugena is not so much a fundamental alteration as an adjustment, a reorientation. The Scot sought to integrate his Eastern sources with his Western ones. As we have seen, his

---

<sup>31</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 324.

progress in this particular area (the significance of the Triune image) was uneven, but our proposed reading is very much in the spirit of the Scot's own project. To draw upon these particular patristic sources in search of a way to integrate them is an endeavor which mirrors that of Eriugena. Even if we draw somewhat different conclusions from those of the Scot, the basic methodology is the same.

Eriugena clearly did recognize the importance of the Triune image as a theological concept, even if he did not know what to make of it. This study represents in part an attempt to explicate the significance of the Triune image in light of the contemporary discussion of personhood. In exploring—as Eriugena did—the significance of the Triune image, the reflections of John Zizioulas prove particularly helpful. Zizioulas presents two truisms concerning the significance of the Trinitarian character of personhood. He says on the one hand that:

The expression “God is love” (I John 4:16) signifies that God “subsists” as Trinity, that is, as person and not as substance. Love is not an emanation or “property” of the substance of God... but is *constitutive* of His substance, i.e. it is that which makes god what He is, the one God. Thus love ceases to be a qualifying—i.e. secondary—property of being and becomes *the supreme ontological predicate*. Love as God's mode of existence “hypostasizes” God, *constitutes* His being.<sup>32</sup>

The constitutive character of love, then, includes the notion of another who is loved. To be personal is to be interpersonal, to be relational. There are no solitary persons; to be a person is to be in relation to other persons. We could easily cite numerous passages from, among others, Martin Buber and John Macmurray, but for the present this brief statement from Buber should suffice: “Man becomes an I through a You.”<sup>33</sup> This means that persons are not fundamentally individuals who engage in interpersonal relations as a secondary mode of action; on the contrary, interpersonal relation is, as Zizioulas puts it, “constitutive” of personhood. Talk about

---

<sup>32</sup> John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993), 46.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1950), 80.

personhood must not only include the concept of relationship, that concept must be axiomatic in any substantive account of what it means to be a person. Additionally, Zizioulas says that:

Uniqueness is something absolute for the person. The person is so absolute in its uniqueness that it does not permit itself to be regarded as an arithmetical concept, to be set alongside other beings, to be combined with other objects, or to be used as a means, even for the most sacred goal. The goal is the person itself; personhood is the total fulfillment of being, the catholic expression of its nature.<sup>34</sup>

In other words, the particular person is not interchangeable with other persons. Each person has and is a unique *identity*. While there are no truly isolated persons, there are no identical ones either. It is precisely in the uniqueness of each particular person that the profound beauty of love is grounded. Love, by its very nature, affirms the difference of the other, that which makes it fundamentally other. At the same time, the uniqueness of each person ennobles the person by ensuring that the one who acts in self-giving (that is, in love) is in fact giving a truly unique gift, one that is irreplaceable.

Each of these concepts importantly informs reflection upon what it means to be a human person, a living being made in the image of the Triune God. Just as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one God, we as human persons are fundamentally relational; we are interpersonal. At the same time, just as the Father is not the Son, nor the Son the Spirit, nor the Spirit the Father, we as human persons are distinct from one another in our uniqueness. If the concept of relationality is lost, we find ourselves slipping into isolated individualism, and eventually into Cartesian solipsism. On the other hand, if the concept of our uniqueness is lost, we fall prey to monism.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 47.

<sup>35</sup> As one example of this problem, Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious helps us to see how the erosion of personal uniqueness leads to monism.

The concept of the Triune image has further import as well. It provides a way to make explicit what is implicit in Zizioulas; that personhood is the divine image. This assumption seems to operate largely at a tacit level in Zizioulas' thought. Perhaps, in light of the unfavorable light in which the Trinitarian theologians of the twentieth century have generally tended to cast Augustine, it is understandable that Zizioulas would not be eager to appropriate an Augustinian dictum in defense of his argument. Nevertheless, the concept of the Triune image does serve to clarify and make explicit the linkage between the personal nature of God and the personhood of humanity, a linkage that is the less clear and explicit in Zizioulas for lack of this concept. Thus, not only can reading of the Scot benefit from the insights of Zizioulas, as we have shown, but Eriugena's thought also can enrich our understanding of Zizioulas.

In sum, Eriugena's application of the Triune image to the discussion of human personhood has useful implications. We have seen that the Scot seemed perpetually unsure of that concept's significance. We have also examined some problems that may arise if the concept of the Triune image is not carefully employed. Nevertheless, his repeated attempts to explicate the import of the Triune image suggest strongly that he sensed its importance, and from them we find ways in which it can serve as a useful concept: First, the Triune image can and should be understood teleologically. To be a person is to have a *purpose*. Second, it can and should be understood as entailing the idea of relationality. To be personal is to be *interpersonal*. Third, it can be and should be understood as entailing the idea of otherness. To be a person is to be *unique*. Finally, we have suggested that the Triune image offers a way to make explicit the linkage between the personhood of God and human personhood. To be a person is to be *defined and normed* by the personhood of God. Whatever in our existence as persons contradicts the revealed character of God is necessarily a contradiction of our own personhood. It is most unlikely that Eriugena fully

recognized all of these implications, but it is clear that he recognized the significance of the Triune image, even if he could not clearly explicate that significance. We might say that whether or not the Scot understood what he had discovered, he was certainly convinced that he had discovered something of importance. In retrospect, it would appear that his conviction was well founded.

We will continue to develop the concepts of purpose, uniqueness, and relationality as constitutive of the human person throughout the remainder of this study, but this will be our particular focus in part 3. We will see that Eriugena's eschatology is a radical outworking of these ideas, a teleological expression of personal uniqueness and relationality. In this scheme the fullest expression of personal uniqueness and relationality is the destiny for which God has made humanity, but at the same time that destiny is the fullest realization of what it means to be a person.

Before we can do this, however, we need to consider Eriugena's epistemology of the human person. This is so because we need to explore the concept of knowledge in order to begin to get at what "relation" means. Is relation a mode of knowledge, or knowledge a mode of relation, or are they simply two different things? How do the concepts of knowledge and relation inform and interact with one another? Before we can consider how the Scot develops the concept of relation in part 3, therefore, we need to examine his epistemology. The question of epistemology is also important in that knowing is a *personal* activity. When we ask what can be known about a person, we presuppose a person who knows. Knowledge and the personal knower are inseparable. These concerns will be our focus in part 2.

## INTRODUCTION TO PART 2

In examining what Eriugena has to say about the human person, one particular dimension of his thought must always be kept in focus: his epistemology. The question of epistemology as a philosophical category will be the focus of chapter five, but we could fairly say that epistemology in a broader sense is the governing concern in each of the next four chapters. The Scot is concerned both to say positively what can confidently be said about the human person and to delineate clearly those areas into which reason may not confidently proceed. Eriugena appropriates from Gregory of Nyssa the idea that, because God is incomprehensible, humanity as the image of God also partakes of incomprehensibility. But Eriugena does not simply leave the discussion there. He also grapples with what can in fact be known about the human person both on the basis of revelation and on the basis of observation and experience. These two sources provide the data from which he develops his ideas.

This approach is a significant part of what makes the Scot useful to the project at hand: integrating the insights of contemporary Trinitarian theology with those of the Anti-Cartesian philosophers. It might be argued that, while contemporary theologians such as Zizioulas have provided a coherent metaphysical account of personhood, they have done relatively little to articulate a phenomenology of personhood. It might similarly be argued that, while the Anti-Cartesians have made considerable progress in articulating just such a phenomenology, they seem to lack a coherent, rigorous metaphysical account within which to couch their ideas. Eriugena, precisely because he develops his ideas both from revelation and from experience, offers a way in which these two streams in the contemporary discussion of personhood might begin to be integrated.

We have seen in part 1 how Eriugena engages his patristic sources, the building blocks of his thought. To speak substantively about the human person, Eriugena relies on the insights of these patristic sources as data that the discussion must take into account. From this foundation he proceeds to develop a set of parameters for talk about the human person. One key aspect of this discussion lies in what we might call the epistemological dimension of the human person. Both *mystery* and *knowledge* as governing concepts are important to an honest account of human creatures. In other words, to speak truly of the human person, we must affirm and develop what we do know while admitting honestly what we do not know.

In part 2 (chapters 3 through 6) we will explicate Eriugena's multifaceted treatment of the relationship between mystery and knowing. Above all, there are four questions this section will seek to address. First, what is a human knower? Eriugena's discussion of the human as a dynamic and integrated simultaneity of person and animal seeks to provide parameters within which any talk about human knowing must be conducted. Our talk about human knowing must be consistent with our talk about what a human being is. The nature of humanity as both image of God (person) and animal (biologically embodied) precludes any reductionism that would ignore either of these dimensions. Further, the integration of the two serves as a corrective to Cartesian dualism. Man is not merely a "ghost in the machine." To be a human being is to be embodied as a whole person, in which the Divine Image and the animal nature can be distinguished but never separated or categorically opposed.

Second, what can be known about a knower? Eriugena is not content with either a crass realism or a lazy solipsism in this regard. The human person is neither flatly inscrutable nor fully comprehensible. People do truly know one another in some sense, but this knowing can never be said to be exhaustive. As with his discussion of the human as dynamic simultaneity, he is

concerned to set parameters that both affirm the truth of what can be known about any person and also that remind his readers that persons are not completely knowable.

Third, how does human knowing happen? For Eriugena, human knowing is real but also symbolic. It happens through, among other symbols, language, and is thus subject to the limitations of language. Human knowing also happens in relation to God as both the final arbiter concerning all truth claims and also as transcending the limits of the human capacity to know. Both language and theological method are therefore central to a proper understanding of Eriugena's epistemology.

Fourth, how does the nature of human knowing impact human existence or, more precisely, the experience of the individual human knower? Because human knowing about God must occur within interpersonal relationship with God and because God is both absolute and in some measure unknowable, Eriugena has two concerns. On the one hand, he affirms resolutely that human knowing about God happens within the parameters he has already set forth. God is personal, and as such is to human knowing a mystery. Human knowing is symbolic, and thus interpretive. God can therefore be encountered or experienced, but always a way that entails an act of interpretation. Because human knowledge is true but symbolic, knowing and interpreting are inseparable. On the other hand, Eriugena is also concerned to uphold the absolute reality of God's existence and character. God is not changed by how human beings interpret their experience of Him. Because this is so, how human beings interpret their experience of God necessarily has ramifications for how they relate to God. An interpretation that accords with who God is allows the human knower to grow in interpersonal relationship with God, while any interpretation that misrepresents who God is necessarily hinders that growth.

It is important for us to remember through the course of part 2 that each of these questions bears upon Eriugena's view of the human person. The questions of human embodiedness, self-awareness, the nature of knowing, and the role of the interpretive act should not be seen merely as disjointed observations concerning the discrete disciplines of biology, psychology, philosophy, and hermeneutics; each, especially when set in relation to the others, also reveals important elements of the Scot's overarching view of the human person. As we consider the Scot's thought in this light, something remarkable happens. The interplay of the concerns we will address in each of the chapters in part 2, rather than serving to flesh out an expansive and rationalistic view of the human person, has the cumulative effect of raising as many questions as it answers. It needs to be emphasized that this is *not* an indication that the Scot's project has miscarried. We will find through the course of part 2 that, rather than answering the human question of personal identity, the Scot's approach serves instead to highlight the urgency and the difficulty of that question. To follow Eriugena's line of thought through his expansive and challenging engagement of this question is to be confronted with the fact that for us as human persons, knowledge of ourselves is never completely unambiguous. To think of ourselves as we truly are is to respect the enigmatic character of our lives as human persons. This confrontation is a necessary preparation for part 3, in which we will consider how the Scot begins to positively address the crucial question of human identity. It is with this concern in view, then, that we should examine the questions raised in part 2.

## CHAPTER THREE

### DYNAMIC INTEGRATION: HUMANITY AS IMAGE OF GOD AND ANIMAL

Light, as we learned in grade school, is something of a scientific paradox. It seems to exist both as waves and as particles. In some situations, thinking of light as waves better explains its behavior, while in others the idea of light as particles makes better sense of the data. Whether we think of light as waves or as particles depends upon the questions we are asking about light, but we do not forget that it is both. We accept the ambiguities inherent in this scheme because the combination of these two ways of thinking about light seems to provide a more comprehensive account than either can provide apart from the other.

This example provides a useful metaphor for describing the aspect of Eriugena's reflection on the human person with which this chapter is concerned. Our focus in this chapter, as in all of part 2, is to draw out of Eriugena's thought the parameters within which any account of the human being as knower, and thus as *person*, must be developed. To the Scot the human being is a dynamically integrated being, simultaneously the Image of God and an animal, both personal and biologically embodied. How, then, should we understand the integration and interplay of our personhood (or perhaps we might say the spiritual aspect of our nature) and our embodiedness? The precise relationship between these two dimensions of the human person defies neat description, but both are true and must be taken into account in any discussion of human personhood. Any account of human personhood that reduces man to nothing more than an animal (B.F. Skinner comes to mind) cannot properly speak about humanity as made in God's

image, while any account which focuses exclusively—or even primarily—on humanity as mind or spirit (such as that of Descartes) cannot speak robustly of our biological embodiedness.

We need also to consider the relation of divine image and animal in humanity in light of the Fall. As we will see, Eriugena holds that the animal nature is part of humanity's original creation and is thus good. He conceives of the Fall as a disordering of the human person, not so much a corruption of the body itself as of its function. It might be simplest to say that Eriugena sees the Fall as the good animal nature being evilly misused, a misuse of which death and self-deception are consequences. This does not, however, change the divine purpose for which humanity was created as animal, as biologically embodied, just as humanity was also created in the divine image.

The Scot's account of the human person suggests that a proper treatment must continually affirm both of these dimensions—and also consider the problem of pre- versus post-lapsarian humanity—while accepting the ambiguities which arise from such an approach. An account of human personhood presented within these parameters is necessarily less precise than otherwise might be possible, but at the same time such an account is necessarily more comprehensive, and thus a truer representation of human personhood. In this aspect of the discussion, as is often the case with Eriugena, we are presented not so much with a positive, constructive account of the human person as with a dialectical representation, a set of parameters within which we must give an account.

In this chapter we will explore several basic themes in Eriugena's reflection on the nature and significance of the human person as this dynamic integration. First, we will examine the Scot's placement of this ambiguity at the heart of what it means to be human. We also will observe the Scot's conception of the human being as both divine image and animal but

nevertheless an integrated whole. He sees the animal and the divine image as distinguishable, but not separable. Second, we will notice that the Scot believes the animal nature to be a good part of God's original creation of the human being. Third, we will explore Eriugena's understanding of the nature and consequences of the Fall. Fourth, we will examine the significance of humanity as Divine Image. Fifth, we will similarly reflect upon the significance of the human person as animal.

### **The Integration of Animal and Divine Image in the Human Person**

We have already argued that the Scot sees humanity as a dynamic integration of animal and Divine Image, a creature which is both biologically embodied (animal) and personal (created in the Divine Image). Eriugena describes this fundamentally human simultaneity in this way:

It is correctly stated of man, 'He is an animal; he is not an animal.' We can confirm this point from the authority of divine Scripture, for the Apostle says: 'An animal-like (*animalis*) person does not perceive the things which are God's.' And then: 'A spiritual man judges everything, but he is not judged by anyone.' Observe how clearly, how openly, he virtually divides a man into two men. One of them is animal-like since he is like the nature of animals, which receives nothing spiritual into itself. The other is spiritual, since it communicates with eternal, spiritual, and divine subsistences and is wholly free from the nature of the animal. The part in man which is like an animal belongs to the outer man; but that by which he surpasses other animals including himself, insofar as he is an animal, fittingly receives the designation of *inner* man.<sup>1</sup>

This depiction of humanity as simultaneously animal and spiritual invites explication along at least two lines. First, Eriugena presents us with a moral exegesis of this idea. He describes human fallenness as a situation in which humanity lives in a way that is not merely physical (which is an integral part of its nature) but outright bestial. Bestial humanity sins by ignoring the fact that we have been made in the Divine Image and by ignoring the implications of that fact for our nature and purpose. When we as human beings fail to acknowledge and live in light of our

---

<sup>1</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, trans. Myra Uhlfelder, with summaries by Jean A. Potter (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976), 220.

creation in God's image, we live as persons at odds with our own personhood. Dysfunctional interpersonal relationships, loss of individual identity, and nihilistic apathy are all consequences of human persons seeking to abdicate our destiny as God's image and to live as merely animal. Humanity cannot seek to live as merely biological without becoming bestial. In other words, we might say that the failure to recognize and live in light of our destiny of fellowship with God obscures all that ennobles us as human and leaves us with only our own desires at the helm. (We will explicate the theme of desire further in later chapters.) At the same time, it is precisely the destiny implicit in human personhood that makes sin sinful. An animal is not evil when it acts like an animal because an animal is all that it is. A human being, in contrast, is not simply an animal; a human being is a human *person*, and as such is made in such a way that purpose, uniqueness, and relationality are fundamental to being what he or she truly is. To live as a beast is morally wrong for a human being precisely because such a way of living is reductionistic; it is less than—and thus at odds with—the totality of his or her nature as a *person*. Further, the fact of humanity's current bestial life cannot negate the destiny for which God has made us. We are beasts (because we live at odds with the Divine Image in which we were made) but at the same time the persistence of the destiny for which we were made makes us not merely animals but *sinner*s. We are both beasts and made in the Divine Image, both animal and not-merely-animal.

Second, while we have seen how this passage speaks to human fallenness, it also speaks to the nature of humanity before the Fall. In this context we are to understand that humanity as originally created *was* this animal-spiritual simultaneity. The animal nature in this connection signifies our life as physically embodied beings. While humanity was created in the image of God—which we have already explicated in Trinitarian terms to mean personhood, with its included corollaries of purpose, uniqueness, and relationality—it has from the beginning been a

biological entity and a part of the created world. Corporeality is not a consequence of sin, as Eriugena makes clear when he says: “. . . the whole soul was produced from the earth in the genus of animals, and the whole was made in God’s image.”<sup>2</sup>

The animal nature, then, is part of God’s original creation and is thus good. Another implication arises from this statement as well: God has created humanity in such a way that the Divine Image and the animal nature are each intrinsic to the whole person. In other words, the human person cannot be partitioned into an “animal part” and a “spiritual part.” Both of these aspects of the human person are completely true of each human person as a whole being because humanity was created as both. The relation between the animal nature and the Divine Image is not one that can be expressed in quantities or ratios; instead, it is (like our earlier allusion to light as waves and particles) a *dynamic simultaneity*. This paradoxical portrayal demands that examination of the human person engage the question with, we might say, one eye constantly upon the integrated nature of human personhood. Eriugena develops this conception of the integrated human person in another way in this passage:

[The soul] is simple and free from all linking of parts... All of it is everywhere present in it throughout the whole.... And although it thus subsists as naturally simple, it receives the divisions of a whole into parts, according to the multiplicity of its motions. Hence it is called by many names. For example, when it is borne around Divine Essence, it is called *mind* (*mens, animus*) and *intellect*. When it considers the natures and causes of created things, it is called *reason*; when it takes in the forms (*species*) of sensible things by the corporeal senses, it is *sense*; when it brings about its hidden motions in the body as irrational souls do, nourishing the body and causing it to grow, its usual proper designation is *vital motion*. But in all of these activities, the whole soul is everywhere present.<sup>3</sup>

Again, we see here that Eriugena rejects the division of the human person into parts. While a human being can be examined with an eye to one particular aspect or another, humanity is at

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

every turn a *Gestalt*, a whole and integrated being which must thus be understood holistically. To speak of the human mind, for example, in such a way as to introduce a dichotomy between it and the body is to lose sight of the integrated nature of the human person and to introduce a relation of opposition in which one part subsumes the other. Descartes' famous characterization of a human being as "ghost in the machine" exemplifies movement toward the primacy of mind, while Skinner's assertion that there is no "personality" which underlies behavior, only behavior itself, exemplifies the reduction of the human being to biological entity. The resulting dualism in effect puts the mind at odds with the body and fails to do justice to the experience of the whole human being. Lived human experience suggests that the relation between the various aspects of the person resists compartmentalization. To provide two examples, we might point to chemical depression as an instance in which body chemistry alters the operation of the mind, or to psychosomatic illness as a case in which the mind alters the operation of the body. The Divine Image and the animal nature are not "parts" of the human person; on the contrary, they are coextensive and interrelated truths which describe the human person as a whole. Eriugena expresses this principle concisely when he says: "The whole image is in the whole animal, and the whole animal subsists in the whole image throughout the whole man."<sup>4</sup> This dictum presents the Scot's thought on this topic in the most concise possible terms. We see here (1) the description of man as Image of God, (2) the description of man as animal, (3) the interpenetration of the two and (4) the statement that the interpenetration of the Divine Image and the animal nature is true of "the whole man."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>5</sup> One wonders whether Eriugena is thinking in Chalcedonian categories as he articulates these last two ideas. The interpenetration of the Divine Image and the animal nature and the ubiquity of the two in human nature evoke the "without confusion, change, division, or separation" of that Council's Definition. This is important for the moment only insofar as to say that Eriugena seems to be grappling with the concept of "distinction-without-

## The Goodness of the Animal Nature

Like many of his patristic sources, Eriugena appropriated the vocabulary of Neo-Platonism in setting forth his ideas. This, in combination with the densely philosophical and deeply mystical character of the Scot's writings, might incline the reader to ask whether Eriugena has also fallen prey to the gnostic tendency toward dualism. We can answer this question with a succinct "no" for two reasons. First, as we have seen, the Scot on several occasions explicitly rejects the idea of a body-soul dualism. Second, the Scot (as we shall see in a moment) rejects the dualistic characterization of spirit as good and matter as evil. The animal nature is not in itself evil, as Eriugena makes clear when he says, "Man, even if he had not sinned, would be an animal; for nature, not sin, made man an animal."<sup>6</sup> Similarly, in another place the Scot speaks of, "this animal body, which Divine Scripture attests was joined to the human soul even before sin..."<sup>7</sup>

At this point it is clear that Eriugena believes that not only is the animal nature not evil, it is part of the original design according to which God made humanity. Since this is the case, two implications are immediately apparent. First, the animal nature in unfallen humanity comes under the "Very Good" which God pronounced over all of His creation. Second, the question arises *why* humanity was created an animal. What purpose does the animal nature serve in God's design for human life? We shall turn to this question shortly, with a view to understanding better the significance of the animal nature and also to developing further implications of the Divine Image. Before we do this, however, it might be appropriate to broach another question: How

---

separation" that is perhaps the chief philosophical corollary of that council, and of Nicea as well. We will examine another way in which Eriugena employs this idea in chapter 8.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 245.

does the concept of the human paradox inform Eriugena's reflection upon the nature and consequences of the Fall?

### **The Nature and Consequences of the Fall**

In the *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, Eriugena is beginning to grapple with this question. He says therein,

Take, for example, the human body before sin which was first animal, later to be spiritual by virtue of obedience, without death intervening. Why first animal? Was it because up to this point there was missing that which was to be added on for keeping the commandment, that is to say the spiritual? And in this way, it was animal due to the fact that it fell somewhat short of the perfection of nature; it would be spiritual due to the fact that it had no shortcomings.... And just as the animal body was capable of dying because it was not yet perfect, so the free will, hitherto rightly animal because mortal, could sin since it was not yet perfect.<sup>8</sup>

While the Scot's thought at this point is less clear than it comes to be in the *Periphyseon*, this passage presents us with two points of interest. First, he seems to be thinking in Pauline categories with regard to what "animal" and "spiritual" mean. The two elements are not so much "spiritual" and "corporeal" as "spiritual" and "carnal." The depiction of man as "animal" in this passage is not so much concerned with "biological" man as with "bestial" man. The contradiction in fallen humanity is not between *corporeal* man and *spiritual* man; rather, it is between *carnal* man and *spiritual* man. Second, "spiritual" in this context means living in obedience to God's Law, an idea which evokes the Pauline statement that "As many as are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God" (NIV). This meaning, in turn, leads us to two further conclusions. First, the congruity the Scot sees between the nature of man as "spiritual" and obedience to God's Law places that spiritual nature in an *interpersonal* context. God has created humanity in His own image and for relationship with Himself. This relation takes the form of the

---

<sup>8</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, trans. Mary Brennan with an Introduction by Avital Wohlman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 53.

human person living in accord with the reality of his or her own nature as creature; the spiritual man is defined from without by God's design, as expressed in His Law. For humanity to relate to God as other than Creator is to contradict God's identity, to deny who God truly is. Such a stance is to contradict the truth of God not just as *cause*, but as *person*. Second, Eriugena implies that the rejection of that obedience by which man is made spiritual makes man bestial.<sup>9</sup> This additional layer of the discussion raises a question: Does man become bestial because he refuses to become spiritual, or does man refuse to become spiritual because he is bestial? By the time Eriugena addresses this question in the *Periphyseon*, his answer is unambiguous. Man is created an animal, but the animal nature, as we have seen, is good. Man as originally created, then, is "biological" but not "bestial." It is in the Fall that man, by refusing the obedience through which he becomes spiritual, becomes bestial. Eriugena puts it this way:

The chief cause of reproach against man is that though he was a spiritual and wise animal when first created in God's image and likeness, he foolishly and irrationally, by going against his Creator's command, drew upon himself likeness to dumb, i.e., brutish animals; and by their motions, which are inappropriate for him, he dishonored the natural dignity of his own nature.<sup>10</sup>

In other words, the act of willful self-definition, which lies at the center of what we call the Fall, amounts to humanity defining itself as merely animal, that is, as only biological. Again, when humanity seeks to be only biological it necessarily becomes bestial. Denial of our destiny as God's Image leaves us no other option than to be beasts. In this scheme, then, the problem is not one of a dualism in which the "evil" animal nature usurps the place of the "good" Divine Image. To say this would be to argue that corporeality is evil, a notion which we have already seen that the Scot rejects, and rightly so. The animal nature is good, as the Image of God is good. It is truer to Scripture and to the Scot's intent to frame it this way: God created man both in His own Image

---

<sup>9</sup> We will develop the relationship between the interpersonal and the moral more fully in chapter 7.

<sup>10</sup> Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 231.

and as an animal. Both of these realities are part of God's original design for humanity and are thus good. The Fall consists in humanity engaging in an act of self-definition in which the animal nature becomes the primary way in which we conceive of ourselves. This leads us to two conclusions: First, we cannot lay blame for that act of self-definition upon the good animal nature, any more than we could blame the good Divine Image. Second, the fact that the animal nature in humanity has, by becoming the primary or sole category for human self-identification, fallen from the biological to the bestial tells us that the animal nature is in some way out of its proper place. These two conclusions lead us to the following thesis: *For Eriugena, the Fall consists of humanity placing the animal nature over-against the divine Image as an act of self-definition in which the whole person, both as animal and as Divine Image is active and for which the whole person is culpable.*

The Fall, then, is not a change in the content of human nature; rather, it is a disordering of that content. Both the animal nature and the Divine Image are true of the whole human person, and each is part of the original creation of humanity according to God's perfect design. This raises a question: Why is the human person created to be such a paradoxical entity? The most obvious answer to this question is that both the animal nature and the Divine Image are integral to the purposes for which God created humanity. Man is created for purposes which demand that he be neither merely animal nor merely the Divine Image, but a coincidence of both. At the same time, however, this does not necessarily mean that the Divine Image and the animal nature serve exactly the same purposes. We can speak of the human paradox without *de facto* conflating the two aspects of the human person into one; indeed, we must do so in order to properly maintain the dynamic simultaneity which Eriugena presents as constitutive of the human person. We need, then, to search for a *taxis* within which the Divine Image and the animal nature coincide and

cooperate while neither losing the distinctiveness of either nor giving place to a dualistic view of the human person. To this end, it is appropriate to explore the significance of each of these two aspects of the human person.

### **The Significance of the Divine Image**

We saw in the previous chapter that Eriugena appropriates the Augustinian idea of the Triune Image, and we went on to develop some implications of this idea. We argued that human personhood, as the Divine—and Triune—Image, includes at least four key concepts. First, human personhood must be understood teleologically. To be a person is to have a purpose. Second, human personhood includes the idea of relation. There are no truly autonomous persons. Third, the human person is unique. No person is interchangeable with any other person. Fourth, the human person, as made in the Image of God, is defined by the God whom it reflects. What contradicts God’s self-disclosed character stands as well in fundamental contradiction to what it means to be a human person. The sum of these four ideas is this: the human being is created as person for the purpose of relation in all the uniqueness of the particular person to other persons in their own uniqueness. Further, this relation must mirror the revealed character of God, who creates beings other than himself and fully affirms their otherness. In sum, the human person is made for loving communion with other persons, a relation in which the uniqueness of each particular person involved is embraced and upheld as both real and good. The human person, then, is not to be affirmed merely as a means to some other end. Instead, the human person, precisely as *person*, is not merely a means but an end in himself. The uniqueness of the particular person is good and valuable because it comes under the “Very Good” of Genesis. God has created human beings as persons, and thus as ends in themselves. We as humans are valuable apart from whatever functional purpose we might serve.

## The Significance of the Animal Nature

Having explored the significance of the Divine Image in the context of the human paradox, we shall now examine the significance of the animal nature in the same context. To say it briefly, in their creation in the Image of God human persons find the basis of their value, while in their creation as animal they find their vocation. It is this idea of vocation that we shall now consider. While it is debatable whether Eriugena explicitly presents a positive account of the significance of the animal nature in humanity, we are not left without means to explore how this idea functions in the Scot's thought. His debt to Maximus the Confessor is significant and unquestioned, and Maximus had more than a little to say about human corporeality. If we examine the notion of humanity as animal through a Maximian lens, it helps us to see how this idea seems to take shape in the Scot's thought. Blowers and Wilken provide us with a concise summary of Maximus' understanding:

The Logos is the supreme divine Mediator, while humanity, the microcosm of the created order, and bearer of the divine image, enjoys the graced vocation of participation in Christ's mediation. . . Christ through his ministry of incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension, has overcome both the natural and the unnatural (postlapsarian) divisions within creation; likewise humanity shares in his ministry of cosmic reconciliation. . . through the multifaceted disciplines of ascetic practice (πραξις), contemplation (θεωρια), and elevated mystical insight (θεωλογια).<sup>11</sup>

As we already have seen, Eriugena echoes Maximus' radically Christocentric emphasis.

Humanity does play a mediating role in Eriugena just as in Maximus. At the same time, both thinkers also see the mediating ministry of humanity as a second moment, one that is a corollary of the mediating ministry of Christ. This is necessarily so because of the Fall. Maximus speaks to the mediating ministry of humanity, the consequences of the Fall, and its restoration through Christ in *Difficulty 41*, which Louth summarizes as follows:

---

<sup>11</sup> Paul M. Blower and Robert Louis Wilken, eds., *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: Selected Writings from Maximus the Confessor* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 21.

After introducing the theme of the division of being, he shows how the human person has been created to hold together these divisions of being, which are all reflected in the human constitution. The human person is therefore to be regarded as a microcosm and bond of creation, mediating between all the divisions. But because of the Fall, the human person can no longer fulfill this function. Therefore, in the Incarnation, God has recapitulated the cosmic role of human beings and restored them to their primordial function.<sup>12</sup>

In other words, the mediating ministry for which God has created humanity is not possible for fallen human beings. Because of Christ's birth as the Second Adam, humanity can be restored in such a way that it will serve the purpose for which it was made. Human beings, through union with Christ, share in His ministry. It is an indubitable axiom of Christian orthodoxy that, in Jesus Christ, the God who created the cosmos has united createdness to himself. The Incarnation is the first moment in which creation is drawn into union with God, but those human beings who are united to Christ will be instruments through which God will extend Christ's ministry to all of creation. Because of Christ, human beings can be the "bond of creation" as they are restored through union with Him. In sum, what Maximus (and Eriugena) present to us is a synthetic and symbiotic understanding of the relationship between recapitulation and *imitatio Christi*. Virtue is not for its own sake; it is the expression of the grace through which human beings are transformed into the likeness of Christ and the means by which Christ's mediation is extended to all of creation. At the same time, the Incarnation is a completed event, but its ramifications are extended throughout the created world through the instrumentality of human beings who live as Christ lived. In Christ, the Word has become flesh; through the Body of Christ, the Word continues to become flesh.

In sum, then, humanity has been created both as Divine Image and as animal (i.e. corporeal) for the purpose of uniting creation to God. In the Incarnation, creation is united to

---

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 156.

God. Human persons, as they are united to Christ, share in this unitive ministry. Because it is God's intention to unite all of creation to Himself, both corporeal and incorporeal, humanity as his chosen instrument for this must necessarily be corporeal as well as spiritual. The animal nature is a necessary facet of the human person as made for this mediating ministry. This is why it is that in their creation in the Image of God human persons find the basis of their value, while in their creation as animal they find their vocation.

This formulation invites further explanation. The human person qua divine image is end in himself in that God does not need further reason to proffer fellowship than that humanity is made in His own image; every human is a person, and thus created for the express purpose of fellowship. (This follows from the Trinitarian conception of person which we have already set forth, in which purpose, uniqueness, and relationality are constitutive of the person.) Humanity is means in that God has created the human person for more than man himself. The creation of humanity is creation for service. The animal nature is the interface by which divine love is mediated through man to the created world, of which man is organically a part. Eriugena's conception of humanity as end prevents the reduction of human value by setting a personal morality over against a mechanistic (and thus ultimately pragmatic) one. On the other hand, the Scot's conception of humanity as means stands against the tendency toward egoism and narcissism which lies at the heart of human sinfulness. Man is never man for himself alone; he is man for God (wherein lies his worth) and for creation (wherein lies his vocation). The restoration of the original harmony between these two purposes is central to Eriugena's understanding of how Christ's victory over sin and death effects the restoration of the human person.

## Summary and Implications

In this chapter we have observed the following: First, Eriugena conceives of the human person as a dynamic integration—created as a whole as an animal and at the same time created as a whole in the Image of God. Second, we have observed that Eriugena sees a distinction between what we have called “biological” man and “bestial” man, which informs how he reflects upon the difference between the action of the animal nature before and after the Fall. Third, we have seen that Eriugena sees the animal nature as part of the original creation of humanity, and thus as originally good. Fourth, we have seen that Eriugena resists any impulse toward compartmentalization of the person; the human person is a *Gestalt*. Fifth, we have seen that Eriugena locates the crux of morality in the definition of the human person’s particular identity. Either the human person is defined from without by God or from within, which can only mean denial of God as Creator and norm. Self-definition can never be definition of oneself as made in God’s Image; to conceive of oneself as made in God’s Image is to accept definition from without. Conversely, when human beings insist upon self-definition, the Divine Image cannot serve as the content of such a conception, so only the bestial remains to serve as possible content for human self-definition. Sixth, we have observed that the animal nature is neither more nor less culpable than the Divine Image for the act of self-definition which Eriugena locates at the core of the Fall. The self-definition which lies at the heart of the Fall is an action of the whole person, for which the whole person is culpable. The Fall, then, is not a change in the makeup of the person; rather, it is a disordering of that makeup, one in which the human person insists upon self-definition and thus becomes bestial because self-definition can culminate in no other way. Seventh, we have seen that the human person as made in the Divine Image is made for the purpose of Trinitarian relationship, in which context the ideas of purpose, uniqueness, and

relationality are constitutive of the person. Thus, human beings as persons (and thus made for Trinitarian relationship) are to be affirmed as valuable, if for no other reason than that they are *persons*. Eighth, we have reflected upon the significance of the animal nature in humanity as the means by which corporeal creation is drawn into union with God, which is humanity's ultimate vocation.

We ought at this point to draw one further implication from what we have already observed: the human person as dynamic simultaneity remains so in the fallen state. The disordering of the human person does not erase the creation of humanity in the Divine Image because that creation is not a *property* of human nature, rather; it is a *destiny*. Though we humans can deny and/or reject the purpose for which we have been made, we can never alter the fact that we have been made for eternal fellowship with God. At the same time, we persist as embodied beings, biological man become bestial in our fallenness. The vocation that underlies our creation as embodied beings also persists, even while the disordered animal nature (the "bestial") seems to contradict that vocation. The human paradox, then, has this significance for us as fallen human beings: each of us has been made in the Divine Image, i.e. made for fellowship with God. At the same time, we have been made animals, in order that we might be the instruments through which God unites all of creation to Himself. The disordering of the human person does not erase this simultaneity in the constitution of the human being. As fallen human beings, therefore, each human being is *at the same time made in the image of God and a beast*. The paradox of human nature has thus become a contradiction. To Eriugena, the resolution of that contradiction can only be an eschatological one. Through the proleptical presence of the eschaton in the believer through union with Christ, the contradiction is brought to light and begins to be transformed through the process of sanctification. Nevertheless, the eschatological

nature of that resolution means that the human paradox in the life of the believer takes the form of man as at the same time made in the Divine Image, made as biological, and become bestial.

This complexity brings us full circle: we as human beings are in a sense paradoxical.

Awareness of this truth might at first blush seem to be less satisfying than would be a simpler account of the human person, but where our acceptance of this ambiguity makes our self-understanding less full, it at the same time makes that understanding more honest. In examining what we might call Eriugena's epistemology of the human person, this fundamental honesty is integral to his project. The Scot is just as concerned with what cannot be said about the human person as he is with what can be said. When revelation has spoken and what cannot be said has been stripped away, the little that remains can serve as a surer (if more modest) basis from which to reflect upon the nature and significance of human personhood. The reality of our creation in the Divine Image stands against our impulses toward self-definition, self-reduction, and despair. We cannot be either our own gods or mere beasts because we have been made in God's Image. At the same time, our creation as animal stands against our apathy and our denial of our vocation because we have been made precisely for that vocation. Our creation as animal also stands against our impulse toward hubris because we as fallen human beings can only be bestial apart from the restoring work of Christ. Each of these considerations must inform our reflection upon the human person. None of these considerations may fairly—or, we might add, safely—be set aside. This dynamic and complex simultaneity, then, impels us to confront, examine, and humbly embrace the fundamental ambiguity which lies at the heart of our identity as human persons.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **ENGAGING THE KNOWER: SELF-AWARENESS AND PERSONHOOD AS MYSTERY**

Our concern in chapters 3 through 6 is to deal with Eriugena's epistemology of the human person. This chapter is concerned with the knower himself. What can be known about the one who knows? This question is one that we cannot lightly set aside; that it is problematic to speak of the act of knowing in a way that is divorced from the knower is immediately apparent once the question has been broached. It is appropriate, therefore, to consider what can be known about the knowing person and, as befits the concerns of this study, to consider the Scot's reflection upon our question. As we shall see, he does have something particular and substantive to say.

We observed at the conclusion of the previous chapter that Eriugena is just as concerned with what cannot be said concerning the human person as with what can be said. We also argued that this principle is central to the Scot's project. The rigor with which Eriugena seeks, on the one hand, to set forth the available data and, on the other, to point out and respect the unknowable guides his project at every turn. Only by clearly establishing both what is known and what is unknowable can his project as a speculative thinker be a useful one. In light of what is known and with proper respect for what is unknowable, the speculative thinker can seek to clarify provisionally what is unknown but not necessarily unknowable. To see that Eriugena believes that this is both true and applicable to the human person, we need only to listen as He argues at one point:

If affirmations and negations about the Divine Essence are compatible because It surpasses everything made by it and of which It is the Cause, who may not perceive

that negations and affirmations are harmoniously united in reference to Its image and likeness, which is in man.<sup>1</sup>

This idea serves as a useful point of departure for this part of our study. In this chapter we will explore a key area in which the Scot brings together “negations and affirmations” concerning the human person: his conception of self-awareness and its limits. As we have already seen, Eriugena’s way of speaking about the human person is fundamentally dialectical. True to form, he employs this same methodology to explore the question of self-awareness. He sets parameters on the basis of his sources, rules out what contradicts those sources, and then seeks to articulate what can still be said within the parameters he has established. This methodology is of particular importance to our study at this point because in this chapter we will show that Eriugena’s conception of self-awareness represents a synthesis of ideas from three of his most important sources: Augustine, Maximus, and Gregory of Nyssa. Moran observes that

Eriugena develops his theory of the soul and its self-knowledge based on Augustine’s concepts, but with much more emphasis on the *negative* nature of the human soul and its powers of knowing. This he took from Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus, especially the idea that the soul cannot form an adequate concept of itself or define its own existence. The soul for Eriugena, following Maximus, does not know *what* it is; it merely knows *that* it is.<sup>2</sup>

(Of course, we might note that where Maximus and Gregory are, the Pseudo-Denis is seldom far away, and indeed, the Scot’s reflection on this topic does have a somewhat Dionysian flavor. Even if the Areopagite is not directly mentioned, the Scot’s fascination with “negations and affirmations” echoes the Dionysian vocabulary and method.) To this end, we will examine the ideas the Scot appropriates from each of these three thinkers, along with how each thinker’s contribution emerges in Eriugena’s own words. In this phase of our study, we will also seek to

---

<sup>1</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, trans. Myra Uhlfelder, with summaries by Jean A. Potter (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976), 227.

<sup>2</sup> Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena: A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 190.

draw implications from each of these three ideas for our project. Having done this, we will then present the synthesis at which Eriugena arrives, and seek to draw some implications from that synthesis in connection with what we have already seen in previous chapters.

### **The Patristics as a Corrective to Secularized Readings of Eriugena**

Before we begin our study proper, we need to pause here in order to make an important point. In this chapter it is our project to deal with the Scot's conception of self-awareness. This question has been explored at some length by, among others, Dermot Moran, who engages the question primarily in terms of Eriugena's conception of the liberal arts. While this approach is not without some validity, Moran's execution is problematic. Although Moran acknowledges what he views as the move toward a synthesis of philosophy and theology in Eriugena, he persistently reads Eriugena as a philosopher (with little weight given to the pervasive appearance of theological themes in the Scot's thought), and in doing so he fails to properly consider the weight which Catholic tradition carries in the outworking of the Scot's project.<sup>3</sup> Moran's tendency is to treat Eriugena's employment of theology as merely a way to resolve philosophical difficulties, i.e. as a sort of evasion. The problem with this is that the Scot does not merely cry "mystery" whenever a problem arises. On the contrary, Eriugena seems to be genuinely endeavoring to develop the philosophical implications of Nicene and Chalcedonian categories using the vocabulary he has inherited from his sources. It is, therefore, our purpose in this chapter to emphasize the *theological* and *patristic* character of the Scot's reflection on the

---

<sup>3</sup> I believe that the tendency to characterize the Scot as attempting a "synthesis" is a perennial problem in Eriugena studies, because the concept of synthesis often means a coming together of two different things in a third thing that is neither of its predecessors. The Scot's project would be better described in terms of *translating* the truths of Christian dogma into the vocabulary of philosophy. This is a different endeavor from what is often envisioned when the term "synthesis" is used.

question of self-awareness, which will necessarily carry us in a somewhat different direction from that already taken by Moran.

We will now look at a couple of remarkable examples that help to demonstrate the problem in Moran's approach. We have already noted (in chapter 2) that the Scot is convinced that the concept of the Triune Image is important, but at the same time seems somewhat unsure what to make of it. In the *Periphyseon* he develops, as we saw, several triads that he presents as possibly explaining the significance of the Triune Image. In the course of one such excursus Moran finds what he believes to be important support for his view of the Scot. Moran tells us that in the course of this dialogue, "Eriugena [asks] whether this trinity of mind, skill, and arts forms itself or is itself formed by another higher being. The answer is important."<sup>4</sup> The answer to the question is indeed important but, as we shall see, not in the way Moran argues that it is. In response to the Teacher's question, the Student says,:

If the Catholic faith did not persuade me that there is a Higher Nature by which this trinity is established, formed, and understood, and if truth did not confirm the teaching, perhaps I would not be rash in answering that it is formed by itself or surely that it is an archetypal form. But since there is a Higher Nature from which all things are formed and begin to be formed, and turning to which all things that are or can be turned toward it are formed, I do not doubt that the trinity of mind is formed by that same nature.<sup>5</sup>

Moran comments on the Student's answer: "Eriugena is saying here that he would accept that the human mind forms itself—if we take no account of the reference to God—that is, that the human mind by coming to know itself, creates itself."<sup>6</sup> Moran's commentary on the Student's answer is that it means exactly the opposite of what the Student says. He simply ignores the caveats, "If the Catholic faith did not persuade me," and "if truth did not confirm the

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>5</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 239.

<sup>6</sup> Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 207.

teaching,” as well as the Student’s clear response that he believes the trinity of mind, skill, and discipline to be formed by God. Moran’s argument fails precisely on the grounds that it “takes no account of the reference to God.” This methodology is exactly what is wrong with Moran’s project. Nor is this the only problem; Moran ignores “the Catholic faith,” which, as we have already seen, serves as an important source of parameters within which the Scot strives to conduct his inquiry. Moran seems to regard not only Eriugena but the Catholic tradition as a whole as useful only insofar as it echoes external philosophical influences—the nature of Eriugena’s project as theology is simply glossed over. “The answer is important,” indeed, but not in the way that Moran claims.

We might consider the Student’s response this way: there are three possible responses to the Teacher’s question. Either, (a) there is no trinity of mind, skill and discipline (and possibly by extension, no reality in any of the three, meaning no self) or, (b) the mental trinity is created by God (the Student’s actual answer), or (c) the mental trinity is self-creating. No reader of *De civitas dei* would be able to accept the first possibility, as Augustine has already made the argument that the thinker cannot be deceived concerning his own existence (more on this shortly) so the Student does not even mention it. The choice between the other two possibilities, however, depends on the thinker’s assumptions. In a sense, what the Student does is frame in a basic way the possibility of thinking about the self from an egocentric perspective vs. thinking from a heterocentric one. By “taking no account of the reference to God,” Moran rejects the Student’s actual answer and supplies its opposite, which better suits his own project.

Nor is this the end of the problem; Moran goes on developing his line of reasoning, soon concluding that, for Eriugena, “the mind grasps . . . its own infinite nature in a knowing which is

essentially negative in kind.”<sup>7</sup> Moran then goes on to comment that, “Eriugena cannot resolve this problematic play of immanence and transcendence without importing the tradition of negative theology.”<sup>8</sup> If, however, we consider another passage from the *Periphyseon*, (one within a few pages of the Student’s answer, in fact) we can see that Moran’s reading is problematic on this score as well. In this passage we see that

as Divine Essence is infinite, so human substance made in Its image is bounded by no definite limit. From what is understood in reference to it, moreover, namely times, places, differentiae, properties, quantities, qualities, relations, conditions (*habitudines*), positions, actions, receptions of action (*passiones*), it is merely understood to have being, but what it is is not at all understood.<sup>9</sup>

I would submit that the emphasis here is not on the Divine infinity but on the ambiguity that prevents conclusive circumscription of human nature. The Scot does not say that human substance (at times the Scot’s synonym for *person*, but our argument does not require this to be so in this case) is unlimited but that it is “bounded by no definite limit” (*nullo certo fine terminatur*).<sup>10</sup> The crucial word here is “definite” (*certo*). In other words, the Scot is not saying that human substance is unbounded; rather, he is simply saying that the boundary cannot be precisely drawn. This is borne out in his reference to “places” (situation of a finite thing in space) and “quantities” (which necessarily cannot be infinite by definition). Again, the inference is not that the human substance transcends quantity (i.e., is infinite) but that it is impossible for human knowledge to quantify it *precisely*. Although the answer to this question is not crucial to a proper understanding of this point, it is not inappropriate to ask whether this ambiguity might not be

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 244.

<sup>10</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon, Liber IV*, ed. Édouard A. Jeuneau, with the assistance of Mark A. Zier, trans. John J. O’Meara and I. P. Sheldon-Williams, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae 13* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1995), 74.

better seen as a symptom of the erosion of the boundary between self and other which results from the Fall. (This erosion will be a central theme in chapter 7.)

Moran's conception of the human mind as infinite raises other problems as well. Otten discusses at some length Eriugena's rigorous employment of the *Via Supereminetiae*, in which God is thought of as "more than" the metaphors which human language employs in the attempt to describe Him.<sup>11</sup> Although this conception need not exclude the idea of the Divine mystery as grounded in transcendence, it seems by the very form of the Scot's language (repeated and broad application of the construction *plus quam*) to imply a conception of that mystery in terms of human thought as the inability of a finite mind to circumscribe the infinity of God. As an indication of the validity of this reading, we can at least say for sure that the language of infinity emerges as the primary category in Nicholas of Cusa's *De docta ignorantia*, a work certainly and profoundly influenced by Eriugena's thought.

Further, and this may be the most important consideration of all, Moran's reading simply fails to explain the Scot's conception of the *Visio Dei* as an infinite succession of finite theophanies (which will be an important focus of our study in chapter 9). For now, a few observations from Carabine should serve to make our point. First, she tells us that: "According to Eriugena, even in the return of all diversity to the unity of God, the quest for God will be endless, for although God is 'found' in theophany to a certain extent, God is not found as to what God is in God's self."<sup>12</sup> She goes on to summarize the point this way: "The unceasing and endless activity of the beatific life is simply seeking God."<sup>13</sup> This eternal seeking does not make sense if we accept Moran's view; if the human mind is infinite, there would seem to be no need for the

---

<sup>11</sup> Willemein Otten, *The Anthropology of Johannes Scottus Eriugena* (Leiden, the Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1991), 52ff.

<sup>12</sup> Deirdre Carabine, *John Scottus Eriugena* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 103.

sort of succession of theophanies Eriugena describes. Merely to recognize the infinity of the human mind would open the way to infinite and absolute illumination. This, however, is not at all what the Scot describes. If Moran is right, why would Eriugena *not* take this sort of course? Carabine offers us a clue in her observation that

Eriugena's dependence on the theme of "eternal discovery" meant that he did not need to envision a "solution" to the problem of knowledge of or unity with God. Therefore, even though many exponents of the negative way seek an alternative path to the unknowable through mystical union, Eriugena did not. His journey to the transcendent results in diversity within unity.<sup>14</sup>

Moran does seem to present the Scot as envisioning a sort of "solution" to this problem. Moran argues that Eriugena in some measure solves the problem of self-knowledge by the statement that, "Man is a certain intellectual idea eternally made in the Divine Mind."<sup>15</sup> For Moran, the Scot sees human self-knowledge as consisting in the awareness that the human mind and the Divine are actually one.<sup>16</sup> As we will clearly show in chapter 8, this rather monistic reading simply does not account for the perichoretic character of the Scot's eschatology. In any case, the Scot's description of humanity as a Divine idea is certainly open to different interpretations than the one Moran offers. It would probably be truer to the Scot's intent to see this statement as a remark on how little can actually be said concretely about what human nature is. In the Scot's view, everything that exists can equally be described as such a Divine idea, or at least as the material manifestation of one. In light of what we have just seen, Moran's account of the Scot's conception of self-awareness can hardly be taken as the final word on this topic.

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>15</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 240.

<sup>16</sup> Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 210.

Nevertheless, having taken into account these problems in Moran's account, we will make use of his insights insofar as they are helpful to our particular line of inquiry.

### **The Influence of Augustine**

In the wake of Brian Stock's writing on Eriugena,<sup>17</sup> as well as that of Moran,<sup>18</sup> and Henry Bett,<sup>19</sup> it is no secret that Descartes was neither the first nor even the second to arrive at the conclusion that a thinker cannot be deceived in believing in his own existence. This idea emerges in Eriugena, who in turn found it in the writings of Augustine. The importance of Augustine's psychology to the Scot's development can be neither doubted nor underestimated. The *Confessions* are generally considered to be the first emergence of autobiography as we now understand the genre; the Doctor of Hippo's use of first-person narrative constitutes a revolution in literature. Similarly, his propensity for self-examination represents, it might be argued, the initial emergence of what we might call a subjective phenomenology. As we shall see in later chapters, this phenomenological emphasis does indeed leave its mark on Eriugena, and this same emphasis is one important reason why the Scot is a useful resource for beginning to integrate the phenomenological account of human personhood set forth by certain twentieth-century Anti-Cartesians (Buber, Macmurray, and Marcel) with the metaphysical account of personhood set forth by the Trinitarian theologians of that same century (most especially Zizioulas). This being said, at this point we are concerned with a somewhat different aspect of Eriugena's debt to Augustine: the argument that a thinker cannot be deceived in believing in his own existence. Moran observes that, "In the *cogito*, Augustine had found an argument to overcome skepticism,

---

<sup>17</sup> Brian Stock, "Intellego me esse: Eriugena's *cogito*," in *Jean Scot Erigene et l'histoire de la philosophie: Actes du II Colloque international Jean Scot Erigene*, ed. René Roques, ed. (Paris: CNRS, 1977), 327–36.

<sup>18</sup> Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, xi.

<sup>19</sup> Henry Bett, *Johannes Scotus Eriugena: A Study in Mediaeval Philosophy* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), 138.

when he discovered that even when I am doubting, and even doubting that I am doubting, I cannot deny that I *am*.”<sup>20</sup> The particular dictum with which we are concerned is found in a section of *The City of God*, which is, interestingly enough, concerned with how the Triune Image manifests itself in humanity. Augustine says therein,

Without any delusive representation images or phantasms, I am most certain that I am, and that I know and delight in this. In respect of these truths, I am not at all afraid of the arguments of the Academicians, who say, What if you are deceived? For if I am deceived, I am. For he who is not, cannot be deceived; and if I am deceived, by this same token I am. And since I am if I am deceived, how am I deceived in believing that I am? for it is certain that I am if I am deceived.<sup>21</sup>

While Augustine does not present this idea with an elegantly minimal maxim like *Cogito ergo sum*, the meat of the *Cogito* is present: thought (specifically doubt in Augustine’s case) as the basis of sure knowledge that the thinker does exist. Augustine does not, of course, seek to develop a philosophical system on the basis of this observation—as does Descartes—but the idea is present. Eriugena follows Augustine in this way; he sees the truth of the argument but does not attempt to ground his epistemology on it. This does not mean, however, that the Scot sees no further usefulness in this idea. On the contrary, his use of the argument is broader and more integrated than that of Augustine, but also more cautious than that of Descartes. For Augustine the use of this argument for existence seems to be merely a simple way to refute radical skepticism. For Descartes this idea serves as the foundation of his entire epistemology. For Eriugena, it serves as one parameter among several in his dialectical representation of the human person. The Eriugenian dictum which has received the most attention in this context is this one: “When I say, 'I understand that I have being,' don't I, by the single verb 'understand,' signify these three things? I point out that I have being, that I can understand that I have being, and that I

---

<sup>20</sup> Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 187.

<sup>21</sup> Augustine of Hippo. *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1st Series, vol. 2 of *The City of God*, ed. Philip

do understand that I have being.”<sup>22</sup> Stock’s article in particular focuses on the significance of this passage, but the Scot presents this idea elsewhere in greater detail. Later in the *Periphyseon* he says,

I know that I have being, but the knowledge of myself is not prior to me because I am the same as the knowledge by which I know myself. And if I did not know that I have being, I would not be unaware of not knowing it. Hence, whether or not I know that I have being, I shall not lack knowledge, since I can still have knowledge of my ignorance. And if everything which can know that it cannot know itself cannot be unaware of its being—for if it had no being at all, it would not know that it did not know itself—the conclusion is that everything which knows that it has being or which knows that it does not know that it has being, actually has being. Whoever is buried in such ignorance that he does not know that he has being and does not know perceive his ignorance, I should call not a man at all, or else wholly extinct.<sup>23</sup>

Two things within this passage are immediately observable and germane to our present discussion. First, we can see that Eriugena’s argument here more clearly echoes that of Augustine than does the first passage we mentioned. Specifically, the role of doubt as the basis of sure knowledge is clearly present in both thinkers. Doubt (presented implicitly in these words of Eriugena’s as the binary possibility of either knowledge or ignorance) presupposes existence: only one who exists can doubt, hence it is self-contradictory to doubt one’s own existence. Second, and more significant for our discussion, the Scot argues that the inability to recognize one’s own existence means that such a being is “not a man at all.” In other words, awareness of one’s own existence is a necessary element of *personhood*. As we shall see in chapters 5 and 6, the Scot believes that the interpretive act is constitutive of personhood. Persons do not merely experience stimuli; they ascribe *significance* to those stimuli. This ascription of significance presupposes a certain capacity to differentiate self from other, which in turn presupposes at least

---

Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 220.

<sup>22</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 62.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

an awareness of one's own existence. In order for there to be another, there must be an "I" from which that other is distinguishable. At present, however, suffice it to say that the human person, as a necessary part of being *human* (which entails personhood), is aware that he or she exists. As we shall see, this principle becomes an important element of the synthesis through which Eriugena presents his conception of self-awareness, which in turn informs his broader epistemology of the human person.

### **The Influence of Gregory of Nyssa**

The second key element in Eriugena's synthesis comes from Gregory of Nyssa, whom the Scot discovered through the works of Maximus and whose *De opificio hominis* (which the Scot calls *De Imagine*) he later translated into Latin. This little treatise of Gregory's, for all its brevity, contains several ideas which later emerge in Eriugena's writings. The idea with which we are concerned at the moment comes from this passage:

The image is properly an image so long as it fails in none of those attributes which we perceive in the archetype; but where it falls from its resemblance to the prototype it ceases in that respect to be an image; therefore, since one of the attributes we contemplate in the Divine nature is incomprehensibility of essence, it is clearly necessary that in this point the image should be able to show its imitation of the archetype. For if, while the archetype transcends comprehension, the nature of the image were comprehended, the contrary nature of the attributes we behold in them would prove the defect of the image; but since the nature of our mind, which is in the likeness of the Creator, evades our knowledge, it has an accurate resemblance to the superior nature, figuring by its own unknowableness the incomprehensible Nature.<sup>24</sup>

To express it succinctly, since (1) God is mystery and (2) humanity is made in God's image, it must be the case that humanity partakes of mystery as a part of its creation in God's image. To be a human person, then, is to be a mystery. Moran observes that, "Eriugena always

---

<sup>24</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man.*, vol. 5 of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 2nd Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 396.

maintains that only the divine mind has true knowledge of the human mind.”<sup>25</sup> This insight has one important implication: human persons never truly “know” other persons in any immediate way. Persons may be *encountered*, but not in such a way that the mystery that lies at the core of their being as persons can ever be fully or finally penetrated. In a word, surprise (or to put it another way, *wonder*) is part of what makes human beings persons, and is a necessary element of all truly personal human relations. We might also add that this fundamental incomprehensibility of the person, if taken seriously, operates at the level of practice as a safeguard of the otherness (and the uniqueness mentioned in chapter 2) that is constitutive of personhood. This conception of the Divine Image as mystery emerges in the *Periphyseon*, where he introduces a quotation from the passage we have just examined with these words:

There are two principal aspects under which we recognise the creation of the human soul in the image of God: first, in that, as God is present throughout all the things that are and can be comprehended by none of them, so the soul permeates the whole frame of her body but cannot be bounded by it. Secondly, in that as of God only being can be predicated, but in no way can it be said of Him what He is, so the human soul is only understood to be, but what she is neither herself nor any other creature understands. Thus . . . Gregory in the Eleventh Chapter of the . . . *Treatise on the Image*, drawing a distinction between the bodily senses and the nature of the mind, in treating of the mind says that it is incomprehensible . . .<sup>26</sup>

For Eriugena, then, this principle has a further implication: not only is the human person a mystery, but more specifically, the human person—by virtue of being a *person*—cannot even know *himself*. Although Moran argues, as we have already seen, that a kind of self-knowledge is possible, he says clearly that, “Eriugena does not see the mind knowing itself in some form of private introspection.”<sup>27</sup> We might observe at this point that this insight does a great deal to

---

<sup>25</sup> Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 206.

<sup>26</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon, Liber IV*, ed. Édouard A. Jeuneau, with the assistance of Mark A. Zier, trans. John J. O’Meara and I. P. Sheldon-Williams, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae 13* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1995), 113.

<sup>27</sup> Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 210.

illuminate Martin Buber's lament: "How is a being to collect itself as long as the mania of his detached I-hood chases it ceaselessly around an empty circle?"<sup>28</sup> Buber later clarifies this by saying that in seeking to know the self, "the confrontation with the self comes into being, and this cannot be relation, presence, the current of reciprocity, but only self-contradiction."<sup>29</sup> Navel-gazing, then, is more than distraction or sloth; it is in fact more akin to self-mutilation. Self-exploration becomes self-objectification, which in turn becomes self-dissection. In this context, the conviction that the self is fundamentally unknowable is a salutary protection from introspection's fruitless quest for a final answer to the question, "Who am I?" For each of us as human persons, our uniqueness is something axiomatic and not reducible to or fully explicable in particulars. (If the reader will indulge a moment of poetry, we might say that no word so properly and fully encompasses the human person in his totality as his name, which is not a description but is rather a symbol by which we distinguish this uniquely mysterious person from others in their uniqueness and mystery. A person's name does not finally speak on the level of properties but on that of quiddity.)

### **The Influence of Maximus**

The third element in Eriugena's conception of self-awareness is a turn of phrase he appropriated from Maximus the Confessor, whose works Eriugena translated after completing his translation of the pseudo-Denis. O'Meara tells us that: "There were some important philosophical themes . . . which Eriugena got from Maximus: the distinction, for example, between *quia est* and *quid est*—we know *that God is*, but not *what He is*."<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1950), 108.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>30</sup> John J. O'Meara, *Eriugena* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 73.

The epistemological import of this concept is that knowledge of properties is not prior to knowledge of existence. In this view Eriugena differs significantly from Descartes, who seems to place experience of properties (sense data) prior to awareness of existence. In other words, the Cartesian account would tend to say that, in order to know *that* something exists, it is necessary to know *about* that thing, to know in some sense *what* it is. Apart from that knowledge of what a thing is, a Cartesian epistemology leaves open the possibility that the thing in question is merely an illusion. Eriugena, on the other hand, takes his cue from Maximus in arguing that knowledge of a thing's existence does not require or presuppose knowledge of what that thing is. What Eriugena appropriates in this context, however, is the formal vocabulary for his final synthesis of Augustine, Gregory, and Maximus.

That Eriugena's intention is to present such an integration of these thinkers is suggested by O'Meara's observation that "Eriugena believed that he was making a synthesis of the teaching of Pseudo-Dionysius with the doctrines of Augustine."<sup>31</sup> Eriugena, then, thought of himself as bringing together Augustine and the pseudo-Denis. We need to expand on O'Meara's statement, however. Eriugena's debt to Maximus is not merely as a helpful commentator on Denis, although Eriugena certainly does benefit from Maximus in that way. Similarly, the Scot does not think of Gregory of Nyssa merely as a precursor to Denis. The writings of the pseudo-Areopagite are of course important as a major influence upon the development of Eriugena's thought. At the same time, however, they serve as a sort of gateway through which he discovers other thinkers who are also significant influences in their own right. Eriugena's interaction with the Dionysian corpus led to his discovery of Maximus, whose writings he went on to translate. His reading of Maximus in turn led to his discovery of Gregory of Nyssa.

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 56.

By bringing together (1) the Augustinian argument for knowledge of one's own existence with (2) Gregory's conception of the Divine Image as mystery and (3) couching these ideas in the form of a neo-Maximian trope, we find that the Scot articulates the following conception of self-awareness: "The human mind both knows itself and does not know itself. It knows that it is, but it does not know what it is. This is the greatest source... of our teaching that God's image is in man."<sup>32</sup> We can see clearly here how the Scot has brought together the three elements we have already examined. The Augustinian conviction that the thinker surely knows his own existence emerges in Eriugena's confident statement that the mind "knows that it is." At the same time we see Gregory's influence in Eriugena's admission that the mind "does not know what it is," and in his argument that the fundamental mystery of the human person constitutes evidence that we have been made in the Divine Image. Finally, the form of this statement is clearly Maximian. As a way to encompass and articulate—elegantly, we might add—the duality of (1) sure knowledge of one's own existence and (2) the fundamental mystery of the human person, Eriugena appropriates a turn of phrase from Maximus and tells us that "the human mind . . . knows that it is, but it does not know what it is."

Although this is a singularly clear and concise expression of Eriugena's synthesis, this conception of self-awareness does emerge elsewhere. In Book I of the *Periphyseon* Eriugena tells us: "There is no nature, whether rational or intellectual, which is unaware of its being, even though it does not know what it is."<sup>33</sup> It might be observed that at this stage the Scot makes no mention of the Divine Image, and that we cannot be sure that he is thinking of Gregory in this instance. This objection, however, does nothing to refute what we have already said for the following reasons. First, Eriugena had already completed his translation of Gregory by the time

---

<sup>32</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 243.

he began writing the *Periphyseon*. Second, if Gregory is not operating at an implicit level in this dictum, it begs the question why Eriugena is motivated to connect the thinker's awareness of his own existence with the *quia est/quid est* of Maximus in the context of the human mind. Third, even if the first two reasons are set aside, the fact is that Eriugena does go on to articulate the conception we have already seen, which implies that this dictum ought at very least to be seen as a preliminary step toward the Scot's final synthesis.

At another place in the *Periphyseon*, Eriugena observes that

we may understand that the whole human soul has been made in God's image....  
Second, because just as it is predicated of God only that He is without any definition of what He is, so the human soul is merely understood as having being, but neither it nor any other creature understands what it is.<sup>34</sup>

Here, although the Scot's language does not as clearly echo the Maximian trope we have already mentioned, the *quia est/quid est* distinction operates implicitly in the way the thinker's knowledge of his own existence is juxtaposed with the ideas of mystery and the Divine Image. The Maximian concept informs the way the Scot relates these ideas, even if he does not reiterate it explicitly. We ought to note as well that this dictum follows the one in which Eriugena employs the *quia est/quid est* distinction, so it is to be expected that he would not repeat his earlier words verbatim; in order to refer the reader to what he has already said, repeating the substance suffices.

### Summary and Implications

We have already reflected to a certain degree upon the significance of Eriugena's synthesis through the course of this chapter in that we have taken time at various points to consider the significance of the three ideas which come together in that synthesis. In brief, we have noted that

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 261.

the Augustinian argument for knowledge of one's own existence constitutes a refutation of radical skepticism, and that self-awareness is presupposed in the self-differentiation of the human interpreter from that which he or she experiences. We have also noted that Gregory's conception of the Divine Image as mystery moves us toward an understanding of interpersonal encounter that has distinct affinities with the Buber's thought. Finally, we have noted that the Maximian distinction between *quia est* and *quid est* makes existence *practically* prior to sense experience and not merely logically so. It remains, therefore, to draw some implications from the complete synthesis as Eriugena articulates it for us.

First, we see in Eriugena's synthesis that the quest for self-knowledge is a futile one. He tells us: "In [no way] is [human nature] subject to any created intellect or sense, and it does not itself understand what it is."<sup>35</sup> As we have already observed, the nature of human personhood is such that it can neither be dismissed as illusory nor comprehended. The impulse to probe one's own identity is one that can never be satisfactorily indulged. The reality of knowing *that* we are, but are at the same time unable to know *what* we are points us beyond ourselves. Our significance as particular persons cannot be found through introspection, but that significance cannot be ignored in that we can never honestly question *that* we are.

This brings us to our second point. Eriugena's synthesis casts the human impulse toward self-definition in what can only be called a tragicomic light. He tells us that "knowledge and ignorance are present together, inseparably and at all times, in the human soul. It knows that it is a rational and intellectual nature, but it does not know what intellect and reason themselves are."<sup>36</sup> We cannot be mere beasts in that we know our own existence *as knowers*, and thus do know ourselves in some sense, but neither can we be our own gods in that the content of our own

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 243.

identities perpetually eludes us. The human impulse toward self-definition that lies at the heart of sin is not only sinful but simply futile. We cannot define in any meaningful way what we cannot know. Again, this has the effect of moving our focus outside ourselves so that our ultimate meaning is located in something external to us, in the image of which we have been made. We must, then, accept the definition of ourselves that is implicit in our having been made in God's Image, accepting along with that definition the reality that it comes from outside ourselves. We observed in chapter 2 that our having been made in God's Image finds expression in our nature as relational beings; to think of ourselves merely as "individuals" leaves us with an incomplete picture of our own personhood. As we are confronted with the knowledge *that* we are and at the same time with our inability to fathom *what* we are, we see that our creation as human persons includes the reality that neither are we in this most basic sense "autonomous." To put it simply, we do not as persons stand alone; we are constituted by our relation to other persons. At the same time, while we are unique, the exact content of our uniqueness eludes us, so that self-definition in any meaningful way is futile.

Third, personhood as mystery practically safeguards the dignity and the otherness of the person. The fact that each person is a mystery is not a problem to be overcome but a sign that we have been made in the Divine Image. Eriugena tells us that

the human mind is granted knowledge of its being merely to know that it is, but it is not allowed to know in any way what it is. What is more remarkable and splendid to those who consider themselves and their God is that the human mind is praised more for its ignorance than for its knowledge. It is more praiseworthy for the mind not to know what it is than to know that it is; just as negation is more closely and fittingly related to the praise of Divine Nature, and it is wiser to be ignorant of It than to know It; for ignorance of It is true wisdom since It is known better by not knowing. Very evidently, then, the divine likeness is discerned in the human mind by the mere knowledge that it is, but the ignorance about what it is. *Whatness*, if I may use the

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 250.

term, is spoken of negatively in reference to it, and only being is attributed to it affirmatively.<sup>37</sup>

What is most notable in this passage is that Eriugena says it is “praiseworthy” to own our inability to comprehend ourselves. This simply underscores what we have already said, that the mystery of our own personhood is not a shame but an honor. As a sign of our having been created in the Divine Image, the incomprehensibility of the human person is a pointer toward our destiny of fellowship with God. We are made, as we have said in chapter 3, in such a way that our completion as persons comes through fulfillment of our destiny, which is a communion with God in which we are both fully united with the other and fully and uniquely ourselves in a way that mirrors the Triune life. We will develop this idea further in chapter 9, but let it suffice for now to say that our awareness *that* we are, but not *what* we are, moves us to wonder and humility while at the same time offering us assurance that we are precious to God, who has created us in His own Image. We cannot sort out the riddle of our own identities, but we can know that we are unique, that our existence has purpose, and that other human persons share our purpose and are also unique and precious to God.

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 244.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE MIND'S LIMITS: EPISTEMOLOGY, LANGUAGE AND THEOLOGICAL METHOD

In part 2 of this study we are concerned with Eriugena's epistemology of the human person, i.e. his account of what can be known about a human person. We have considered his depiction of the human person as dynamic simultaneity and his conception of self-awareness. In this chapter we will examine his reflection upon epistemology in general. As part of this endeavor, we will consider how the Scot portrays the working of the mind in coming to know, how he envisions the relationship between language and knowing, and how his convictions concerning theological method inform his philosophy of knowledge.

We will examine Eriugena's conception of the mind's workings along two particular lines. As we shall see, his debt to Maximus the Confessor in this area is significant, so we shall look at a particular construct from Maximus which Eriugena appropriates. Having done this, we shall then look at how the Scot integrates this construct into his own thought.

Eriugena understands language and reason as thoroughly interdependent; for this reason, it is only proper that we consider his view of language as an important element of his epistemology. We will examine two important sources with a view to how they inform the Scot's view of language: Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa. In Gregory we find the conviction that language is necessary to reason, while in Augustine we find the suggestion that the usefulness of language is contingent upon what we might call "good-faith communication." We shall also consider the Scot's conception of language as universally human. Finally, we shall consider his presentation of the fundamental problem of language, that language is both inadequate and

genuinely symbolic.

In our consideration of Eriugena's theological method we find further hints of an underlying epistemology. As an overarching category, his understanding of the relationship between faith and reason adds another layer to our discussion. That relationship plays out along several lines with which we shall also deal. First, Eriugena sees both scripture and creation as important sources of knowledge in that they are two differentiated (but not differing in their content) modes of God's self-disclosure. Next, we shall revisit Eriugena's commitment to the *Via Supereminetiae* (which he adopted from the pseudo-Denis). We shall then examine Eriugena's commitment to the fundamental unity of truth as evinced by his concern for what we would today call public discourse. Finally, we shall consider how the Scot distinguishes between the personal act of faith and the content of that faith. Having examined the Scot's epistemology in light of his views regarding the mind's operation, language, and theological method, we shall then try to draw these several threads together in such a way as to present a more nuanced view of Eriugena's epistemology and its value for our own project.

### **Eriugena's Conception of the Mind**

We begin by considering how Eriugena understands the mind. To do this, we first should consider the influence of Maximus the Confessor. That Eriugena is profoundly indebted to Maximus the Confessor needs no further proof. The Scot himself acknowledged his influence, and it is clearly evident in the Scot's writings.<sup>1</sup> This influence extends to the Scot's vision of the soul and its motions, which is clearly appropriated from Maximus. Maximus describes what he calls "the motions of the soul" as follows:

The Fathers, illuminated by grace, teach that the soul has three kinds of motions that

---

<sup>1</sup> We might observe both wryly and truly that, even in the Scot's propensity for language that is convoluted to the point of being tortuous, we can see the Confessor's influence.

converge into one: that of the mind, that of reason, and that of sense. The first is a simple and inexplicable motion, according to which the soul, moved in an unknowable way close to God, knows Him in a transcendent way that has nothing to do with any of the things that exist. The second is motion in accordance with the defining cause of something unknown, according to which, moved naturally, the soul applies its powers of knowing to all the natural reasons of those things that are known only with reference to cause, which are the forms. The third is composite motion, according to which, affected by things outside as by certain symbols of things seen, the soul gains for itself some impression of the meaning of things.<sup>2</sup>

For Maximus, the soul operates with three motions: (1) the motion of the soul about God in unknowing, (2) the motion by which the soul considers the primordial causes, and (3) the motion by which it considers particular things. The Confessor's understanding of the motions of the soul also seems to be reflected in his understanding of the progression from ascetic discipline (*praktike*) to contemplation of the reasons (*logoi*) of things (*physike*) to contemplation of God (*theologia*). At the stage of *praktike*, the soul struggles toward freedom from the distraction of the passions. At that of *physike*, the soul contemplates the underlying order of the things that are. Finally, at the third stage, that of *theologia*, it contemplates God Himself in unknowing.<sup>3</sup>

In Eriugena, we find this scheme replicated almost verbatim. He speaks of the motions of the soul as *intellect*, in which the soul moves about God in unknowing; *reason*, by which the soul considers the primordial causes; and *interior sense*, by which the soul considers particular things. Eriugena describes intellect this way:

The motion of the soul which is purged by action, illumined by knowledge, perfected by the divine word, the motion by which she eternally revolves about the unknown God, and understands that God Himself is beyond both her own nature and that of all things, absolutely distinct from everything which can either be said or understood—and yet which somehow exists—, and denies that He is anything of the things that are or of the things that are not and affirms that all things are predicated of Him not literally but metaphorically, is called  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\sigma$  by the Greeks but by our writers

---

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 100.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

intellectus.<sup>4</sup>

Maximus' influence is immediately apparent in the Scot's concern for *praktike*; through obedience the soul gains increasing freedom from distraction.<sup>5</sup> That being said, we see here that through *praktike*, which for Eriugena is not virtue for its own sake but rather the lived expression of right relationship with God, the soul is prepared for encounter with God in the experience of unknowing. It bears mentioning here that the "un" in "unknowing" is not a privative. The negation in this kind of "unknowing" is not something less than knowing but rather something more, analogous to how we speak of the infinite as being "unlimited." "Intellect" is for the Scot that motion of the soul in which it experiences self-transcendence, as we can see from what he says here about the "intellectual motion:"

When it comes to the question how created nature can ascend beyond itself so as to adhere to the creative Nature, every inquiry of those who study the potentiality of nature fails. For there we see not a reason of nature but the ineffable and incomprehensible excellence of Divine Grace. For in no created substance does there naturally exist the power to surpass the limits of its own nature and attain to Very God in Himself. For this is of grace alone, not of any power of nature.<sup>6</sup>

What is both striking and immediately apparent in this passage is that intellect is not a power of the soul; on the contrary the soul is powerless to lift itself to unknowing. Only God can lift the soul beyond itself. That this will happen is not a given, and when it does happen it is always a gift.<sup>7</sup> That the intellectual motion is a gift from God and not a power of the soul is an important aspect of Eriugena's view of the mind. It both underscores the importance of grace in Eriugena's

---

<sup>4</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon, Liber II*, ed. I. P. Sheldon-Williams, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 9 (Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1972), 109.

<sup>5</sup> The Scot does not seem to share Maximus' commitment to *ascesis* per se, but obedience to God's commands seems to perform the same function in his thought. This makes sense in light of our observations in chapter 3 regarding Eriugena's understanding of "spiritual" as a moral category.

<sup>6</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon, Liber II*, 115.

<sup>7</sup> In this regard Eriugena seems to a certain extent to have anticipated the position of the hesychastic tradition, which also speaks about eliminating distraction so as to be ready if God should choose to reveal Himself to the

thought and sets a fundamental limit beyond which reason cannot go. Reason can proceed only so far before it can only halt and humbly await grace.

Of “reason” itself (or “the rational motion”), Eriugena says this:

The second motion of the soul . . . is that which is contained within the bounds of its nature and defines the Very God as Cause, that is, it knows only this about the God Who is unknown as to what He is, namely, that He is the Cause of all things that are, and that the primordial causes of all things are eternally created by Him and in Him; and it impresses the knowledge of those causes, when it has understood them, upon the soul herself, whose motion it is, as far as her capacity allows. . . not that it understands what they are substantially—for this is beyond every motion of the soul—but it has the general knowledge that they are and that they flow forth by an ineffable process into their effects; and this is the motion which is called by the Greeks *λογος* or *δυναμις*, but by our writers *ratio* or *uirtus*.<sup>8</sup>

Reason, we might say then, is concerned with “reasons.” In the rational motion, the soul considers the primordial causes, and in so doing relates different created things to one another causally. For Eriugena, reason is the integrating dynamic in thought, by which particulars are grouped into categories.

The contrasting motion, by which similar things are differentiated into particulars, the Scot calls “interior sense.” He describes the interior sense in this way:

There remains, then, the third motion, which functions in the particular reasons of particular things, which are created simply, that is, as a whole, in the primordial causes; and which although it takes the beginning of its substantial motion from the fantasies of sensible things which are communicated to it through exterior sense, attains, by the most precise discrimination of all things through their proper reasons, to the most general essences and to the less general genera, then to the species, and to the most specific species, that is, the individuals, countless and unlimited, but limited by the immutable proportions of their nature; and this is the motion which in Greek is called *διανοια* or *ενεργεια*, but in Latin *sensus* or *operatio*—by *sensus* I mean that which is substantial and interior—which similarly proceeds from the intellect through the reason.<sup>9</sup>

---

individual through mystical experience.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 117.

Shortly thereafter, he clarifies the difference between interior sense and reason as follows:

All essences are one in the reason; in sense they are divided into different essences. Therefore reason receives the most unified knowledge of all the essences from the most unified unity of their principles through the descending intellect; but sense separates that unity by means of differences.<sup>10</sup>

The interior sense, then, is the motion of the soul by which things are known as individuals. It is the function by which the soul assigns significance to the data (“fantasies”) conveyed to it by the exterior sense. We can see how Eriugena understands the difference between the two in the following:

By the arts [man] moves the fivefold sense of the body to recognize sensible things with zealous care to understand them. This motion . . . furnishes no little aid to the rational soul in its contemplation of the truth of sensible things, with all falsehood removed and with true and whole knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

Exterior sense is “fivefold” and “of the body.” In other words, the Scot is referring to sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. In the Scot’s scheme, the soul does not experience external things in an immediate way; rather, its experience is mediated through sense data. The data which the exterior sense provides, the interior sense names and catalogues. Reason then sees unifying relationships between particulars; it categorizes. Exterior sense, then, conveys a particular and limited sort of information; it can only speak to bodily realities. Nevertheless, Eriugena does believe that what the exterior sense conveys, it conveys truly, and in this regard he differs significantly from Descartes, who says: “I have learned by experience that these senses sometimes mislead me, and it is prudent never to trust wholly those things which have once

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>11</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, trans. Myra Uhlfelder, with summaries by Jean A. Potter (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976), 219.

deceived us.”<sup>12</sup> To properly understand the significance of Eriugena’s view of exterior sense, however, we must move to another facet of his epistemology: his view of language.

### **Eriugena’s View of Language**

To get a proper sense of Eriugena’s view of language, we must touch upon at least two important sources of his thought: Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine. Gregory of Nyssa speaks (in *De opificio hominis*) of reason and language as, if not exactly synonymous, at least profoundly interdependent. Augustine, as we shall also see, contributes a dictum which implies something like what we would call “good-faith communication.” Since Eriugena was certainly familiar with both the *De opificio hominis* and Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana*, each deserves consideration as we seek to contextualize and explicate what Eriugena has to say about language.

#### **Gregory of Nyssa on Reason and Language**

In the *De opificio hominis*, Gregory of Nyssa makes a number of statements to the effect that language is the vehicle by which reason finds expression. Indeed, it would seem that Gregory conceives of thought as a process which is fundamentally grounded in the medium of language. He says at one point,

we signify our reasoning by means of the natural employment of our hands in written characters. It is true that this fact, that we speak by writing, and, in a certain way, converse by the aid of our hands, preserving sounds by the forms of the alphabet, is not unconnected with the endowment of reason.<sup>13</sup>

Gregory’s logic is as follows: (1) It has been suggested that the creation of humanity with hands is a reflection of God’s design of humanity as a rational creature. (2) The fact that human beings use their hands to write and to gesture links the hands to language. (3) Since this is so, it is true

---

<sup>12</sup> René Descartes, *Descartes: “Discourse on Method” and “Meditations,”* trans. Laurence J. Lafluer (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), 76.

<sup>13</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, vol. 5 of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff

that the hands are in fact a sign of reason as part of God's design. In other words, the connection of hands with language represents proof that hands are connected to reason, which necessarily implies a strong connection between language and reason. Gregory makes this even clearer when he speaks as follows concerning the human voice: "It must needs be that the organization of these instruments of ours should be adapted for reason, that when struck by the vocal organs it might be able to sound properly for the use of words."<sup>14</sup> Here, the proof that the human voice is a sign of reason lies in the fact that said voice can form words. Again, the connection between language and reason is clearly evident. Gregory goes on to develop this argument and develop the relationship between the mouth and the hands. He describes how animals (such as horses) use their mouths for the task of gathering food, while humans do that sort of crude work with their hands. He then says,

If, then, our body had no hands, how could articulate sound have been implanted in it, seeing that the form of the parts of the mouth would not have had the configuration proper for the use of speech, so that man must of necessity have . . . uttered some bestial sound? But now, as the hand is made part of the body, the mouth is at leisure for the service of the reason.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, if humanity had no hands, the mouth would be burdened with the work of grasping things to eat; but because of the hands, the mouth can be formed in such a way as to facilitate the enunciation of words, which activity he says "serves" reason. Gregory states this even more strongly when he says,

We should not have had the gift of reason if we had to employ our lips to supply the need of the body—the heavy and toilsome part of the task of providing food. As things are, however, our hands appropriate this ministration to themselves, and leave the mouth available for the service of reason.<sup>16</sup>

---

and Henry Wace, 2nd Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 393.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 394.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 395.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

This statement cements the connection between language and reason in Gregory's thought. To say that human beings could not reason if they could not speak can mean nothing else. It is appropriate that we consider Gregory as an influence upon the Scot in this area for two reasons. First, we have already observed repeatedly the profound impact of the pseudo-Denis upon our Irishman. If we take even the most cursory look at the Dionysian corpus, we find that one of the most important themes therein is Denis' concern for proper terminology. In other words, Denis' writings have an inescapably semantic character. This concern for proper speech echoes so clearly and pervasively in Eriugena's writings that we need say no more on that score. Second, Eriugena's familiarity with Gregory was limited: he seems only to have known the *De opificio hominis*. That being said, however, he quotes it repeatedly with reference to a number of issues. Gregory's little treatise comes up in the Scot's discussions of what matter is, the Divine Image as mystery, the exegesis of the second chapter of Genesis (see the Appendix to this study) and the nature of the soul's eschatological encounter with God. Eriugena only knew a little of Gregory Nyssen, but he knew that little well. In the realm of language, Gregory's influence (once we acknowledge it) is particularly significant in its implications for Eriugena's epistemology. If we recognize and give due weight to the Scot's debt to Gregory, it immediately implies that language and thought are so closely intertwined that what we say of one we must also say of the other. This in turn has implications that we shall see shortly.

### **Augustine and "Good-Faith Communication"**

Before we move on to Eriugena's own remarks about language we have one other point upon which we need to touch: his debt to Augustine in the area of language. We could almost certainly say more about Augustine's impact upon the Scot in this area, but one point is particularly germane to our project. At the beginning of the *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, Eriugena quotes Augustine as follows: "It is an outstanding characteristic of virtuous minds to

love the truth in words, not the words themselves.”<sup>17</sup> In this brief sentence Eriugena makes an important statement about what we might call the ethics of communication. The gist of the argument is that words are a means to an end, to truth, rather than being ends in themselves. This implies a sort of contract between those who speak. On the one hand, the speaker carries the obligation to use words truthfully, while on the other, the listener is obligated not just to listen to the words themselves, but to actively seek the truth they contain. To put this in plainer terms, the listener must seek *what the speaker means* rather than whatever the words might possibly mean. This commitment entails a certain trust in the speaker’s good faith. To see that this is so, we need only to consider the impact of suspicion upon how we listen. If we are listening to a person we distrust, we tend to ask ourselves what that person’s words *might* mean rather than what they *do* mean. Our distrust motivates us to scrutinize each word in a way that we do not when we are listening to someone we trust. If we consider this in light of Gregory’s contribution, it has important implications for our understanding of Eriugena’s epistemology. We will develop and substantiate these implications more fully in chapter 6, but suffice it to say for now that the Scot views human communication as inseparable from the interpretive act, which is conditioned (and possibly even predetermined) by our trust or distrust of the person with whom we are communicating.

### **Eriugena on Language**

As we turn now to consider the Scot’s own words about language, we find that he has three points to make. First, Eriugena sees language as universally human, which follows immediately from what we have argued concerning Gregory’s impact upon the Scot. To be human is to be created in the Divine Image, which includes reason and thus language. Second Eriugena sees

---

<sup>17</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, trans. Mary Brennan with an Introduction by

language as inadequate; words cannot express everything. Third, he sees language as nevertheless genuinely symbolic; words cannot encompass the totality of what they signify, but they are not devoid of truth or meaning. Words are true as far as they go. Eriugena speaks of language along these lines in this passage: “Mankind, since he is impelled by the necessity of signifying things and lacks the power to distinguish their true nature, customarily has devised these faulty designations.”<sup>18</sup> We can observe each of the ideas we have just mentioned in this brief sentence. First, we see the universality of language in humanity; Eriugena describes language as the property of “mankind.” Second, we can see the symbolic character in Eriugena’s description of language as “signifying things” even though humanity cannot know those things’ “true nature.” Third, we can see the inadequacy of language in his description of words as “faulty designations.” Another striking idea arises from the passage: “mankind . . . is impelled by the necessity of signifying things.” This is a statement about the universality of language, but it also implies more. We have already argued that, for the Scot, what is said about language can also be said about thought. It is not just in our speech to others that we are compelled to signify things; on the contrary, this impulse finds expression in our own internal narration. In the act of thinking we signify things to ourselves, utilizing a symbology which conveys something of reality, but is at the same time inadequate to articulate some things. The problem of language as both symbolic and inadequate is particularly evident when we try to speak (or think) about God, as we can see in the following:

In the first place it is to be noted—since no expression is adequate to God—that almost no speech-signs, whether nouns or verbs or other parts of speech, can be properly affirmed of God. How could sensory signs, that is, signs connected with bodies, signify with clarity that nature which is far removed from all corporeal sense

---

Avital Wohlman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 4.

<sup>18</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 50.

and scarcely attainable to even the purest mind since it transcends all understanding? Yet toilsome human reasoning, rendered indigent after the sin of man, does make use of them, so that somehow the abounding sublimity of the creator may be believed and intimated. Besides, if all verbal signs are not according to nature but contrived by human convention, why wonder if they are not adequate to describe that nature which alone is truly said to be?<sup>19</sup>

In order to properly explicate this quotation, we should take a moment to place it in context. It is drawn from the *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, which is significant for a few reasons. First, the *Treatise* predates Eriugena's exposure to his Eastern sources (Denis, Maximus, and Gregory). Even at this early stage in Eriugena's development as a thinker we can see that language is an important concern; his reflection on the problem of language is not simply a product of his exposure to Denis. Second, the *Treatise* is in major part, as we have already noted, an argument in favor of a particular reading of Augustine. The Doctor of Hippo accounts for the vast majority of the citations in this work. It is no overstatement to say that the *Treatise* is the source in which we can most clearly discern the Scot's profound debt to Augustine. Third, we can see that Eriugena speaks of language in terms of "speech-signs." This, in combination with the quotation from *De doctrina christiana* which we earlier examined, gives us a sense of that work's impact on Eriugena's view of language.

Having made these observations, we find that as early as the *Treatise*, Eriugena is already convinced that speech is inadequate to the task of describing God. In his discovery of the pseudo-Denis, then, the Scot seems (in this area at least) to have found not so much a new way of thinking as a confirmation of his own intuitions and a fruitful resource for their further development. We can also see that Eriugena is already thinking in terms of "sensory signs." This evokes what we have already observed regarding his debt to Maximus and his view of interior and exterior sense. (This is not to say that the Scot's thought concerning sense is fully formed at

---

<sup>19</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, 59.

this point, but he does seem already to be asking the question. Both of these observations point to a particular account of Eriugena's development as a thinker. It is tempting to think of our Irishman as one who stumbles upon the treasures of the Eastern Church and emerges radically transformed. In light of what we have seen here, this portrayal is romantic to say the least. The fact is that, while the Scot certainly did benefit from his exposure to the Eastern Fathers, they seem at least in part to have provided answers to questions Eriugena was already asking.) All of this is to say that Eriugena's development as a thinker is not a wholesale movement away from Augustine and toward the East; rather, it is an assimilation and integration of new sources into the Scot's search for a comprehensive theological narrative. Keeping these considerations in mind, we shall now turn to the question of theological method as it informs the Scot's epistemology.

### **Theological Method and Epistemology**

One of the central questions—and perhaps *the* central question—in the realm of theological method is that of the proper relationship between faith and reason. Even those who marginalize one or the other must justify why they do so. This question lies at the heart of Eriugena's scheme, and the Scot has particular and explicit views on the subject. The interplay between faith and reason operates at several levels in Eriugena's writings. Indeed, Gilson has observed that, "The true meaning of Eriugena's doctrine results from his conception of the relations which obtain between faith and reason."<sup>20</sup> On the one hand, he sees theology as a fundamentally hermeneutical enterprise, a pursuit of the proper reading of two "texts" which reveal the same truth: Scripture and creation. Again, the *Via Supereminetiae*, which he incorporated into his project after his discovery of the Dionysian Corpus, is a different sort of attempt to rightly define

---

<sup>20</sup> Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955), 113.

the relationship between faith and reason. As another example, the distinction between *fides qua* and *fides quae* also serves to enrich and inform the Scot's thought in this area. Finally, Eriugena's views regarding the relationship between faith and reason motivate his convictions regarding the fundamental unity of truth and the defensibility of the catholic faith in public discourse. As a point of entry into the Scot's theological method, then, it is fitting to begin by examining how he speaks of faith and reason.

Perhaps the most concise summary of the Scot's view regarding faith and reason is found in the *Periphyseon*, where he says, "True authority is no obstacle to right reason or right reason to true authority, since both undoubtedly flow from a single source, Divine Wisdom."<sup>21</sup> In examining this statement, we need to pay special attention to Eriugena's use of the key qualifiers "true" and "right." His limitation of the argument to "true authority" and "right reason" points to a refusal to sacrifice either the catholic faith or intellectual rigor to its counterpart. Not all authority is true authority nor is all reason right reason. What constitutes both true authority and right reason is the continuity of each with the revealed character of God, through whom alone they can be seen to cohere. This concern emerges early in the Scot's writings; within the first few pages of the *Treatise* he says,

Every true and complete doctrinal system by which the theory of all things is most assiduously inquired into and most clearly ascertained is established within that discipline which the Greeks usually call *philosophia*.... what else is the exercise of philosophy but the exposition of the rules of true religion by which the supreme and principal cause of all things, God, is worshipped with humility and rationally searched for? It follows then that true philosophy is true religion and conversely that true religion is true philosophy.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 89.

<sup>22</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, 7.

In this passage, Eriugena articulates (much more verbosely) something very like Anselm's eloquent description of theology as "faith seeking understanding."<sup>23</sup> For Eriugena to say that true religion is true philosophy is as much as to say that part of the function of religion is to provide a coherent account of life. On the other hand, to say that true philosophy is true religion is to say that the postulates of a philosophical system decisively open or close the possibility of providing such an account.

This concern for proper theological method has a practical motivation in the *Treatise*; that work is a refutation of Gottschalk's doctrine of double predestination, and we find that the Scot attacks his opponent precisely on the basis of theological method: "This foolish and merciless lunacy [double predestination] is in the first place refuted by divine authority; secondly it is annulled by the rules of right reason."<sup>24</sup> Eriugena's critique of Gottschalk argues that the argument for double predestination both fails to *believe* the testimony of Scripture and also fails to provide a rationally coherent account of predestination. This conviction that faith and reason are intended to complement one another emerges, as we have already seen, in the *Periphyseon* and in the *Homily on the Prologue to John's Gospel* as well. Eriugena says therein: "Both... run to the tomb.... Peter symbolizes faith, John symbolizes intelligence. And so, since it is written 'unless you believe you will not understand,' faith must precede into the tomb of the holy Scripture; then follows intelligence, whose entry is prepared by faith."<sup>25</sup> Here, then, we see the Scot tipping his hand completely; faith must always take priority over reason. Gilson provides the following excellent summary of Eriugena's stance:

---

<sup>23</sup> Preface to *Proslogium*. See, for example, *Saint Anselm: Basic Writings*, trans. S. N. Deane with an Introduction by Charles Hartshorne (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1962), 2.

<sup>24</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, 10.

<sup>25</sup> John J. O'Meara, *Eriugena* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 160.

Since it receives truth from an infallible source, the wise thing for reason to do is to accept this truth as God reveals it in Holy Writ. Faith must now precede the exercise of reason. Yet, far from suppressing it, faith engenders in us a twofold effort, first, to make it pass into our acts so as to purify our moral life, next to explore it rationally through the exercise of contemplative life . . . human reason is a reason taught by a divine revelation and this remains equally true whether the reason at stake be that of a philosopher or that of a theologian.<sup>26</sup>

We should point out two important insights in Gilson's account. First, Gilson rightly recognizes the *moral* character of theology. As we saw earlier, Eriugena is neither a Gnostic nor an ascetic for exactly this reason: theology is at least in part a means to better understand God's commands so as to better obey them. As we grow in obedience, we also grow in faith and thus in relationship with Him. The emphasis is neither upon *ascesis*/mortification nor upon cognition; on the contrary, the primary concern is *moral* and thus relational.<sup>27</sup> Second, Gilson has made explicit what we have alluded to only in passing thus far: for Eriugena, "true authority" means that Scripture takes ultimate priority. Gilson develops this idea further: "When God speaks, we have to believe him, because what God says is true, whether we understand it or not. When a man speaks, even if his authority is universally recognized by other men, what he says is true only if reason approves of it."<sup>28</sup> The practical outgrowth of this is that Eriugena's thought is now effectively reducible to two streams of information. The Fathers, while they are useful for better understanding Scripture, are not infallible. Thus, theology finally must draw from either Scripture or from rational observation of the created world. For the Scot, any other source is ultimately either reducible to one of these two or inadmissible. It is appropriate at this point to examine what Eriugena has to say concerning Scripture and creation.

---

<sup>26</sup> Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 113.

<sup>27</sup> We will develop this further in chapter 7.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 114. One wonders whether Gilson's dislike of Eriugena was not due at least in part to this view, which would almost certainly have sounded too much like Protestantism for Gilson's taste. "But that is another story."

Eriugena's view of Scripture and creation follows immediately from his conviction that true authority and right reason are not opposed. Scripture and creation are both God's handiwork, and each truly reveals God if rightly interpreted. In the *Homily*, Eriugena provides us with a concise summary of how he understands these two modes of God's self disclosure:

In two ways, therefore, the eternal light makes himself known to the world, by Scripture and by what is created. Not otherwise is divine knowledge renewed in us except by the writings of Scripture and the sight of the creature. Learn the divine words and understand them in your spirit: there you will recognize the Word. Look with the bodily sense at the forms and beauty of sensible things: in them you will perceive the Word of God.<sup>29</sup>

Through Scripture, then, God reveals Himself. The mind is taught by Scripture to see God's revelation in the created world as well. In this scheme, reason plays the role of integrating what we observe by the bodily sense (the exterior sense) with what we are taught to believe by Scripture. Bernard McGinn has observed on this point that, for Eriugena, "since God is the source of both reason and the Bible, there can be no *real* conflict between the two."<sup>30</sup> If there *seems* to be a contradiction, then, the problem is one of interpretation. Eriugena, as we saw earlier, believes that the exterior sense provides reliable—if limited—data with which reason works. Scripture provides the unquestionable (for the Christian) content of faith; that is, it is the authoritative source for the Christian faith. The task of reason, then, is to synthesize the data provided by the exterior sense with the content of faith as revealed in Scripture. Reason, then, seeks to see the created world and our lives in it in a way that is consistent with the account set forth in Scripture. Both Scripture and creation can be misunderstood, however, so "right reason" is that which provides a synthesis through which Scripture and creation can be heard as speaking harmoniously. Neither may be sacrificed for the sake of the other. This passage provide us with

---

<sup>29</sup> O'Meara, *Eriugena*, 166.

<sup>30</sup> Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God*, vol. 2, *The Growth of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 93.

one further insight into the Scot's position: for Eriugena the common thread between the two is Christ. Christ is the Divine Word through Whom all things have been made, and He is also the central focus of Scripture. Christ, then, provides a hermeneutical key through which the "texts" of Scripture and creation must be "read."

About Scripture itself, Eriugena has this to say:

Of course the authority of sacred Scripture must be followed in all matters since truth resides in it as in its secret dwelling place... In fact, nothing should be said or thought about God by those who live purely and piously, and zealously seek the truth except what is found in sacred Scripture.<sup>31</sup>

The synthetic reading of Scripture and creation necessarily begins—in the Scot's view—with Scripture. It is true to say that Eriugena sees the relationship between Scripture and creation in dialectical terms, i.e. as a sort of hermeneutical spiral. Nevertheless, this interpretive process must begin with Scripture if it is to proceed rightly. We said earlier that the postulates of a philosophical system either open or close the possibility of providing a proper account of our life in the world. The function of Scripture in the Scot's scheme is to provide postulates that lead to "true philosophy," i.e., a proper account. Faith—as taught by Scripture—makes reason "right" in that it provides those postulates from which reason can proceed to provide a proper account of our life in the world. The task of reason is to see the truth of Scripture in the data afforded by exterior sense through experience of and in the created world.

Concerning creation, the Scot exhorts his reader: "Get to know the Maker from the things that were made in him and through him: 'For his invisible things,' as the Apostle says, 'are perceived by the intelligence through the things that were made.'"<sup>32</sup> We said a moment ago that Eriugena sees the operation of reason as a sort of hermeneutical spiral between Scripture and

---

<sup>31</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 86.

<sup>32</sup> O'Meara, *Eriugena*, 165.

creation. This quotation demonstrates the truth of that claim in that, when our eyes are opened by faith—again, as taught by Scripture—we actually “get to know” God through the world He has made. The created world reveals something of its “Maker” just as a piece of art reveals something of the artist. This is not to say that general revelation is equivalent to special revelation in the Scot’s mind; as we have already seen, he is resolute in his affirmation that Scripture must come first, both in sequence and in priority. Scripture is less liable to misinterpretation than the created world. This is so precisely because Scripture is a grace, a Divine remedy for the self-deception into which humanity has fallen because of sin. McGinn observes that “John [the Scot] stressed that creation and scripture were two parallel manifestations of the hidden God, noting that scripture was only necessary in light of the Fall, which has hindered humanity’s ability to read the book of creation.”<sup>33</sup> Scripture, then, serves as a corrective to the human propensity to misinterpret the significance of the created world. Another such corrective of which the Scot makes use is the *Via Supereminentiae* of Denis, to which we now turn.

In his *De docta ignorantia*, Nicholas of Cusa makes remarks to the effect that we have two possible ways of envisioning God and the world. We can either see the world through the lens of God (which is theology) or we can see God through the lens of the world (which is idolatry).<sup>34</sup> The Scot’s understanding of creation as opened to exegesis by Scripture exemplifies the former impetus. It is precisely as a caution against the latter that he adopts the Dionysian method. The progression from affirmation to negation to the *Via Supereminentiae* leads the reader to roughly the same conclusion as Eriugena’s understanding of Scripture and creation.

---

<sup>33</sup> Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God: The Growth of Mysticism*, 4 vols. (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 2:93.

<sup>34</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *Nicholas of Cusa on Learned Ignorance: A Translation and Appraisal of De Docta Ignorantia*, trans. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning, 1990), 124, 84.

Denis argued that, while it is proper for theology to speak affirmatively of God, these affirmations must always be understood as inadequate, and thus as only a preliminary step in the doing of theology. It is necessary for the theologian to recognize and point out the ways in which these affirmations are inadequate, which he does through negation. This, however, does not negate all use of affirmation, but only the *comprehensiveness* of affirmations about God, which brings the theologian to the *Via Supereminetiae*, in which God is spoken about as “more than” the symbols used to describe Him. The difference is primarily one of emphasis; while Eriugena’s conception of theophany (God’s self-revelation in creation) emphasizes the positive aspect of the theological enterprise, the *Via supereminetiae* emphasizes the caution against idolatry.

Regarding this Dionysian methodology, the Scot tells us that

all things predicated of God with the addition of the terms *Super* or *More Than*—e.g., *Superessential*, *More Than Truth*, *More Than Wisdom*, and other similar expressions—embrace both parts of theology in the fullest sense. Thus in verbal expression they possess the form of the affirmative; in meaning, however, the force of the negative. Let us conclude this matter with a brief example. *It is Essence* is an affirmation; *It is not Essence* is a denial; *It is Superessential* is at once an affirmation and a denial. On the surface, of course, it has no negative, but the negative shows its force in the meaning. By saying “It is Superessential,” one is not stating what It is but what It is not, i.e., that It is not Essence but More Than Essence. The statement does not, however, express what it is that is more than essence when it declares that God is not any of those things which have being, but is more than they are. It does not at all, however, define what being is.<sup>35</sup>

In sum, the *Via supereminetiae* eventually replaces both the kataphatic *and* the apophatic modes speaking about God. The believer eventually comes to what might best be described as a willing suspension of categories. This is evocative of what we have already said in chapter 4 regarding the *quid est/quia est* distinction which Eriugena appropriates from Maximus. Eriugena applies that distinction to God’s Image as manifested in the human mind, but in Maximus it is applied to God Himself. Further, it makes perfect sense in light of the earlier statement we heard

from Gilson that God's truthfulness and our ability to understand what He is saying are two different things. This helps us to better grasp the significance of what Eriugena says just a page or two earlier,

Didn't we say that the Ineffable Nature cannot properly be signified by any word, name, sensible sound, or thing denoted? And you conceded that it is called *Essence*, *Truth*, *Wisdom*, and other things of this kind not properly but metaphorically. We said that it is called *Superessential*, *More Than Truth*, *More Than Wisdom*, and other such names. But don't these terms seem virtually like proper names if *Superessential* is applied properly even though *Essence* isn't? Similarly if *More Than Truth* and *More Than Wisdom* are proper terms although *Truth* and *Wisdom* aren't?<sup>36</sup>

The striking thing here is that Eriugena sees the *Via Supereminetiae* as yielding "proper names." The outgrowth of this is that, once again, the Scot is moving the discussion toward personal categories. He is less interested in describing God than in properly naming Him. To put it another way, the real point is not to know *about* who God is; rather, it is to know who He is in a relational sense. That God is known interpersonally as a mystery with a name is not qualitatively different from any other interpersonal relationship in which humans engage. In light of what we have seen in chapter 4, all of our human interpersonal relationships partake of mystery precisely because they are relations with *persons*. In this context, then, trust is an integral aspect of any truly personal interaction. Knowing *about* another person can only carry us so far; at some point the relationship must come to such a place that those involved feel that they simply *know each other*. If this does not happen, the relationship stagnates. Knowing *about* another person, then, is a means to simply *knowing* that person. This does not diminish the fundamental mystery of the other person; indeed, the sense of wonder is actually heightened by the awareness that the other is both incomprehensible and *trustworthy*. This point brings us to

---

<sup>35</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 27.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

another aspect of Eriugena's theological method: the relationship between *fides qua* and *fides quae*.

The distinction between “the faith which is believed” (doctrine) and “the faith by which one believes” (trust), as we have already intimated, plays a significant part in Eriugena's theological method. To put it in simple terms, doctrine supplies knowledge *about* God so that we might trust Him and thus come to *know* Him in a relational sense. In the *Treatise*, Eriugena speaks to this distinction when he says,

Our salvation... takes its beginning from faith; [Satan] strives, therefore, to destroy faith, seeking out suitable vessels by which from outside into the ears of believers who are powerless to guard against the force of his cunning he may pour those poisons which his argumentative wickedness inwardly contrives.<sup>37</sup>

In short, Satan attacks the act of faith (trust) by seeking to render the content of faith (doctrine) unbelievable. God (like any other person) can only be known through trust. Faith is the foundation of interpersonal relationship. If doctrine can be rendered unbelievable, the possibility of trusting the God about whom doctrine speaks is undermined. This distinction has another side as well; trust is specific to a particular person, and the reality of the relationship is somewhat contingent upon the accuracy of what we know *about* that person. Eriugena provides this example in the *Homily*:

To whom did he give the power of becoming sons of God? To who receive him and believe in his name. Many receive Christ. The Arians receive him, but do not believe in his name; they do not believe that the only begotten Son of God is consubstantial with the Father... And so it is of no profit to receive Christ, while they try to deny his truth. But they who receive Christ, true God and true man, and believe this firmly, are given the possibility of becoming sons of God.<sup>38</sup>

In other words, to profess relationship with someone about whom we believe false information renders the relationship—to the degree that we believe those falsehoods—a lie.

---

<sup>37</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, 9.

Doctrine matters because it communicates truly to us what God has revealed *about* Himself. To trust in a God about whom we believe things which conflict with doctrine is both to profess a relationship that is a lie and to make for ourselves an idol to replace Him.

We spoke a moment earlier about the problem of Satanic attack upon the credibility of doctrine. This reality motivates—at least in part—the Scot’s concern for the unity of truth and the defensibility of the catholic faith in public discourse. To this concern we shall now turn. Eriugena says in the *Treatise*, “Therefore, lest we defenders of the truth appear to contend without weapons with the advocates of falsehood; it will be appropriate for us to observe the rules of the art of disputation.”<sup>39</sup> That the *Treatise* is patently a polemical work is indisputable; historical sources and the text itself make this clear. What is less frequently mentioned is that the *Treatise* also manifests an apologetic concern, as we can easily see here. The refutation of Gottschalk is certainly Eriugena’s primary motivation, but something more is at stake. Eriugena is also concerned to show that the catholic faith can hold its own in public discourse, hence his adherence to “the rules of the art of disputation.” We can see further evidence of this concern shortly thereafter in the *Treatise*, when Eriugena says that, “[heretics] are of great use, not for teaching the truth, of which they are ignorant, but by exciting worldly men to seek the truth and unworldly catholics to unveil the truth.”<sup>40</sup> The Scot’s conviction on this point is clear: The catholic faith is true, so the Church need not fear to embark on the fair and rational refutation of heresy. In other words, because true authority and right reason both “undoubtedly flow from a single source, Divine Wisdom”<sup>41</sup> orthodox Christianity can hold its own in fair public discourse.

---

<sup>38</sup> O’Meara, *Eriugena*, 173.

<sup>39</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, 8.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>41</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 89.

This is not to say that argumentation can *prove* the truth of Christianity in such a way that the opponent must come to faith (more on that point in chapter 6) but it is to say that Christianity can provide an account of itself that is not repugnant to reason.

### **Summary and Implications**

In our exploration of the Scot's epistemology, we have covered a great deal of ground, so it is fitting that at this time we pause to summarize what we have found and to consider the significance of those findings for our project. In examining how Eriugena uses Maximus' account of the motions of the soul, we found three key ideas. First, we saw the Scot's firm conviction that God cannot be known (comprehended by reason), but that He *can* be "unknown" (encountered because God lifts the person beyond his own limitations by grace). Second, we saw that this fact sets a limit beyond which reason simply cannot proceed. Third, we saw that Eriugena sees the testimony of the exterior sense as trustworthy, although limited.

In our examination of the Scot's view of language, we dealt with four key ideas. First, we argued that the Scot appropriates Gregory of Nyssa's view of the radical interdependency of language and reason. Second, we argued that Eriugena's use of a particular Augustinian dictum implies the necessity of something resembling what we would call "good-faith communication." Third, we pointed to the Scot's view of language as universally human. Fourth, we saw that Eriugena conceives of language as inadequate and yet genuinely symbolic.

In looking at Eriugena's theological method, we pursued our investigation along five basic lines. First, as an overarching category, we considered the Scot's view of the relationship between faith and reason. We showed that Eriugena sees faith and reason as designed by God to work in harmony with one another, with faith providing the postulates from which reason proceeds in ascribing significance to sense data. Second, we considered Eriugena's view of Scripture and creation. We showed that Eriugena sees each as a way in which God discloses

Himself to humanity, with Scripture taking priority because of the distorting effects of sin upon human interpretations of the created world. Third, we examined the Scot's employment of the *Via supereminentiae*. We saw that the Scot employs this approach both as a protection against the impulse toward idolatry and also as a way to move toward encountering God *personally* rather than as an object. Fourth, we considered the significance of the distinction between *fides qua* and *fides quae* in the Scot's thought. We saw that doctrine assures that we know *about* God as He truly is in order that we might trust Him, and thus know Him in genuine relationship. Fifth, we considered Eriugena's concern for public discourse. We saw that the Scot frames the task of theology as presenting an account of Christianity that is, on the one hand, true to catholic doctrine and, on the other, not repugnant to reason. It remains, then, for us to ask how these findings inform our project.

In drawing out the implications of our findings, four key *loci* are central: truth, interpretation, faith, and reason. We have found that each of these elements is a fundamental part of the dialectic which constitutes Eriugena's general epistemology. Each, if given due weight, rules out a particular philosophical position which a narrower examination might have allowed us to attribute—mistakenly—to our Irishman. The reader may draw some small amusement from the fact that, in pseudo-Dionysian fashion, we shall reflect upon what the Scot's epistemology is *not* in order to move toward better articulating what it is.

We need first to consider Eriugena's conception of truth. As we have already seen, Eriugena is convinced of the fundamental unity of truth. There may be different accounts of truth but, as we saw in the *Treatise*, Eriugena is not a pluralist. Some accounts are true and others are false. Thus, the goal is not ultimately an account of things that manifests a human consensus; on the contrary the goal is an account that agrees with God's own account, which is the true one. Dermot Moran has argued that Eriugena's thought is best described as "*subjectivist* . . . in the

sense that all spatiotemporal reality is understood as immaterial, mind dependent, and lacking in independent existence.”<sup>42</sup> The problem with Moran’s description is that it redefines subjectivism in such a way that it significantly conflicts with what the term “subjectivism” is typically considered to mean. For Eriugena, the mind upon which “spatiotemporal reality” is finally “dependent” is not the human mind but that of God. Thus, a human construction of “reality” which conflicts with God’s account is finally *unreal*. Indeed, the Scot sees the cognitive dissonance in an unbelieving mind confronted by the *Visio Dei* as the basic meaning of the word “Hell.”<sup>43</sup> In the end, the God of the Bible is real, and Eriugena’s uncompromising conviction that this is so removes him from the ranks of “subjectivists” in the usual sense.

Next, we need to consider the importance of the interpretive act to Eriugena’s epistemology. We have already argued that, where humans are concerned, Eriugena conceives of interpretation as intrinsic not just to language but even to thought itself. Interpretation is not a flaw in human knowing per se; rather, interpretation is simply how human knowing happens. To be a human being is to ascribe significance to sense data, and this ascriptive function is exactly the task of reason. In Eriugena’s view, the interior sense receives the data provided by the exterior sense. It then combines that data into groups which represent particular things and names those groups. The task of reason is to integrate what exterior sense conveys with the content of faith by creating a coherent narrative. In this sense, although Eriugena has—to the point of cliché—been described as a Neo-Platonist, he breaks decisively with the Platonic tradition. Eriugena simply does not believe in immediate, unequivocal knowledge *of anything*. Experience by the senses might be considered immediate for the Scot, but he does not consider

---

<sup>42</sup> Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena: A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 81.

<sup>43</sup> We will explore this further in chapter 6.

this to be *knowledge*. Human knowledge, which is the province of reason and interior sense, is fundamentally interpretive. At most, it might be argued that human beings can immediately know by the interior sense *that* others things are (their particularity and otherness), but not *what* they are (in what categories they belong). A dogmatic realism, then, simply does not fit within the parameters of Eriugena's system.

Faith, as we have shown repeatedly, is not merely important but actually primary in Eriugena's epistemology. Again, it is a cliché to refer to Eriugena as a rationalist but, as we have shown, he cannot be so in any real sense. As Gilson rightly observed, "A strange rationalism indeed, whose first affirmation is that faith is the only way which leads to intellection!"<sup>44</sup> In Eriugena's thought, the faith (doctrine) provides the postulates from which reason proceeds. At the same time, faith (trust) is the basic acceptance of those postulates necessary to the right exercise of reason. We also reflected upon the impact of trust vs. distrust upon the interpretive act when we considered Augustine's influence upon the Scot in the area of language. Faith is for Eriugena the basis from which interpersonal relationship must proceed, and he considers interpersonal relationship with God to be the only way to true knowledge.

It remains for us to consider the place of reason in Eriugena's epistemology. He conceives of reason, as we have just said, as the integrative operation by which the mind seeks to set forth a coherent narrative which includes both sense data and the content of faith. We need to observe here that "faith" for Eriugena is not merely trust; it has specific content. To put this in interpersonal terms, we might say that knowing somebody presupposes knowing *about* that person. Eriugena has rightly been described as a mystic, but this is not the same thing as saying that he is a fideist. Although faith is primary, the Scot holds that ultimately the content of faith

---

<sup>44</sup> Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 114.

does not conflict with right reason. As we have said earlier, if there is an apparent contradiction between the two, the problem is one of interpretation. Eriugena does not, however, merely reduce reason to sophistic defense of the faith; on the contrary, he seeks to take seriously both the testimony of the senses and the content of the faith, with reason being the mind's attempt to integrate the two.

Finally, having stated what Eriugena's epistemology is not, it is now fitting that we begin to say what it is. Three adjectives are particularly useful in describing the Scot's conception of knowing: realist, narrative, and interpersonal. We have shown that Eriugena is convinced of the fundamental unity of truth. We have also shown that Eriugena considers God to be the ultimate standard for truth. Moran, even as he attempts to portray the Scot as a subjectivist, is forced to concede that, "In some respects Eriugena is a realist... Eriugena is committed to a realistic theory of universals."<sup>45</sup> This point is especially important in light of the narrative concern, with which we shall deal in a moment. Eriugena is not presenting the mind as simply providing an account of things; on the contrary, he seeks an account which is true to things *as they are*. The Scot is not suggesting that the purpose of narrative is to ease cognitive dissonance, alleviate guilt, or calm anxiety. He sees the function of narrative as bringing the human mind into acceptance of—and harmony with—reality in all its fullness. False comfort will inevitably backfire, so the only hope for true comfort begins with the commitment to live in the real world. In this most basic sense, then, it is fitting that we describe the Scot as a realist.

We need also to recognize the narrative character of Eriugena's epistemology. As we have said repeatedly, human knowledge is never "knowledge" in the immediate, Platonic sense. The Scot recognizes the centrality of the interpretive act by which human beings ascribe significance

---

<sup>45</sup> Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 82.

to sense data. The most that a human person can hope for is a coherent narrative, one which seems to make sense of the data the senses provide. Coherence in itself is no guarantee of truth in that human experience is by its nature finite. To put this in the idiom of statistics, we might say that human analysis is always constructed on the basis of much less than a random (and thus reliably representative) sample of all the data. The Scot's position is in this respect a strikingly honest one; he acknowledges the inescapable provisionality of human knowledge. To borrow a turn of phrase from popular culture, "The truth is out there," but that does not mean that it is (or ever will be) immediately attainable by us. This brings us to the third aspect of Eriugena's epistemology: the interpersonal.

To say that the Scot's epistemology is "interpersonal" needs some explanation. We can explicate the term "interpersonal"—as it relates to the Scot's epistemology—along three complementary lines. First, we mean by this that for Eriugena truth is ultimately *personal*; God is the ultimate reality. Rather than, for example, the *dao* or the Stoic conception of *logos*, the ordering principle of everything is not an impersonal force but a *personal* God. It is in relationship with this God that we ultimately encounter truth in the most complete and profound sense. Second, we mean that for Eriugena—contra Descartes—truth is not best sought in the individual's own reflection. On the contrary, truth in human experience is better expressed in *communal* narrative. This dynamic finds clear expression in the Church, where the doctrines of the catholic faith represent a *community* bearing witness that the God of the Bible is real and trustworthy. This is not to say that communal narrative is by its nature infallible (many people can be univocally wrong) but it is to say that the radical individualism of the Cartesian model is at its root an expression of intellectual hubris and the impulse toward self-definition. Third, we mean that for Eriugena, the One True God is not knowable, but He is *trustworthy*. Human knowledge simply cannot encompass the totality of a person. This does not, however, make

relationship impossible. On the contrary, in the context of trust the mystery of the other person takes the form of wonder, and thus actually enlivens the relationship. This is no more or less true of human persons than of Divine ones. (If we understand “justification” as meaning “right relationship,” this conception of knowing explains simply and perfectly why justification is “by faith;” it simply cannot be otherwise! For a human to seek to know another person in a way that eliminates this element of mystery is in fact *wrong* relationship in that is a denial of the other’s personhood.)

In light of what we have seen here, it is plain that the Scot’s epistemology is complex, and rightly so—life is complex. He deals little in certainty and much in confidence, and this is ultimately a sign of both his honesty and his existential concern. For the Scot, certainty lies in the realm of sense, but sense in itself is not *meaningful*. Meaning is the ground of joy, but it is also the province of reason, which is provisional and can only operate properly as it is taught by faith (that is, through trust in God as self-disclosed). To seek certainty, then, as a means to happiness is a misunderstanding of what certainty can and cannot provide. To say that human beings live with uncertainty in matters of faith is not an indictment of the validity of faith; rather, it is simply an acknowledgement of how human knowing operates. Knowing facts is useful, but it cannot bring human persons real joy. Real joy does not come from knowing facts; it comes from trusting God.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE CONSEQUENCES OF KNOWING: SUBJECTIVITY AND EPISTEMIC RESPONSIBILITY

In chapter 5 we argued that Eriugena's epistemology is realist, narrative, and interpersonal. These threads in his epistemology find clear and pervasive expression in the way the Scot describes the *Visio Dei* and in the way he explicates the doctrine of Hell. In this chapter we will examine these two aspects of the Scot's account with a view to what they reveal about his epistemology. To this end, we will consider the centrality of the interpretive act to the way in which Eriugena envisions the eschaton. As a way of substantiating our claim that the interpretive act is, in fact, central to his eschatology, we shall explicate Eriugena's eschatology with a view to several important ideas. As a point of entry, we shall consider the Scot's debt to Augustine in this area. Next, we shall consider the Scot's conception of God as absolute reality (which will, in turn, help us to better understand why Eriugena ought to be recognized as fundamentally realist in his epistemology). Next, we shall consider the Scot's conception of the unveiling (*apocalypsis*) of reality as confrontation. We shall then consider the Scot's portrayal of eternal punishment as internal conflict. Next, we shall consider a category by which the Scot specifies the object of eternal punishment: what God has not made. This will lead us in turn to consideration of the Scot's reflection upon the *mysterium iniquitatis*. We shall then consider the Scot's understanding of the passions with a view to how his conception informs the question of trust and distrust (a patently interpersonal question). Next, we shall consider how the Scot understands the impact of personal disposition (we might do just as well to say "bias") upon

personal experience. Finally, we shall suggest that the Scot's understanding of internal conflict implies an idea which we would today call "epistemic responsibility." This concept will help to explicate practically our description of Eriugena's epistemology as "narrative." Finally, we shall consider the implications of our findings for our project.

### **Interpretation and Eschatology**

As we saw in chapter 5, Eriugena conceives of the role of reason as fundamentally interpretive. It is reason which groups particulars into categories. Reason is the bridge between faith and sense data. It is through the rational motion that the soul articulates a narrative which seeks to coherently integrate faith with experience. To Eriugena, the interpretive character of reason is not a deficiency in that he sees the function of reason as exactly that of interpreting sense data in light of faith (which includes both faith's character as trust and its content). The problem with reason is not that it is interpretive; rather, it is that reason seeks to interpret without the governance of faith. The impact of faith or unfaith upon the narrative which reason brings forth has consequences of crucial importance, whether for good or for ill. The Scot's employment of the *quia est/quid est* distinction carries all the way through to his eschatology, in which the interpretive act is quite literally the difference between Heaven and Hell. Eriugena speaks this way in the *Periphyseon*:

In the time to come the Truth itself shall shine through all things, not only upon those who in this life are righteous and duly seek after the Truth, but also upon the unrighteous and the wicked who are corrupted by their evil ways and hate the light and flee from it. For all shall see the glory of God . . . For when we are suffering from a disease of the eyes, we cannot enjoy the light, but wish to flee from it and seek to hide ourselves in darkness, not because we do not know what light is and how useful it is to those who can look upon it, but plead the weakness of our eyes as the reason for avoiding its radiance. In the same way the impious too when they are condemned to punishment attribute their hatred of Truth to their impiety, and suffer the unavailing pangs of tardy remorse.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon (The Division of Nature)*, trans. I. P. Sheldon-Williams, rev. John J.

In this passage we see a number of the themes with which we shall deal through the course of this chapter. The notion of God as absolute reality clearly emerges in Eriugena's statement that "all shall see the glory of God." His conception of *apocalypsis* as confrontation appears in his statement that "the Truth itself shall shine through all things." The importance of the passions comes through in his differentiation of those who are "righteous and duly seek after the Truth" from "the wicked who . . . hate the light." The importance of personal disposition (bias) is suggested by his statement that the wicked "are corrupted by their evil ways." We see the conception of punishment as psychological conflict in the reference to "the unavailing pangs of tardy remorse." The notion of epistemic responsibility finds expression in the statement that "the impious . . . attribute their hatred to their impiety." In short, this passage presents a brief resumé of the role of interpretation in the Scot's eschatology, which we shall develop more fully through the course of this chapter. As a point of entry to this development, we shall now consider his debt to Augustine in this area.

### **The Augustinian Influence in Eriugena's Eschatology**

In this particular locus of the Scot's thought we can see, perhaps more clearly than anywhere else, the enduring influence of Augustine. Although the Scot does not specifically mention Augustine in his discussion of this topic in the *Periphyseon*, certain Augustinian themes which the Scot sets forth in the *Treatise* are carried through unaltered into the *Periphyseon*. Although Augustine's name is not prominent in this part of Eriugena's eschatological reflection in the *Periphyseon*, the Doctor of Hippo's *ideas* are both central and pervasive. Rather than devoting a section of this chapter to Augustinian citations in the *Treatise* (a study which could

---

O'Meara (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1987), 650.

easily comprise a chapter in itself) we shall address the question of Augustine's influence upon the Scot from a different (and more concise) angle. As we have already noted, the *Treatise* is a refutation of Gottschalk's doctrine of double predestination. Gottschalk claimed Augustine as support for his argument, which motivated Eriugena to present a refutation based primarily upon Augustine's works. A few other sources, such as Ambrose and Gregory the Great, are occasionally cited, but the vast majority of Eriugena's supporting material comes from the writings of Augustine. The *Treatise* is as much an argument for a particular reading of Augustine as it is a refutation of double predestination. The Scot cites, among other sources, *De uera religione*, *De civitas Dei*, *De doctrina christiana*, *Confessiones*, *De trinitate*, and *De libero arbitrio* in support of his argument. The *Treatise* presents the reader with a different picture of the Scot's perspective than might be expected (in light of the typical emphasis upon his Eastern sources) in that it shows that the Scot knew Augustine well and drew deeply from his ideas. While it is true that at times Eriugena "interprets" Augustine into saying things with which the Doctor of Hippo would almost certainly have taken issue, the fact remains that in writing the *Treatise* Eriugena presents us with a clear and expansive picture of his own interaction with Augustine, one which left enduring marks upon the Scot's own thought. This is significant for our own study for at least two reasons.

First, we have already suggested the Triune Image as a useful concept in the discussion of human personhood. The conception of subjective experience which the Scot appropriates from Augustine—and continues to expand and develop—is another important element in Eriugena's synthesis, one which helps us to see Augustine's value to the discussion of human personhood. The prevailing tendency in Trinitarian theology is to minimize Augustine's usefulness to the contemporary discussion by nominating *De trinitate* as the point at which Trinitarian theology went awry. Whatever the merits and deficiencies of that work, Eriugena's use of Augustine is not

solely or even primarily dependent upon Augustine's thought on the Trinity. Rather the Scot's use of Augustine tends to focus more on what we would now call the phenomenological or existential dimension of human personhood, the lived experience of being human. This line of thinking, because it uses Augustine's insights in those areas where they are helpful, can serve as a valuable balancing influence in the contemporary discussion of personhood. Further, it helps to bring out Eriugena's own importance as a synthesizer of Augustine with Gregory of Nyssa, the pseudo-Dionysius, and Maximus the Confessor.

Second, it is easy to look at the pervasive use of Neo-Platonic terminology in the *Periphyseon* and draw the conclusion that Eriugena is simply a "Neo-Platonist," whatever that very general description might mean. To do this, however, is to neglect some very important points at which the Scot breaks with the Platonic tradition. For one, we shall see in this chapter that the Platonic assertion that to know the good is to do the good is one that the Scot rejects. The very *Visio Dei* will not convert the sinner. This particular idea brings us to another point at which a proper recognition of Augustine's contribution is not merely significant but crucial to a fair reading of Eriugena. The Scot quotes Origen extensively in Book V of the *Periphyseon*, a fact which might incline casual readers to label the Scot as an "Origenist." While it is true that the Scot makes significant use of Origen, he consistently stops short of Origen's universalism, which was ultimately anathematized as heretical. Eriugena cannot be an "Origenist" in this most important sense. He states that not all will be saved in the end, and says also that the punishment of the damned will be eternal. How does Augustine factor into this question? Simply, the Scot avoids universalism by making use of the subjectivist eschatology which we first see in the *Treatise*. Far from leaving Augustine behind when he discovers the Eastern Fathers, Eriugena continues to benefit from Augustine's insight. Although the influence of Eriugena's Eastern sources is both profound and pervasive, it is ultimately through Augustine that the Scot is able to

avoid universalism not just formally but factually. (By this we mean that Eriugena is not a universalist, and that this is true not merely because he professes not to be but because he provides a substantive account which not only makes universalism philosophically unnecessary but actually contradicts it.) For these reasons, the reader is advised to take note of the eschatology which emerges through those portions of the *Treatise* with which we shall deal. Although we will not take the time to remark at every turn upon this Augustinian influence in the Scot's thought, a careful eye will note that in common between the *Treatise* and the *Periphyseon* there is a subjectivist eschatology which is already present and extensively developed in the *Treatise*. This eschatology, Augustinian in its rootage, will itself help us to see the centrality of the interpretive act to the Scot's own epistemology, which will in turn further our discussion of the Scot's view of human personhood and the relevance of that view to the contemporary discussion. Having remarked upon the importance of Augustine to this topic, we shall now turn to Eriugena's conception of God as absolute reality.

### **Themes in Eriugena's Eschatology**

We have argued that Eriugena is fundamentally a realist in his epistemology. This is not to say that the Scot believes in immediate knowledge of reality; on the contrary, he holds that human knowing is narrative and interpretive by its very nature. Nevertheless, he is not a subjectivist in the sense that he does believe that reality exists independent of the human mind. It is not upon the human mind that reality is contingent; rather, it is contingent upon the mind of God. This fact places the Scot in the realist camp in that, although he is very aware of the limits of human perception, he does not go so far as to say that perception is all there is. It might be objected that the Scot is *philosophically* a subjectivist, however his theology might serve to counter this tendency. If we accept the qualitative difference between theology and philosophy proposed by those who prefer to separate the two, this objection might have some merit. The

problem with this objection is that the Scot himself does not see theology and philosophy as separate; it is precisely his project to offer an account which integrates them. If, therefore, we are willing to impose an interpretive framework upon Eriugena which he would certainly have rejected, we can accept the objection as valid, but not otherwise. Further, the real problem in Eriugena's mind is not *whether* reality is perceptible. He asserts that the senses do truly perceive the world, as we have already seen. Although the senses do not perceive everything, they do provide a reliable, if limited, representation of the created world. The real problem for Eriugena is not one of perception but rather one of interpretation. As we shall see shortly, the Scot believes that in the eschaton reality will be made manifest to everyone, but this does not guarantee that everyone will rightly interpret that experience. We shall begin, however, by considering Eriugena's conception of God, because it is God with whom all human creatures must deal at the eschaton.

### **God as Absolute Reality**

The center of the Scot's eschatology and therefore his epistemology is his conception of God as absolute reality. For Eriugena, God is the Truth, and His order is manifested in the created world. Further, God's existence, His character, and His order are not altered by any action of the human mind, although, as we shall see, a human mind's interpretive framework radically affects how God and His order are experienced by that mind. In the *Treatise*, Eriugena says this:

Before he created it [God] predestined that the state of his universal creation would be one of such beauty that the ugliness of the wicked, which he did not predestine because he did not intend to create it, did not deface the whole, the malice of offenders did no injury, the uncertainty of those in error did not spread doubt, the unhappiness of those worthy of punishment did not disturb the happiness of the elect.

For the baseness of malice, or the error or the unhappiness of no man is allowed to bring dishonour upon the eternal order predestined before all ages.<sup>2</sup>

Eriugena's point here is that God's order is not undone by human sin. God, having foreseen that humanity would fall into sin, has actually ordered the world in such a way that in the eschaton the ugliness of human sin will only be experienced by the sinner himself. Sin is by its nature (as egocentrism and the attempt at self-definition) a misconstruing of how things really are. The human person is not self-defined, but rather defined from without by his or her nature as a created being who has been made in God's Image. This misinterpretation, while it has dire consequences for the sinner, does not in any way alter the truth; the world will in the end clearly and evidently be what God has designed it to be. Eriugena observes elsewhere in the *Treatise*,

Of [rational natures] one part, indeed, freed by the grace of its creator, voluntarily obeys the eternal laws and by cleaving to them is made happy; but the other, deservedly abandoned to pride and disobedience, refused to be confined within the order of the aforementioned divine law, but it was unable to surmount it. For in whatever way the rational will basely moves, it will find in the eternal art the limit within which its baseness will be honorably ordered, in such a way that from its own hateful wickedness the laudable discipline of wisdom is honoured, and the disordered deformity of one part does not diminish the supremely ordered beauty of the whole. Accordingly, the supreme and ineffable divine wisdom predestined limits in its laws beyond which the wickedness of the ungodly cannot advance. For no one's wickedness is allowed to extend to infinity, as he might wish, since the divine laws impose a limit to his advance. For to what does that worthlessness of all impious men and of their chief, the devil, aspire if not to withdraw from that which is the highest essence, to the extent that their nature, if divine law allowed, would return to nothingness?... But since difficulty arising from the divine laws prevents it from falling as greatly as it would wish, by that difficulty it is oppressed, and in its oppression it is tormented, punished, tortured.... Therefore God predestined the ungodly to punishment or destruction, that is, he circumscribed them by his immutable laws which their impiety is not allowed to elude.... that very difficulty by which they are prevented from attaining to what they wantonly strive after, becomes for them the penal ruin and the just torment of their wretched passions.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, trans. Mary Brennan with an Introduction by Avital Wohlman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 111.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

We should note especially that Eriugena speaks of “the eternal art” (i.e. God’s design and order in the world) as constituting the “limit” within which the sinful will is “ordered.” In other words, in the eschaton the sinner cannot actually accomplish what he desires because “the divine laws impose a limit to his advance.” In the face of this fact, not even the self-destructive impulse of the sinner can truly be gratified; God has made human persons to exist, and exist they shall. The punishment of Hell consists in ongoing experience of the futility of sin. This notion of futility underscores the fact that God is real and is genuinely God, with all that entails. Eriugena reprises this theme in the *Periphyseon* when he says,

And if any one should ask: Whence come those things that are called evil and dishonourable and unjust, and where are they to be found? he should be answered: they come from no other source and are to be found nowhere else but in the vanity of vanities and in the false reasonings of those who blasphemously pretend that that is which is altogether non-existent, and regard everything which interferes with their lustful pleasures and prohibits or restrains them as evil because it causes them pain. Therefore they even go so far as to criticize the disposition of Divine Providence, saying that any restraint or hindrance or suppression of the force of the free will is an evil, not realising that all such restrictive measures are manifestations of the most loving mercy of the Divine Goodness. For it is the part of the most excellent and undisturbed Creator to watch over the good which he has created, lest it should perish and be consumed in its destructive impulses.<sup>4</sup>

Here we see again that the Scot does not conceive of human freedom (in the eschaton, at least) as the freedom to *do* but as the freedom to desire and to “reason,” to *interpret*. The fact is that the human person has not made himself, nor can he finally destroy himself. God’s “Providence” sets the limit; indeed it does so with sufficient force that the Scot refers to it as “restraint,” “hindrance,” and “suppression.” It is the futile act of the sinner to “pretend that that is which is altogether non-existent.” Being is God’s gift and can never be unmade by any human action, nor can humanity cause anything to be which is not. The most that a rebellious human

---

<sup>4</sup> John Scottus Eriugena. *Periphyseon (The Division of Nature)*, 651.

being can do is either to ignore what is or to “pretend” that something exists which does not; what actually exists is entirely God’s decision.

### ***Apocalypsis* as Confrontation**

What truly *does* exist will be manifest in the eschaton, which brings us to our next locus, *apocalypsis* as confrontation. Eriugena says concerning the eschatological return of Christ that “each man, good or evil, shall behold His coming in himself, in his own conscience, when they shall be set free, and God shall reveal the hidden places of the darkness and each man shall be the judge of his own deeds and thoughts.”<sup>5</sup> In the return of Christ, the troubling questions humanity has asked about Him will be answered. The factual gaps which the unbelieving have sought to fill with doubt will now be filled with the reality that Christ is, in fact, Lord. There will be no question whether, for example, He was resurrected; the resurrected Christ will appear to all. His Lordship will not be open to debate because things simply will happen as He dictates. In the return of Christ, “the facts” will no longer be at issue because in that moment He will be The Fact. For the person who has *reasoned* that Christ is not Lord, this moment will constitute by its very nature a confrontation of sorts, a collision with the reality that He *is* Lord. What is confirmation for the believer is confrontation for the unbeliever. This confrontation lies at the heart of Eriugena’s understanding of eternal punishment, which we shall now examine.

### **Eternal Punishment as Psychological Suffering**

One especially striking feature of Eriugena’s eschatology is the way he develops the idea of Hell. The Scot does not just *focus* on the psychological suffering of the damned in their eternal punishment, he says that this suffering *is* that punishment. It is at precisely this point that we can see (1) how and why Eriugena avoids Origen’s universalism and (2) the centrality of the

interpretive act in his conception of human personhood. Eriugena believes that the *Visio Dei* is not only for the elect but for all of humanity. This, however, does not mean that all will be saved; on the contrary, God's appearance can be a hateful thing for the rebel just as it is a beautiful thing for the believer. Origen argues that all will eventually come to repentance, essentially because to know the good is to do the good. For Eriugena, to experience the good is one thing, but to *interpret* that experience in such a way as to recognize the good as good is quite another, an act of faith. The interpretive nature of reason is not changed by the experience of *apocalypsis* because reason simply *is* interpretive. In the eschatological return of Christ, the rebel will be shown the futility of his aspiration to godhead. Things will not come to pass in the way the rebel desires precisely because it is not his to steer the course of events. Although any real hope of having his own way is destroyed at this point, the *desire* to have his own way remains in the rebel. It is exactly here that Eriugena locates the torment of eternal punishment. He says in the *Treatise*, "What is the pain that is called spiritual if not the deprivation of the mutable things which the soul has enjoyed or hoped it could enjoy?"<sup>6</sup> To be human is to desire, but desires which conflict with God's order are futile. The awareness of this futility, coupled with the persistence of sinful desire in the damned, creates a psychological conflict which expresses itself in suffering. In the eschaton, the buffering effect of distraction will be removed; everyone will know that Jesus is Lord because He will be clearly and continually present in His glory to everyone. It will no longer be possible to ignore Christ—He will be inescapably and undeniably present to all. The fact that Christ is Lord will not be welcome news, however, to those who cling to their own aspirations to godhead.

---

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 684.

<sup>6</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, 107.

That Christ's Lordship is a hateful reality to the damned emerges clearly in another passage from the *Treatise*. Eriugena says therein that

no heavier penalty is inflicted on a wicked servant than that he be forced against his will to serve a just master. For inwardly in himself he suffers more from the incitement of a proud will than exteriorly from the harshest lashing of his body, because when he is not allowed to spurn the will of his master, he is tormented by himself within himself. But what person of proper judgment would ascribe the origin of such a punishment to the just master and not rather to the unjust servant? For indeed he is set on fire within himself by the torches of his own disobedience before the master from outside adds any torment to the sum of the punishment.... Of the two who at the same time look at the sun, the one with ordered gaze is illuminated, the disordered one is stricken by darkness.<sup>7</sup>

Again, the emphasis is upon the futility of sinful desire. Compliance is hateful to the rebel, but disobedience is not an option. To do what one's master directs is neither rewarding nor onerous in itself; it is one or the other depending upon what the servant thinks of his master. Although the Scot's language is more expansive and philosophical in the *Periphyseon* than in the *Treatise*, the thrust of his argument is the same:

It is our belief that the various kinds of punishment will not be found localised in any place anywhere in the whole of this visible Universe, or, to be succinct, anywhere within the length and breadth of the nature which is created by God. Moreover, they never shall exist, any more than they do at present, save in the perverse motions of evil and corrupt wills and consciences, and consist in late and unavailing repentance, and in every kind of perversion of power, whether in the human or the angelic creature. . . For although the lust and fever of evil-doing will always be present in perverse wills, seeing that the object of lust can never be attained, and the flame evil will have nothing but itself to consume, what else is left but stinking corpses lacking all vital motion, lacking, that is, all substance and potency of natural goods? And here it is, perhaps, that we have the most severe torments of evil men and evil angels, the lust for evil combined with the impossibility of assuaging it either before or after the Day of Judgment.<sup>8</sup>

One thing about this passage is unusual: the Scot's mention of "late and unavailing repentance." This formulation is something of a problem for the reading we have thus far

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>8</sup> John Scottus Eriugena. *Periphyseon (The Division of Nature)*, 612.

presented of the Scot's eschatology in that it seems to imply that all will repent, but some will do so too late. We might deal with this problem in any of three ways. First, we might simply disagree with the Scot on this point, saying that it represents an unrecognized contradiction in his thought. This study is not concerned merely to summarize Eriugena; this has been done well elsewhere. Instead, our purpose is to draw upon Eriugena as useful to the contemporary discussion of personhood; such usefulness need not entail acceptance of Eriugena's thought in every point. Second, we might argue that this is essentially a trope. In light of the Scot's predilection for the poetic this approach would not be without foundation. As is also the case with the previous approach, we could argue from the prevailing trend in the Scot's thought that this formulation is an anomaly. Either of these two approaches would suffice to keep our inquiry moving, but there is a third possibility which might serve better. The real crux of the problem lies in the definition of "repentance." If the Scot is using the word in its technical sense, it would represent a more typically Roman idea of Hell, one in which the damned are constrained to suffer from without because of past choices (acts of sin) rather than from within by their own ongoing choice (inward rebellion). If, however, the Scot's use of the term is less strict, we might understand repentance not in the sense of contrition but of attrition. In other words, the damned do not regret their sins because they are sins; rather, they regret their sins because those sins have consequences. In this case, God need not be more than a hateful and intractable reality to the sinner's way of thinking. In any case, while this formulation might seem somewhat dissonant with the reading we have thus far presented, it does not significantly alter the prevailing trend in Eriugena's thought. In the end, the torment of Hell *is* psychological and *does* consist in ongoing awareness that sinful desire is futile. This view, in turn, invites us to consider the notion of "psychological suffering" and to see how it contributes to understanding "personhood" more fully.

One further passage warrants our attention as we examine Eriugena's conception of psychological suffering. He argues that "the utter destruction of all evil in all human nature does not mean that the phantasies of evil shall not be forever preserved in the consciences of those who in this life practiced evil, and if forever preserved, then forever punished ."<sup>9</sup> This adds another layer to our examination of psychological torment in the Scot's eschatology. First, as in the previous passage, we can see that torment is not located in a place or in anything other than the mind of the sinner. This must necessarily be so in that human *nature* will be purged of all evil. If we borrow a very common distinction from the Eastern tradition, we can easily see that the conscience is not a matter of *nature* but of *person*. We shall develop the personal significance of the conscience in chapter 7, but suffice it to say for now that when Eriugena speaks here of the purging of human nature he intends the reader to understand the end of death. Death will be destroyed, and acts of sin will be impossible, but the *desire* to sin (and the knowledge that such desire is futile) will persist to torment the damned. It is memories and imaginary indulgences ("phantasies") of sin that will instantiate sinful desire and thus become the source of eternal torment.

### **"What God Has Not Made"**

Having touched briefly upon the question of human nature, as distinguished from the human person, it is now fitting for us to examine one way in which Eriugena differentiates the two in the context of eternal punishment. The thrust of his argument is that evil is not God's invention and cannot be causally traced to Him in any way. Thus, what God punishes is not anything which He has made. Eriugena says clearly in the *Periphyseon* that "in no nature which God has created does He punish what He has created; but only what He has not created does He

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 626.

punish.”<sup>10</sup> Nor is this idea a later development in the Scot’s thought; he says something very similar in the *Treatise*: “. . . the creator does not punish the things he made, nor does he take from them the gifts of nature.”<sup>11</sup> Punishment, then, is experienced by what God has not made.

Eriugena fleshes out this idea thereafter, arguing that

the death of the soul is sin; God did not make sin for the soul, since he it is who frees it from sin; and so life did not make the death of life. The penalty for sin is death; God did not make death; therefore he did not make a penalty. Torment is a penalty; God did not make a penalty; therefore he did not make torment. The penalty for sin is death; the death of life is sin; therefore the penalty for sin is sin. Penalty is suffering; therefore the suffering of sin is sin.... What [God] made in [the damned] he did not leave or abandon, otherwise their nature would return to nothing, if the highest being were not in them; but what he did not make in them, that is to say, pride, he spurned.<sup>12</sup>

In this passage, the Scot argues that the torment of the damned is not punitive in the usual sense. On the contrary, those things which are experienced as punishment, rather than being imposed by God for the sake of punishment, are experienced as unavoidable consequences of sin itself. God does not punish what He has made but what He has not made is punished. This raises the question: what, then, is punished? What is it that God has not made? Eriugena answers this question as follows:

In the wicked it is not what God has made that undergoes punishments, but what pride has corruptly devised. Indeed, the passion of a perverse will is tortured when it is not allowed to have those things which it evilly or unworthily strives after; for by this name, that is of concupiscence, the generality of all the vices is understood.<sup>13</sup>

What experiences punishment is concupiscence. In light of what we have already observed, this creates a clear causal relationship between sin (self-definition or egocentrism) and torment. For Eriugena, casting oneself as the center of reality culminates in torment because only God is

---

<sup>10</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon (The Division of Nature)*, 636.

<sup>11</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, 99.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

the center of reality and only God can be God. However, this does not prevent the sinner from *desiring* to be God and experiencing the futility of this impossible desire.

### **The *Mysterium Iniquitatis***

This raises another question: whence the sinful human desire to take God's place? We shall consider this question as we examine what the Scot has to say concerning the *mysterium iniquitatis*. As we shall see, the Scot holds that, although sin is a fact of human existence, it simply defies causal explanation. He tells us,

sins do not pertain to the nature but to the will: the cause of all sin, whether in angel or in man, is his own perverse will; but the cause of the perverse will itself is not to be found in natural impulses of the rational and intelligible creature, for the Good cannot be the cause of evil. Therefore it is uncaused, and has no natural origin. So we are confronted with this inexplicable mystery: the evil will of transgressing angels and men, although it is itself uncaused, is the efficient cause of every sin and every punishment of sin . . . what is punished is the irrational impulse of the perverse will which arises in rational nature.<sup>14</sup>

In light of what we have already observed with regard to Eriugena's conception of self-awareness, this view is not only unsurprising, but actually something we might expect. As persons, that is, as creatures who have been made in God's Image, mystery is part of us, just as mystery is part of God, in whose Image we have been made. What God has made is the will, but the evil will is a creaturely invention. It cannot be attributed to God because God did not create anything evil; on the contrary, He pronounced everything He made "Very Good." That humanity wills evil is not, therefore, attributable to God. It is because of this idea that Eriugena resolutely argues that God does not punish what He has made, but only what He has not made. For Eriugena, punishment arises from the human determination to do what only God can do; at the root of sin is the usurping of God's role as Creator. Sin is in itself the bringing forth of what God

---

<sup>14</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon (The Division of Nature)*, 622.

has not made. To ask why this happens is to ask for a rational explanation of insanity. To seek a cause behind the insanity itself is futile. To be a person is to will; why persons will what they do is inscrutable to human inquiry. No human can penetrate the mystery that is the Divine Image.

### **Passions as Impetus toward Action**

Much has been said regarding the relation of the passions to the will, and it would not be unusual to argue that human persons will in accordance to their passions. Eriugena is aware that the passions play an important role in human willing, but he does not give them determinative significance. The Scot understands the passions as impulses to do, but the content of that doing is not ultimately determined by the passions, nor are the passions themselves categorically good or evil. Instead, the Scot seems to see them more as the means by which trust or distrust moves from potentiality (as disposition) to actuality (as action). In bestial man the passions are indeed bestial, but they were not created so. The passions are not something the Christian ought to extinguish; rather, they are to be transformed by grace. Eriugena says this:

One should perceive too that the passions of irrational creatures which, after the fall of man from the dignity of the divine image, human nature had drawn to itself and added as a kind of penalty for sin, and which were not naturally implanted before the fall-- that these passions, I say, can be changed into natural virtues in those who are perfect. By passions I mean pleasure and sadness, concupiscence and fear, and whatever springs from them, which can undoubtedly be changed to virtues.... In short, there is no vice which cannot be changed into a virtue in the wise through the operation in them of divine grace.<sup>15</sup>

Maximus speaks in similar terms of *eros* deified, (that is, transformed by grace)<sup>16</sup> but his statement is somewhat less convincing in that the Confessor also remains committed to the practice of *ascesis*. Although Maximus is willing to say that desire can be deified, his

---

<sup>15</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, trans. Myra Uhlfelder, with summaries by Jean A. Potter (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976), 315.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 41.

commitment to ascetic practice calls into question whether he is fully convinced of this; such a juxtaposition suggests a certain ambivalence toward desire. On one hand, while desire can be deified, on the other, it might be wiser to quell it just in case. We have earlier noticed that the Scot simply does not share the ascetic commitments of Maximus. In Eriugena, transformation is not accomplished by snuffing out desire; on the contrary, he sees transformation as accomplished through the struggles of contemplation and obedience to God's commands. Through these things desire meets not a new Object but its original one, Who lays claim to its service. Through the transforming work of grace, desire is changed not in its nature but in its direction. Desire draws the sinner away from God, but it also can draw the believer to Him. In the fallen human condition, the believer suffers conflict between his fallen condition as bestial man, which directs desire along one vector, and his destiny as biological man and Image of God, which directs it along another. The final question for each human person is one of trust: Who defines me? If we claim to define ourselves, the passions will wrongly define us, but if we trust that we are defined from without by our having been created in God's Image, they can come to express that trust. In the human person who lives by faith in personal relationship with God, desire changes its direction so that God Himself is its object, thus becoming a living, motive expression of that trust, one that moves the believer to deeper contemplation and more comprehensive obedience. In short, human beings simply do desire, but what they desire is not determinative of their trust or distrust toward God; rather, trust or distrust finds expression in the impulse either to please God or self.

This personal disposition of trust or distrust shapes the totality of human experience; life is viewed either through the lens of faith or through that of disbelief. This is not, of course, to say that human persons operate solely with one or the other of these perspectives; on the contrary, ambivalence is naturally to be expected in the conflict between man as created and man as he

imagines himself to be. Nevertheless, experience is, by the rational motion, *interpreted* in each particular instance in accordance with either trust or distrust toward God. The eschatological punishment of the damned is not so much a Divine act as it is a particular human experience of God's Lordship. How a person experiences God's Lordship depends entirely upon that person's disposition toward God. This brings us to another important theme in Eriugena's epistemology: the impact of personal disposition (bias) upon experience.

### **The Impact of Personal Disposition on Experience**

In the *Treatise*, Eriugena succinctly describes the profound impact of bias upon the quality of experience: "Whatever pertains to the joy of the happy life is for [the damned] turned into the torment of unhappiness."<sup>17</sup> This point emerges throughout the Scot's eschatology. There is not one reality for the saints and another for the damned; on the contrary, it is the disposition of the individual person, the *a priori* of either trust or distrust toward God, which wholly determines *how* the person experiences God. This bias, either toward trust or toward distrust, ultimately makes the difference between Heaven and Hell. Eriugena fleshes out this point elsewhere in the *Treatise*:

Thus, while the system [of divine laws] itself is the same, remaining always unvarying in itself, for those who love it it is the glory of happiness, for those who hate it it is the reproach of punishments.... Their own envy torments the latter against will; their own love crowns the good will of the former.<sup>18</sup>

God's order, as we have already seen, manifests His reality and His Lordship. The difference in eschatological experience between the saints and the damned is one of personal disposition. Those who trust God come to love His Law (Psalm 119), while those who do not can only experience God's Lordship as underscoring their own inability to be God. The same

---

<sup>17</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, 122.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

experience that for the saint is a validation of God's constancy and trustworthiness is for the damned a bitter reminder of the futility that is sin's inevitable conclusion. Thus, the very same thing, God's Law, is experienced in two different ways on the basis of a single difference: the saints trust God, while the damned do not. Nor is this difference merely one which concerns humans; trust and distrust are *personal* concerns. The Scot extends this principle to angels as well when he says, "The Devil... constantly looks into the depth of perdition and eternal death and, separated by his arrogance, departs from the contemplation of truth."<sup>19</sup> While Eriugena's angelology *per se* is not our concern, suffice it to say that this brief passage underscores the importance of personal disposition. The Devil is "separated by his arrogance." This hubris stands in conflict with the reality of his nature as a creature, and thus he "departs from contemplation of the truth."

The commitment to either trust or distrust toward God shapes the way in which reason functions. Reason validates trust in God's goodness for the saints, but it also can serve the attempts of the damned to "rationalize" their distrust of God. Eriugena tells us that

reason... has uniformly been distributed to the wholeness [of human nature], which is neither increased nor diminished in any one; but that nature does not all receive the Divine Light in the same way. This inequality does not come about through the fault, envy, inadequacy of the Light Itself, since It is present to all, shines with equal brightness upon all, and flows out equally for all with an inexhaustible outpouring. But since not all have the same power of vision by which the Light of minds is perceived, it follows that some enjoy It more, others less, and still others are wholly excluded from It. Examples are the unclean spirits unwilling to turn toward It. Even their exclusion from participation in the truly existing Light does not result from the intellectual substance of which they were created by the Highest Good-- for otherwise they would be wholly reduced to nothing, since everything wholly deprived of participation in It lacks being. But insofar as they are contaminated by the irrational motions of their perverse will; they are excluded from participation in the True Light. They turn not to it but to themselves...<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 285.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 347.

The difference, then, is not that saints are more “rational” than sinners. The difference is that those who hate the Divine Light are “unwilling to turn to It.” Distrust is a vicious circle in that encounter with God by one who distrusts is painful. This pain is seen through the lens of distrust and interpreted by reason as validation of that distrust. This, as the Scot tells us, is neither the result of a difference in the way the damned have been created nor a difference in the way God discloses Himself to them. The difference is solely in the bias toward trust or distrust. It is this bias toward distrust which lies at the heart of what Eriugena means by “the irrational motions of their perverse will.” These motions are not “irrational” because they are illogical; they are “irrational” because the will is prior to reason. The person either believes or does not, and reason seeks to validate the person’s trust or distrust. In the end, when confronted with the *Visio Dei*, the damned do not suffer for any other reason than that “They turn not to it but to themselves.” Here again we see that the impulse toward self-definition and egocentrism culminates in futility and suffering. This brings us to one final theme in the Scot’s eschatology: the concept of epistemic responsibility.

### **Epistemic Responsibility**

The experience of the damned, as we have already seen, is the product of their distrust of God. This unwillingness to acknowledge God as God manifests itself through the operation of the passions, which actualize this distrust in particular sins. Reason occupies a place between the will and the passions, seeking to articulate a coherent narrative which justifies the actions toward which the passions move in service of the will. We might summarize this progression as beginning with trust or distrust, which reason then justifies through its narrative function. On the basis of the narrative which reason has articulated, the passions are the means by which personal disposition (the bias toward faith or disbelief, the province of the will) is actualized. While the

final confrontation with God as absolute reality does not finally overcome bias, it does create an internal contradiction which manifests itself in the experience of futility.

Reason, then, is the ground upon which either beatitude or damnation rests. Eriugena sees reason as contingent upon personal disposition, so that reason articulates a provisional narrative which is necessarily informed either by trust toward God or by distrust toward Him. Some persons trust God and others do not; the difference is tied to the mystery of personhood as the Divine Image. Reason, however, as informed either by trust or distrust, seeks to coherently integrate experience into its narrative. In the final *apocalypsis*, reason will either find that the account it has articulated in service of trust is validated, or it will find that the account it has set forth in service of distrust ends in futility. The account which reason articulates in service of trust or distrust has consequences for experience. Either the person experiences the final *apocalypsis* as joy and validation or as futility, either of which is contingent upon the narrative which reason has presented. Although it is ultimately the personal disposition to trust or distrust which decides the outcome, the soul moves toward that outcome through the instrumentality of reason, which directs how the passions actualize personal disposition in life.

Reason is the means by which the experience of the *Visio Dei* is evaluated by the soul as either joy or futility. The Scot tells us in the *Treatise* that “in that prison of his own wickedness in which he had enclosed himself, [the damned soul] will not avoid the inescapable punishment that consists in the darkness of eternal ignorance.”<sup>21</sup> Three things are significant in this passage. First, the sinner has “enclosed himself” in the “prison of his own wickedness.” The experience of Hell is of the sinner’s own making. Second, the punishment of Hell is “inescapable.” There is, as we have already remarked, a clear causal relation between sin and unhappiness. Third, this

---

<sup>21</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, 108.

punishment “consists in the darkness of eternal ignorance.” This is not to say that the damned do not *experience* the Truth; on the contrary, it is the *Visio Dei* which they find painful. The problem is that the damned cannot *know* the truth because their bias toward distrust of God eliminates the possibility of providing a coherent account of things as they truly are. For Eriugena, experience is not the province of reason but of sense. It is reason’s function to *interpret* sense data (which as an aggregate comprise experience) as taught by faith (or unfaith).

The Scot develops this idea elsewhere in the *Treatise*:

If there is no happiness except eternal life, and eternal life is knowledge of the truth, therefore there is no happiness except knowledge of the truth.... Thus is there is no unhappiness except eternal death: and eternal death is ignorance of the truth: then there is no unhappiness except ignorance of the truth.... Therefore each one is punished by his own obstinacy, which is in no way from God; and for this reason in no way should he be believed to be its author.<sup>22</sup>

The source of this torment, then, is “obstinacy,” which prevents reason from providing a coherent account of things as they truly are. The bias toward distrust of God (whether manifested as atheism or rebellion makes no difference) eliminates the possibility of reason presenting a coherent account because God *is* God. This bias imposes a premise which is counterfactual; reason cannot produce a true account from a false premise. Eriugena does not conceive of “knowledge of the truth” as an event of human discovery; on the contrary, reason by its nature articulates an account which seeks to integrate its premises with experience. “Knowledge of the truth” is the outcome of reason taught by faith in that faith provides reason with premises which are consonant with the way things truly are, beginning with the absolute reality of God.

Where reason has operated from false premises because of the bias toward distrust of God, it can never provide a fully satisfying account—only one which ends in futility. The experience of futility with which the Scot equates the suffering of the damned is finally the product of a

radical cognitive dissonance arising from reason operating on the basis of premises supplied by the bias toward distrust. The Scot describes this as follows:

At the end of this sensible world there will in the nature of things abide no wickedness, no corrupting death, nor any of that suffering which in this life still afflicts our fragile matter; for all things visible and invisible shall rest in their Causes. Only the lawless will of wicked men and angels, smitten with the memory and conscience of its evil ways shall abide in torment, and of those things which in this life it had lusted after, and in the future it had hoped to obtain, nothing will be found: “for in that day shall perish all their imaginations.” Their imaginations shall perish, he says, not their substances. But what are these imaginations of which he speaks? Surely the vain phantasies of those sensible things which in this life they long for with insensate desire, and which haunt the minds of those who through their wickedness have been blinded by irrational affections. And those who invent these phantasies shall themselves become very like them. For nowhere will they find the solidity of real truth, but will be tormented by empty dreams.<sup>23</sup>

In the final *apocalypsis*, the damned will collide with the absolute reality of God. They will experience futility through their perpetual inability to overthrow God. Finally, they will retreat from the intractable reality of the *Visio Dei* into radical alienation. The objects of their desires will be shown to be unattainable. Having denied *a priori* that God is God, they will not trust Him. This precludes the possibility of meaningful interpersonal relationship with Him; God can only be an unavoidable and hateful It. At the same time, having experienced futility in their quest for godhead, they can no longer entertain the illusion that they will have things as they wish. What remains, then, is the “torment” of “empty dreams.” In the end, the damned suffer from the conflict between their bias (as narrated through the instrumentality of reason) and things as they truly are, deprived not only of the joy which comes only from trusting God but also of the transitory pleasure of sin, which is no longer possible. They are trapped—by their own epistemic commitments—in the realm, not even of “what might have been” (they have experienced futility,

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>23</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon (The Division of Nature)*, 622.

which precludes this option) but of “what I wish had been.” Hell is eternity spent talking bitterly to oneself.

### **Summary and Implications**

At this point we shall take a moment to summarize what we have seen before proceeding to draw out the implications of our findings. We began by arguing that the interpretive act is central to Eriugena’s eschatology. We then touched upon Eriugena’s debt to Augustine. We argued that the Scot does not derive the subjectivist aspect of his eschatology from his Eastern sources but from Augustine, as we can see by the prominence of that eschatology as early as the *Treatise*. We then set forth several key themes in the Scot’s eschatology. First, we considered Eriugena’s conception of God as absolute reality. Although God cannot be known, He is real. No human act can change God or His place as Creator and Lord of the cosmos. Next we examined his portrayal of *apocalypsis* as confrontation. In the return of Christ, God’s Lordship will be clearly and universally manifest. Those who have awaited His coming will greet it with joy, while those who have denied His Godhead will collide with the reality that He is Lord. We then reflected on the Scot’s identification of eternal punishment with psychological conflict. The Scot’s conception of eternal punishment is not physical but psychological; it is experienced as futility. This led us to explication of a particular category in the Scot’s thought: what God has not made. We saw that Eriugena conceives of the evil will not as proper to God’s creation of humanity but as a creaturely invention. This in turn led us to consider Eriugena’s conception of the *mysterium iniquitatis*. The evil will defies causal explanation in that, although it causes sin, it is not in itself caused by anything outside the person. From there we moved to consideration of the passions as expressions of trust or distrust. We said that Eriugena sees the passions as the means by which reason seeks to enact and actualize the narrative it has formulated from the premises provided it by trust or distrust toward God. The passions are, for the Scot, the impetus toward action. We

then considered the impact of personal disposition upon experience. The role of reason is, as we have said, 1) to articulate a narrative which integrates its premise of trust or distrust toward God with experience and 2) to seek to actualize that narrative through the passions. Finally, we examined the concept of epistemic responsibility as a useful category for understanding the Scot's eschatology. The narrative which reason produces will in the end bring forth either joy or futility.

It now remains to consider the implications of our findings for the present study as a whole. We shall begin by suggesting a *caveat* to what we have seen. The Scot speaks at length of the evil will, but this does not in itself necessitate a synergistic reading of his thought. We have seen that Eriugena believes that in the eschaton being faced with the futility of evil desire is exactly what "Hell" means. It is precisely in the inability to do evil and to entertain the illusion that they can be God that the damned experience that futility. This suggests that the Scot has a somewhat different conception of the will than we might initially think. God's Lordship is in no way altered or compromised by any human action or attitude because He is Absolute Reality. All that is affected by human willing is the experience of the particular person. In this regard, Eriugena may have offered us a way to bridge the historical gap between the monergistic concern for proclaiming God's absolute Lordship (a concern the Scot clearly shares) and the synergistic concern for proclaiming His absolute goodness (also something Eriugena is deeply concerned to emphasize). We need also to remember that Eriugena's primary category for humanity as the Divine Image is that of *mystery*. Persons believe what they believe and do what they do, but only God knows *why*. Further, we have pointed out that the Scot deals with the passions in an unusual way. Because they are the means by which reason seeks to actualize the narrative it has formulated on the basis of premises supplied by either trust or distrust toward God, the passions are not determinative of either the will or reason. Finally, it is for the reasons that we have just

listed that the term “will” has only been used where the Scot uses it. In the scope of the present study, the terms “bias” and “personal disposition” have been more typical, and with good reason. It is not the concern of this study to set forth *why* human beings either trust or distrust God. Our concern is not to explain *why* human beings interpret things as they do but simply to underscore that they *do* interpret, that the interpretive act is universally human.

We need also to consider what we have seen with regard to the interpretive act as a central dynamic in Eriugena’s eschatology. At this point it should be clear that the Scot’s conception of the *Visio Dei* is informed at every turn by the human act of interpretation. Some souls will experience the glory of God joyfully, while others will experience the same glory as the frustration of their desires (futility). The difference is nothing other than one of interpretation arising from an underlying difference in personal disposition. In this context our description of the Scot’s epistemology as narrative and interpersonal is clearly substantiated. The function of reason, as we have seen, is to articulate a narrative on the basis of the premises supplied it by personal disposition (either trust or distrust toward God) which integrates those premises with experience. Reason, when confronted with the *Visio Dei*, need not alter its premises because premises are not the purview of reason but of bias (personal disposition). Reason then, seeks to *interpret* the experience of the *Visio Dei* in a way which accords with its premises (and, we might add, its narrative heretofore, which has functioned as substantiation for those premises).

At the same time, the bias which ultimately determines the way in which the particular soul will experience the *Visio Dei* is an *interpersonal* one: trust or distrust toward God. This bias is neither general nor an abstraction; on the contrary, it is a specific disposition with regard to God as Person. Because God is Creator and Lord, and because the created world as His handiwork manifests His order, the bias toward distrust of God skews the entire narrative which reason seeks to set forth. Nevertheless, reason continues to perform its narrative function, albeit

defectively, because narration is simply what reason does. We might go so far as to say that the function of reason in the service of distrust amounts to something like conspiracy theory as cosmology. On the other hand, reason taught by faith sets forth a narrative which is fundamentally in accord with things as they are because the personal disposition toward faith supplies premises which embrace the absolute reality of God along with His order as manifested through His acts as Creator and Lord. This is possible because in faith the particular person operates with the fundamental premise that God as Person is trustworthy.

We have also argued that Eriugena is fundamentally a realist, and to see that this is so we need only to consider the roles of epistemic responsibility and cognitive dissonance in his eschatology. We have repeatedly referred to the final *apocalypsis* in terms of collision and confrontation, and rightly so. It is precisely through encounter with the Returned Christ and the *Visio Dei* that the damned soul experiences futility. In the final *apocalypsis* the soul encounters the Lordship of God experientially. The bias toward trust or distrust is not determinative of this encounter's content; rather, that bias determines the *significance* which reason ascribes to that content. The damned soul will be convinced that God is God, but that soul can never be convinced that it should not be God. Therefore, the torment of Hell consists in the cognitive dissonance which arises because of the conflict between the damned soul's bias (distrust toward God, as well as the will to be God) and the experience that God *is* God. Reason addresses this dissonance through a narrative of futility. In this context, it should be clear that the Scot simply does not envision reason as a means by which the person accesses reality. Instead, reason provides a narrative which seeks to coherently integrate experience with its own bias. Experience (the purview of sense) is real, if limited. While experience is real, however, its significance is ambiguous. Bias sets forth fundamental premises from which reason articulates a narrative which ascribes significance to experience. The Scot never questions the reliability of experience, only

whether the human person has properly *interpreted* that experience. Further, reality is not contingent upon the human mind but upon the mind of God. (Things absolutely are as God thinks they are precisely because everything that exists is a manifestation of God's ideas.) Humans genuinely experience what they experience; the real question is whether they ascribe the proper significance to that experience. For Eriugena, there is more to reality than perception because God is God, and everyone will eventually know this to be true. *How* they experience this reality is not a product of the reality itself but of their own interpretation.

In sum, then, we have examined the Scot's eschatology with a view to his epistemology. We have found that his epistemology is realist in that the Scot does not make reality contingent upon the human mind but upon the mind of God, Who creates and orders the world. This rules out the argument that Eriugena should be considered a subjectivist. We have further found that the Scot's epistemology is interpersonal in that the premises from which reason constructs its narrative are fundamentally the product of either trust or distrust toward God as Person. This suggests a point of contact between the Scot's thought and that of, among others, Buber and Macmurray. We shall further develop this idea in chapter 7. We have also found that the Scot's epistemology is narrative in that the function of reason is to provide an account which seeks to coherently integrate experience with its own premises. This rules out the argument that the Scot is fundamentally Platonic in his epistemology in that reason cannot directly access the truth of things; it can only narrate. Reason is by its nature provisional in that the account of experience and its significance which it articulates on the basis of the premises supplied by personal disposition can never be truly disproved, only driven to the conclusion of futility.

In part 2, we have considered the Scot's epistemology of the person. We have examined his conception of the human being as the simultaneity of biological man, bestial man, and the Image of God. We have defined biological man in terms of human embodiedness as originally created

for the purpose of drawing all of creation into fellowship with God. Man's nature as biological begins to be restored in the believer through the process of sanctification. We have defined bestial man as the fallen, sinful condition of the human person which arises from the attempt at self-definition and the consequent inability to truly manifest the Divine Image, which presupposes that the human person as *Image* is defined from without rather than from within. We have defined the Image of God in terms of the destiny of fellowship with God. This destiny manifests itself in personhood, which entails relationality, uniqueness, and purpose. This simultaneity creates a basic uncertainty with regard to the human person in that the ultimate relation of these dimensions of the human person can only be fully clarified in the eschaton.

We have also considered Eriugena's conception of self-awareness as a synthesis of Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus. We saw that the Scot arrives finally at the conclusion that "the mind knows that it is, but not what it is." This conclusion moves the discussion of persons "knowing" one another out of the realm of epistemology in the usual sense and into the realm of encounter and trust.

We have further considered the Scot's general epistemology as it emerges in his views not just of epistemology itself, but also of language, theological method and, in this chapter, his eschatology. We have observed that Eriugena's general epistemology is realist, narrative, and interpersonal. Given the mystery which the Scot sees as fundamental to the human person, the caveats with which his general epistemology presents us apply *a fortiori* to the specific question of his epistemology of the human person.

The product of all this is a clear picture of how the Scot grapples with the problems inherent in human knowing, especially knowing other persons. In essence, what we have seen in part 2 is the philosophical expression of the Scot's own struggle to sort out what can be known from what cannot. In the end, there is precious little left on which to build. We can see the Scot's

epistemology, both in general and as it relates specifically to the human person, as a dismantling of the conceptual structures which rationalistic hubris seeks to build. In part 3, we shall examine how the Scot constructively addresses the concerns which we have examined in part 2.

### INTRODUCTION TO PART 3

In part 1 we considered Eriugena's patristic sources and his relation to Christian orthodoxy. We discovered there that the influence of Nicene and Chalcedonian categories is pervasive in his works. In part 2, we considered the Scot's epistemology with a view to what it tells us about his view of the human person. As we saw, the Scot's extensive reflection upon the nature of knowing as it relates to the human person has the effect of highlighting the ambiguities which lie at the heart of our lives as human persons. The human person by his very nature frustrates attempts at precise definition, whether this project of definition is attempted by himself or by other human persons. The ambiguous relation between the human person as Divine Image and as animal, the narrative and symbolic character of knowledge, and the centrality of the interpretive act all lend weight to Eriugena's thesis that the human person "knows that it is, but not what it is."<sup>1</sup> In light of the Scot's insight, we can sense that the Psalmist's question, "What is man?" (Psalm 16) is an unsettling one, one that frustrates the impulse of fallen humanity toward self-definition.

As we will see in part 3, rather than offering any sort of answer based upon introspection, Eriugena continually points the human person outward to God, neighbor, and indeed to creation as a whole. It is this fundamental condition of relatedness which is central to the Scot's conception of the human person. As we suggested in chapter 2, this relatedness, as an expression of the human destiny of fellowship with God, is constitutive of the human person and entails both the uniqueness of the particular person and the movement of the person toward communion

---

<sup>1</sup> See chapter 4, especially pp. 98–101.

with the other. Through these last chapters we will examine this relatedness from three different angles.

In chapter 7 we will examine the relationship between the interpersonal and the moral as it emerges in Eriugena's thought. Eriugena's conception of this relation is one in which both the particularity and the relationality of the human person are integral to the actualization of human personhood. It is precisely *relation* to the other *as other* that underlies the concept of morality, and it is through this relation, which affirms the uniqueness and distinction of particular persons, even as they are brought together in communion, that the human person becomes what God has designed him or her to be.

In chapter 8 we will consider the perichoretic character of Eriugena's eschatology. This dynamic of distinction-without-separation helps us to see that, both in an ontological sense and in a teleological one, uniqueness and relationality are each constitutive of the human person. At the same time, the fact that this dynamic emerges so vibrantly in the Scot's *eschatology* helps us to flesh out what we meant (in chapter 2) when we described the Triune Image as the human *destiny* of fellowship with God.

In chapter 9 we will reflect upon the Scot's eschatology in light of the concepts of intersubjectivity and dialogue. As we will see, Eriugena conceives of the *Visio Dei* as a sort of eternal dialogue, through which the human person lives in vital interpersonal relationship with God. This will require that we reflect as well upon the nature of communication. Additionally, we will see that Eriugena's conception of the eschaton suggests a way in which we can understand the mediation of Christ in interpersonal terms.

Through the course of part 3 we will see from these different vantage points how Eriugena speaks to the pervasive and visceral question of human identity. Having done this, we will then

take a little time to draw out some themes from our study as a whole and reflect upon their significance for the discussion of human personhood and for the Christian life.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### BEING KNOWN: THE INNER I-THOU

Eriugena's epistemology, especially as concerned with the human person, seems to raise as many questions as it answers. Through the course of part 2 we saw again and again that the constant tendency in the Scot's reflection on the human person is, even as he considers and develops in depth the information available, to confront his reader with how much cannot be known. This approach can be frustrating to the reader in search of direct, unambiguous, and comprehensive answers to standard anthropological questions; Eriugena is not concerned to offer that sort of answer.

Nevertheless, the process of exploring the Scot's epistemology has a salutary effect with regard to our project: he raises for us—in the most expansive, compelling, and rigorous terms—the problem of *identity*. The reader who takes seriously the Scot's exploration of what can be known, especially with regard to the human person, is driven to face how little solid information is actually available. As this happens, the natural and proper response of the reader is to ask—with visceral urgency—"Who, then, *am I*?" It is at this point that it is appropriate for us consider how Eriugena begins to offer not an exact solution (in the sense of a clear answer that resolves all concerns, clears up all ambiguities, and eliminates the role of faith) but a way forward, along which this question can be substantively addressed.

In order to develop the implications of the Scot's thought on this problem, we shall engage three Twentieth Century thinkers: Martin Buber, John Macmurray, and Paul Tournier. As we bring Eriugena into dialogue with these thinkers we will see that a substantial commonality

emerges in how they view the human person, one which will be helpful to us as we consider the Scot's ideas in particular. Buber helps us to develop the implications of the Scot's words in the context of *interpersonal encounter*. Macmurray's insights lead us further to consider the specifically *moral character* of this encounter. Tournier indicates how the Scot's words suggest an actual way in which we can *address the problem of identity*. After we have done this, we shall then revisit an observation we made in chapter 6; namely, that the Scot diverges from Maximus in the matter of *ascesis*. As we have earlier observed, Eriugena is concerned with obedience to God's commands rather than with *ascesis per se*. Our study through the course of this chapter will suggest one possible reason why this is so. Finally, we shall conclude the chapter with the implications of our findings for our project as a whole.

But at the outset we should be clear about the purpose of this chapter (and this third Part) within the entire project. This project seeks to show that the theology of John Scottus Eriugena is well suited to provide a "unifying vocabulary" between the phenomenology of modern Anti-Cartesian philosophers and the thoroughly Trinitarian account of personhood of contemporary theologians. In part 2 we drew out an account of human personhood implied by the Scot's Trinitarian and eschatologically-oriented theology. This links Eriugena closely (but not identically) to the insights of theologians such as John Zizioulas. Now we must see how this account of personhood is consistent with the concerns and accounts of philosophers such as Buber and Macmurray, and also to see how Eriugena's theology fosters a helpful Christian theological appropriation of their philosophical observations and insights.

An obvious way to begin, then, is to see how both Eriugena and modern Anti-Cartesians appreciate and deal with the same key problem, because if they do this, then we are justified in comparing and contrasting their responses. This problem is the *erosion of the boundary between self and other*. In Eriugena, we can see this by recalling, first, that he found the concepts of

relation and particularity as being grounded in, respectively, reason and interior sense. One way in which sin manifests itself in fallen humanity is in the subjugation of reason and interior sense to the exterior sense, which arises from the human attempt at self-definition that constitutes sin.<sup>1</sup> This subjugation causes a radical *disordering* of the way in which the human person conceives of his relation to everything else. Because the exterior sense has usurped the priority of interior sense, the sinful human person sees particularity from a skewed perspective. Because of sin, the exterior sense usurps the priority of reason; therefore, reason wrongly relates particulars to one another.

Specifically in terms of persons and their relationship, this means that, in fallen humanity, the boundary between self and other has been catastrophically compromised. We can see the contrast between the saint and the sinner in terms of how the self deals with the other very clearly in this passage (the saint is called the “wise man”):

The form by which evil seduces those whom it destroys is good, since it is the phantasy of a good: but the evil itself is absolutely evil and is not created by any good, for it is the contrary of every good. And if anyone examines closely the nature of the phantasies by which evil is painted, for in her naked self she cannot appear, being without form and deformed and shameful and without cause, we will see for himself that it is altogether good.

And this can be clearly shown by the following argument: let us suppose that two men, of whom the one is wise and by no means tickled or stung by the goads of avarice, and the other is foolish and greedy, pierced and torn by the goads of his perverse desire, are brought into one place and a vessel offered them made of pure gold and set with the most precious jewels, endowed with the loveliest form, fit for the use of a king. Both, the wise man and the greedy one, see it, both receive through the corporeal sense the phantasy of the vessel itself, both store the phantasy in the memory, both bring thought to bear upon it. But the wise man by a simple mental process entirely refers its beauty, the phantasy of which he ponders within himself, to the glory of the Creator of natures: no enticement of cupidity steals upon him, no poison of greed infects the purpose of his pure mind, no lust contaminates it. With the greedy one on the other hand it is altogether different. Directly he has absorbed the phantasy of the vessel he blazes with the fire of cupidity, he is consumed, he is

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. chapter 3 for our discussion of the nature and consequences of the Fall and the nature of fallen humanity as bestial.

poisoned, he dies: for instead of referring the beauty of that nature and of its phantasies to the glory of Him Who said, 'Gold is mine and silver is mine,' he plunges and is swallowed up in the most stinking swamp of cupidity. Notice that for both the phantasy of the same vessel was good and beautiful. But whereas in the sense of the wise man it is simple and natural and free from all evil, in the greedy one it is a double phantasy, compounded with the contrary evil of cupidity, which is mixed with it and given form by it and coloured by it so as to seem good, whereas it is the most poisonous evil.

Evil, then, is not implanted in man's nature, but established in the perverse and irrational motion of the free and rational will. And it appears that this motion is not within human nature but from outside, from a bestial intemperance, and by the subtle devising of the ancient enemy it is tinged and mingled with good so as to deceive the lustful affections of the carnal senses, and thus destroy them by death.<sup>2</sup>

The exterior sense, then, is not inherently evil but rather disordered; when it occupies its proper place it conveys to interior sense, reason, and intellect the information through which God's handiwork in creation is recognized. The beauty of the golden vessel is unequivocally good, but the personal disposition of the one who gazes upon it determines whether that beauty excites doxology or concupiscence.

This passage needs also to be considered from another angle. In dealing with the issue of personal disposition as trust or distrust toward God, it is equally valid to think of that disposition as either theocentric (which manifests itself in trust) or as egocentric (which manifests itself as distrust). It is precisely because the bias toward distrust of God is egocentric that the question of God's order is considered to be irrelevant. Even the impulse toward self-abnegation (as in the case of suicide) is egocentric in that it consists in presuming to do away with oneself and thus exert a negative sort of self-determination. The impulses toward self-deification and self-abnegation are two sides of the same coin, and both are expressions of the disordered person. Each is a product of the eroded boundary between self and other.

---

<sup>2</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon, Liber IV*, ed. Édouard A. Jeauneau, with the assistance of Mark A. Zier, trans. John J. O'Meara and I. P. Sheldon-Williams, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae 13* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1995), 203.

It is remarkable to realize that, a thousand years later, Buber will identify the same problem and see it expressed in the same two ways:

What has to be given up is not the I, as most mystics suppose: the I is indispensable for any relationship, including the highest, which always presupposes an I and You. What has to be given up is not the I but the false drive for self-affirmation which impels man to flee from the unreliable, unsolid, unlasting, unpredictable, dangerous world of relation into the having of things.<sup>3</sup>

Buber's words are pregnant when considered in the context of Eriugena's earlier illustration of the golden vessel. The possibilities are either interpersonal relationship with God (theocentrism, out of which flows doxology) or the "false drive for self-affirmation" (which is egocentrism in a nutshell, and which brings forth concupiscence, which seeks fulfillment in "the having of things"). Buber's description of the "world of relation" as "unreliable, unsolid, unlasting, unpredictable" and "dangerous" clearly points to egocentrism's quest for stability, security and, to sum it up in a word, *control*. This egocentrism manifests itself, as we have already observed, in two basic ways, either as self-deification or as self-abnegation. In order to see how this happens, we shall now turn to another insight from Buber and consider how it illuminates the problem of the eroded boundary between self and other.

Buber observes, in terms that ring harmoniously with Eriugena's conception of reason as narrative, that: ". . . it is the lofty art of thought that it can paint a reliable and practically credible picture of the world."<sup>4</sup> He goes on to describe thought as metaphorically painting two murals on opposite walls of a tunnel, at which the self periodically looks.<sup>5</sup> These pictures portray all of reality, but in different ways. The person makes sense of the world by looking at one or the other of these pictures. Buber then says:

---

<sup>3</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1950), 126.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

. . . when man is for once overcome by the horror of alienation and the world fills him with anxiety . . . he sees that the I is contained in the world, and that there is really no I, and thus the world cannot harm the I, and he calms down; or he sees that the world is contained in the I, and that there really is no world, and thus the world cannot harm the I, and he calms down.<sup>6</sup>

We see the twin impulses toward self-deification and self-abnegation clearly described here. The impulse toward self-deification finds expression as the I that contains the world, while the impulse toward self-abnegation manifests itself in the non-existent I contained in the world.

We may see that the erosion of the boundary between self and other is a pervasive problem in how widely we find both self-deification and self-abnegation. Self-deification expresses itself in philosophy through the solipsism of Descartes as well as the egoism of Nietzsche. It emerges in interpersonal interaction as oppression and exploitation. It emerges hermeneutically in deconstruction. The common thread between all of these is the fact that each considers everything from a perspective which places the self at the center of reality and attempts to subsume all within the self. The impulse toward self-abnegation also finds broad expression. In behavioral psychology, the person is nothing more than the sum of behavior. In interpersonal interaction, self-abnegation expresses itself as codependency, in which the self disappears into the other. The common thread is that each of these depends upon the negation of the self. We can see this erosion of the boundary between self and other described in another way in Eriugena's example of the golden vessel. It is noteworthy that the wise man "refers its beauty . . . to the glory of the Creator," meaning that he does not seek to possess the vessel. This is a fundamental affirmation of the vessel's otherness; it belongs to someone, therefore the wise man does not seek to own it. On the other hand, the "cupidity" of the "greedy" one is simply the desire to own the vessel and thus subsume it into himself. In light of what we have observed thus far, we might

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

express it this way: The greedy man observes the vessel from the disposition of distrust toward God and perceives its beauty as something to be taken into himself, i.e. as a means toward self-deification.

As we have earlier observed, Eriugena argues that neither self-deification nor self-abnegation is finally possible; in the eschaton, each of these culminates in futility. The self can neither be God nor cease to exist. Each is a false—and therefore ultimately unsatisfying—solution to the problem of identity. Nevertheless, the problem of identity *is* both real and urgent; “Who am I?” is a universally human question. We have also observed that the Scot’s epistemology, both in general and specifically with regard to the human person, intensifies the reality and urgency of this concern.

How, then, can this question be addressed? The Scot offers a possible way forward when he alludes to:

. . . the walk of the Lord God in Paradise, that is, human nature as He had created it in His own image, which he never abandoned nor gave over destruction, in which after a mystic and spiritual manner He is always walking, examining the heart and the loins of each, enquiring in an intelligible voice after the causes of our transgression, and rebuking and correcting us with a mercy greater than the justice of His vengeance.<sup>7</sup>

This brief passage opens the possibility of addressing the question of identity in terms of encounter with God. We will now examine three aspects of the encounter between humanity and God in dialogue with the thought of Buber, Macmurray and Tournier. We will consider Buber’s insights with regard to the nature of interpersonal encounter as a way of more fully developing the point that encounter with God is necessarily interpersonal. We will then consider the moral dimension implied in the Scot’s remark that God is continually “examining the heart and the loins of each” in light of Macmurray’s reflection upon the relation of personhood to morality.

---

<sup>7</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, *Liber IV*, 231.

Finally, we will offer Tournier as showing how this moral encounter actually serves as a way of actualizing personal identity.

### **From “I-It” to “I-Thou”**

Martin Buber begins his *I and Thou* with the premise that there are two “basic words.” A human being speaks one or the other of these to whatever he encounters on each occasion when he encounters that being. These are, “I-It,” which signifies that the speaker perceives the being as an object and a means to another end, and “I-Thou” which signifies that the being is an end in itself. While Buber believed that the I-Thou relation could apply even to plants and stones (he had a profoundly formative experience while gazing at a piece of mica) it is not our concern to defend this aspect of his thought. The concept of I-Thou relation is clearly germane and useful in the discussion of interpersonal relation, and it is to this context that we shall restrict our application of his ideas. It is appropriate that we do this for three reasons: First, our study is concerned specifically with the human *person*. While Buber believed the I-Thou relation to extend to impersonal objects, it is not our concern to justify this belief. Second, the bulk of *I and Thou* does in fact deal with *interpersonal encounter*. It is thus fitting that we consider his observations concerning the I-Thou encounter between persons within this study. Third, while Buber’s belief does have pantheistic overtones, this does not in itself imply or entail that any employment of his ideas culminates in pantheism. As we shall see in chapter 8, the Scot’s rigorous and intentional application of Trinitarian ontology to his eschatology allows him to speak of union and also of distinction with equal robustness. Indeed, it is precisely in this regard that Buber’s ideas benefit from dialogue with those of Eriugena. As a point of entry, we will consider a description of the I-Thou encounter:

When I confront a human being as my You and speak the basic word I-You to him, then he is no thing among things nor does he consist of things. He is no longer He or She, limited by other Hes and Shes, a dot in the world grid of space and time, nor a condition that can be experienced and described, a loose bundle of named qualities.

Neighborless and seamless, he is You and fills the firmament. Not as if there were nothing but he; but everything else lives in his light. Even as a melody is not composed of tones, nor a verse of words, nor a statue of lines—one must pull and tear to turn a unity into a multiplicity—so it is with the human being to whom I say You. I can abstract from him the color of his hair or the color of his speech or the color of his graciousness; I have to do this again and again; but immediately he is no longer You.<sup>8</sup>

Buber begins by describing the I-Thou encounter in terms of priority; in the encounter, the one to whom the speaker says “You” takes precedence over whatever else is perceptible. In short, to say “You” in the sense Buber intends, what he would consider to be an authentic “You,” means that the one addressed commands the speaker’s complete attention. Further, the one addressed is a Gestalt; he can be neither analyzed nor dissected, but only welcomed. Dissection falls within the purview of “It.” To say only “It” to another person is cognate with the desire of the greedy man in Eriugena’s example of the golden bowl. The greedy man seeks to subsume the other into himself; in the same way, the denial of another’s I is a manifestation of the impulse toward self-deification. What is addressed only as It can be subsumed because its otherness as a You has been denied. Buber recognizes that not every encounter is of the I-Thou variety; human persons alternately say “You” or “It” to the same person depending upon the context, and this is not necessarily a bad thing. Buber makes this clear when he says, “In all the seriousness of truth, listen: without It a human being cannot live. But whoever lives only with that is not human.”<sup>9</sup> The problem, then, is not that human persons say It to other persons; to consider another person in these terms is an aspect of human relationship. It is what we call knowing “about” another person, and this sort of knowing is a real and significant part of the relationship. The problem is that human persons content themselves with “It” instead of saying “You” when it is fitting to do

---

<sup>8</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, 59.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

so. To always say “It” to other human persons is to reduce them to objects of study. Buber explains,

The man who has acquired an I and says I-It assumes a position before things but does not confront them in the current of reciprocity. He bends down to examine particulars under the objectifying magnifying glass of close scrutiny, or he uses the objectifying telescope of distant vision to arrange them as mere scenery.<sup>10</sup>

In always saying “It” to other humans, the speaker closes the possibility of encountering them as what they truly are, as persons. This is a *categorical* denial of their true nature as beings to whom one should say “You.” To deny another person the “You” is to consider their capacity to say “I” as unreal. In short, to deny the “You” amounts to egocentrism.

This denial stands in fundamental contradiction to the relational nature of human beings. To always say “It” is possible, but to do so isolates the speaker. This also prevents the actualization of his own nature as a relational being, a person. This is why Buber argues that “whoever lives only with [It] is not human.”<sup>11</sup> At the same time, the one addressed cannot be merely used as a means toward actualization of the I. Buber states flatly that, “The You encounters me by grace—it cannot be found by seeking.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, the quest to use the other as a means to actualization of the I is futile. The You cannot be found, only awaited and welcomed. This need for the You as the one who actualizes the I is universally human.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, a human person cannot meet this need on his or her own terms; the nature of the I-Thou relation precludes this possibility. To be human, then, is to wait for the You. Buber explains,

It is not as if a child first saw an object and then entered into some relationship with that. Rather, the longing for relation is primary, the cupped hand into which the being that confronts us nestles; and the relation to that, which is a wordless anticipation of

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>13</sup> We will consider how the Scot envisions the actualization of the I in chapter 9.

saying You, comes second. . . In the beginning is the relation—as the category of being, as readiness, as a form that reaches out to be filled, as a model of the soul; the *a priori* of relation; *the innate You*. In the relationships through which we live, the innate You is realized in the You we encounter; that this, comprehended as a being we confront and accepted as exclusive, can finally be addressed with the basic word, has its ground in the *a priori* of relation.<sup>14</sup>

This universally human condition of waiting entails, as we said, the You who actualizes the I. We reflected in chapter 2 upon the significance of the Triune Image as a useful category in our discussion of the human person. We observed that the Triune Image implies the concepts of uniqueness and relationality. In light of Buber’s comments we can see that the Triune Image serves as a useful theological category in that it provides a meta-narrative which encompasses—within a specifically Christian context—what Buber has observed. Buber has already argued that: “What has to be given up is not the I, as most mystics suppose: the I is indispensable for any relationship, including the highest, which always presupposes an I and You.”<sup>15</sup> At the same time, Buber recognizes the other’s importance to the actualization of the I in his discussion of “the innate You.” He describes this actualization as follows:

Man becomes an I through a You. What confronts us comes and vanishes, relational events take shape and scatter, and through these changes crystallizes, more and more each time, the consciousness of the constant partner, the I-consciousness. To be sure, for a long time it appears only woven into the relation to a You, discernible only as that which reaches for but is not a You; but it comes closer and closer to the bursting point until one day the bonds are broken and the I confronts its detached self for a moment like a You—and then it takes possession of itself and henceforth enters into relations in full consciousness.<sup>16</sup>

In short, the actualization of the I happens precisely because the You is *other*. In the encounter with the You, the I becomes aware that the You is not the totality of things. While the You occupies, as we saw earlier, the center of the one’s attention who says “You,” the speaker

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 80.

nevertheless becomes aware that the You is not totality precisely because he says “You” to it. Out of this comes the awareness that someone must be the one who is saying “You,” and in this moment the I is actualized. It is important that Buber says that the I “confronts its detached self *like a You*” (emphasis mine). When the I confronts itself as an It, the outcome is altogether different. Buber explains,

When a man does not test the *a priori* of relation in the world, working out and actualizing the innate You in what he encounters, it turns inside. Then it unfolds through the unnatural, impossible object, the I—which is to say that it unfolds where there is no room for it to unfold. Thus the confrontation within the self comes into being, and this cannot be relation, presence, the current of reciprocity, but only self-contradiction.<sup>17</sup>

The I cannot be properly addressed as “It.” To do so is a contradiction; it is to say “I am not I, but It.” Because this is so, the only proper way in which the I can address itself is “like a You.” In other words, the actualization of the I means the *recognition* of one’s own *uniqueness* and *relationality*, i.e. personhood. The nature of this encounter precludes self-analysis; analysis is within the purview of It. Nevertheless, the I comes to be profoundly aware of its own reality even though it cannot know itself as an object. The I remains perpetually a mystery; to encounter the I “like a You” is to embrace this mystery, while seeking the I as an It is an exercise in futility. Buber conceives of the I, then, in a fashion which shares a great deal with the Scot’s view. To paraphrase Eriugena, the I knows *that* it is, but not *what* it is.

At the same time, this awareness also includes the recognition of the You as fundamentally other. It is precisely the otherness of the You which catalyzes the actualization of the I. It is proper, then, for the I to actively *affirm* the otherness of the You as good. Without You there cannot be any I in the fullest sense. Out of this awareness the affirmation of the You takes the form of care and concern for the You. Buber says it this way: “Love is responsibility of an I for a

You.”<sup>18</sup> To fully affirm the otherness of the You—and the goodness of that otherness—entails responsibility. In order to better understand the character of interpersonal responsibility, it is now fitting that we turn to the ideas of John Macmurray.

### **Morality and the Interpersonal**

In Macmurray, we find the idea—richly developed—that the interpersonal is intrinsically moral and vice versa. He argues that: “The moral rightness of an action . . . has . . . its ground in the relation of persons.”<sup>19</sup> For Macmurray this is so for at least two reasons. First, Macmurray shares Buber’s conviction that the actualization of the person occurs through interpersonal relation. Second, this actualization is actually intrinsic to the nature and purpose of interpersonal relation itself. Macmurray explains, “The inherent objective—the reality of the relationship—is the full mutuality of fellowship in a common life, in which alone the individual can realize himself as a person.”<sup>20</sup> Because this is so, Macmurray contends that: “a morally right action is an action which intends community.”<sup>21</sup> This is not to say that the other can be merely utilized as a means to the actualization of the person; Macmurray says something much like Buber on this point:

Self-interested relationship excludes the mutuality it seeks to extort. If it succeeds in its intention, it produces the appearance of mutuality, not the reality. It can produce, at most, a reciprocity of co-operation which simulates, even while it excludes, the personal unity which it seeks to achieve.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>19</sup> John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), 116.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

In other words, “mutuality” depends upon the affirmation of the other precisely as other. To use another person is, to express it in Buber’s terms, to say “You are not You, but It.” The problem in this is that, as we have seen, the It cannot actualize the personhood of the speaker; this requires a You. Further, apart from this rather pragmatic concern, community (perhaps not a synonym for Buber’s “I-Thou encounter,” but certainly a similar idea) is constituted by love for the other. Macmurray explains,

The relation between [the members of a community] is positively motivated in each. . . Each, that is to say, acts, and therefore thinks and feels for the other and not for himself. . . it is a unity of persons. Each remains a distinct individual; the other remains really other. Each realizes himself in and through the other. Such a positive unity of persons is the self-realization of the personal.<sup>23</sup>

Again, we see that the actualization of the person is dependent upon the other. Positive motivation (Macmurray’s term for love) entails concern “for the other and not for himself.” At the same time, “Each remains a distinct individual; the other remains really other.” The nature of love as self-giving, then, depends upon (1) an other, to whom the self can be given, and (2) a real self to give. To deny the other’s personhood is to eliminate the possibility of giving, because giving presupposes a real going out from oneself. If there is no other, there is no “out” to which anything can go from oneself. This is the terminus of self-deification. At the same time, to deny one’s own personhood is to repudiate the gift itself, which is the terminus of self-abnegation. Within the context of the I-Thou encounter, neither self-abnegation nor self-deification is possible. Self-abnegation is not possible because “I” must say “You,” while self-deification is not possible because it precisely to the *other* that I say “You.”

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 158.

This mutuality of the I and the You is ubiquitous, and it has consequences for all concerned. What one person does affects other persons; there are no “victimless crimes.”

Macmurray says it this way:

The ‘I’ and the ‘You’ are both constituted by the personal relation. The intention of one particular agent is therefore inherently related to the intention of the Other, and not merely accidentally. Consequently, the morality of an action is inherent in action itself . . .<sup>24</sup>

Because this is so, the interpersonal is moral and the moral is interpersonal; even if they might conceivably be distinguishable from one another, the two are never properly separable. To say “You,” to affirm the personhood of the other, is to assume moral responsibility. At the very same time, however, to think in moral terms is to presuppose a You. In other words, “right” is not right for any other reason than that it is concerned with actualizing and affirming the personhood of the other to the fullest. To think in terms of right, according to Macmurray, is to immediately acknowledge an implicit You. This has clear and important implications for Eriugena’s mention of

the walk of the Lord God in Paradise, that is, human nature as He had created it in His own image, which he never abandoned nor gave over destruction, in which after a mystic and spiritual manner He is always walking, examining the heart and the loins of each, enquiring in an intelligible voice after the causes of our transgression, and rebuking and correcting us with a mercy greater than the justice of His vengeance.<sup>25</sup>

In light of what we have seen thus far, this passage is pregnant with implications. In the “walk of the Lord God in... human nature” we can see that God is present to all human beings. In the Scot’s view, even in the eschaton those who are alienated are self-alienated. God is present to humanity because He has made humanity for fellowship with Himself; the Fall neither alters nor thwarts the destiny of those who persist in rebellion. God is before them; alienation is not a

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>25</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, *Liber IV*, 231.

product of God's absence but of the personal disposition of distrust even in the face of the *Visio Dei*. In the Scot's statement that God "never abandoned" human nature, we can see the expression of God's love and faithfulness to humanity, which entails His assumption of moral responsibility qua humanity. God is not only present to all humanity but persistently loving in His disposition toward each human person. In the statement that God is continually "examining the heart and the loins of each," we see the moral dimension brought into the discussion. Precisely because God speaks to humanity in *moral* terms, He is speaking in *personal* terms; the moral is an expression of the personal. In this moral encounter, then, the way opens for the fullness of personal encounter, through which the I is actualized. As we observed earlier, Eriugena conceives of sin as disordering the human person in such a way that human perception of the boundary between self and other is radically compromised. Through moral encounter with the human person, God begins to remedy this problem. In order to flesh out how this actualization takes place, we shall now turn to Paul Tournier.

### **Moral Encounter and Personal Identity**

Buber poses the question of identity pointedly in these words: "How is a being to collect itself as long as the mania of his detached I-hood chases it ceaselessly around an empty circle?"<sup>26</sup> Tournier describes essentially the same problem when he remarks that "introspection has failed completely as a means of discovering the person."<sup>27</sup> The question of identity—specifically, in what way and to what degree the human person can be known to other human persons, or even to himself—is a central concern in Tournier. He shares with Buber, the Scot, and Gregory of Nyssa, as we shall see in a moment, the conviction that the identity of the human person is not finally

---

<sup>26</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, 108.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Tournier, *The Meaning of Persons* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 67.

nor comprehensively knowable. Further, the pursuit of self-knowledge is not only futile but actually detrimental. Tournier says this:

Self-examination is an exhausting undertaking. The mind becomes so engrossed in it that it loses its normal capacity for relationship with the world and with God. Locked into a narrow round of endless and sterile self-analysis, the person becomes shrunk and deformed, while false problems multiply *ad infinitum*.<sup>28</sup>

Introspection, then, is an endless loop. Furthermore, the process of introspection draws attention away from what truly matters: “relationship with the world and with God.” Like Buber, Tournier sees the process of introspection as leading to distortion and erosion of the self. What matters is not that the human person knows himself (which is impossible) but that he is aware of and respects the boundaries, the outer limits, of his own person. As this awareness and respect come into play, the groundwork is laid for right relation to the other. It is this differentiation of the other—as person—from the self, and the accompanying delimitation of the self, which forms the basis of the moral. As the moral concern becomes explicit, the status of the other as person, as “You,” opens the way for the actualization of the I. At the same time, the actualization of the I is contingent upon that I recognizing and affirming 1) the otherness of the You and, 2) the element of mystery which inheres in the You precisely as You, and not as It. This element of mystery echoes what we have already observed in Eriugena, and this connection serves to buttress a comment we made in an earlier chapter; namely, that all interpersonal relationships are based upon trust.<sup>29</sup> In light of the element of mystery which inheres in the person, it cannot be otherwise.

Tournier discusses this simultaneity of encounter and mystery in terms of the distinction between what he calls the “person” and the “personage.” In short, the “person” is the identity, the

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. chapter 5 for our discussion of trust as the basis of interpersonal relationships.

comprehensive “who” of the particular person. The “personage,” on the other hand, is the way in which the person is manifested through action. Tournier describes this distinction this way:

The person, pure and unvarnished, will always escape us. Doubtless only God knows it. I can never grasp the true reality, of myself or of anybody else, but only an image; a fragmentary and deformed image, an appearance: the ‘personage’ . . . There is thus a strange relationship between the personage and the person; they are linked together, and yet they remain distinct. I can approach the person only through that image which at one and the same time allows me glimpses of it and also tends to hide it from me, reveals as well as conceals it. And then man is not static, but living, each consultation gives me a fresh image of him. An undemonstrable yet indisputable intuition tells me that there is unity and continuity in him even though the successive images seem discontinuous, diverse, and even contradictory. An urge towards synthesis impels me to seek the common factor in them, to pass from the lantern slide to the cinematograph film, to comprehend man in his incessant movement.<sup>30</sup>

We have earlier mentioned the assertion of behavioral psychology (or, at least, of certain streams within that school) that there is no “personality,” only behavior. Tournier presents us here with a contrasting view in that he believes the person to be that element which underlies and is the continuity between the acts which constitute the personage. The personage is the habitual element which manifests the person through action. Tournier puts it this way: “All that is mechanical in man, every physical or psychical phenomenon, is of the order of the personage, and not of the person.”<sup>31</sup> The habitual element, the personage, is not limited to external action; Tournier holds that the mind has habits as well.

With this distinction, we can now clarify in what sense we speak of the personage manifesting the person through “action.” The initial impression might be that thought is one thing and action another, but for Tournier thought is a subset of action. Thought is something that the mind *does*. That being said, it makes sense that the mind has habits. In this sense, then, the distinction between person and personage is not the differentiation between thought and

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 23.

action but between intention and habit. This habitual aspect of the mind has obvious implications for the function of reason as the interpretive act. Interpretation is not purely a product of intention; habit also has a part to play. We will pick up this thread again shortly. The following is a concise summary of Tournier's view of the distinction between person and personage: "The person is the original creation, the personage is the automatic routine."<sup>32</sup>

As we have just seen, Tournier distinguishes between the person and the personage as the intentional versus the habitual within the human being. This raises a question: how does Tournier conceive the relation between the two? Three particular points emerge in Tournier's description of this relation.

First, the person and the personage are distinguishable but not separable; humans are integrated creatures. Tournier says that "we must resign ourselves to this indissoluble connection between the person and its personage—or rather, between the person and its personages. For we are not only one personage throughout our lives; we are innumerable personages."<sup>33</sup> In other words, the person will manifest itself through different (and even seemingly discontinuous) actions, but the person nevertheless underlies the personage at every turn. The seeming discontinuities are not indications that the person is absent, nor are they necessarily indications that the person has changed. They may merely be indications that the person is more complex than had previously been thought.

Second, the person simply does manifest itself through action; humans do what they do because they are who they are. Tournier offers the example of a masquerade party, suggesting that people often disclose a great deal about who they are by the costumes they choose and by how they behave while enjoying the anonymity of the masks which conceal their faces. He

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 39.

observes that “by a curious paradox, the costume and mask, instead of hiding the person, actually display it with greater truth.”<sup>34</sup> In the case of such anonymous actions, while the identity (in the sense of name, social network, etc.) of the person is concealed, the personage more clearly discloses what kind of person is beneath the mask even as the mask conceals which person is acting. The personage reveals the person because the personage is habitual; it is automatic, and thus by definition unintentional. Such actions cannot by their very nature be calculated to evoke a particular effect because they are unintentional. Tournier develops this idea further when he says, “The personage we put on is not as artificial as we think. It expresses our real person all the more faithfully because we are less on our guard with respect to it.”<sup>35</sup> The personage manifests the person through action precisely because the actions of the personage are not calculated.

Third, the personage affects the person; human identity is shaped by human action. While the personage is habitual, it is at least to some degree within the capacity of intention to form *new* habits. Tournier says this: “Our personage moulds our person. The external role we play transforms us constantly, exerting its influence even on the deepest and most intimate recesses of the person.”<sup>36</sup> In other words, what a person does is not only a manifestation of the person but also an influence upon the person. We have spoken repeatedly of ambivalence as ubiquitous in fallen humanity. The tension between our creation as biological and our condition as bestial, as well as the simultaneity of both with our destiny of fellowship with God (our creation in the Divine Image) manifests itself in the complexity of the human person. In this sense, then, the question rightly arises which aspect of this complexity is being manifested in any particular

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 80.

action of the personage. This question cannot be categorically answered for all actions of the personage; the different elements within the dynamic and complex simultaneity of the person simply will emerge sooner or later. Nevertheless, the habits through which the personage manifests the person also serve to shape the relation of the elements within the simultaneity of the person.

Tournier conceives the relation between person and personage, as we have seen, in terms of a certain mutuality between the two. His position marks a path between the extremes of determinism (in which the personage is *purely* a manifestation of the person, with no mutuality between the two) and self-abnegation (in which there is no person, only the personage). Tournier's thesis is that we become the kind of people who would act in the way that we do. Action from the ambivalence is the only kind of action for fallen humans. With that being said, our actions matter because they influence who we are, and the attempt to act only from pure motives is naïve. Tournier argues that

instead of turning our backs on the outside world and concentrating on our own inner life, where the true nature of the person always eludes us, we must look outwards, towards our neighbor, towards God. We must boldly undertake the formation of personage for ourselves, seeking to form it in accordance with our sincerest convictions, so that it will express and show forth the person we are.<sup>37</sup>

This still leaves open the question with which we began, "Who am I?" What does "the person we are" mean? Tournier's answer to this question is both intriguing and germane to our examination of Eriugena. We have repeatedly pointed to the Scot's conviction that the human person is not humanly knowable; Tournier shares this conviction. At the same time, Tournier

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 81.

builds on this idea which serves to illuminate Eriugena's remarks about "the walk of the Lord God in . . . human nature."<sup>38</sup> Tournier says this:

With its characteristic realism, the biblical revelation turns us from the utopian dream of a life exempt from all appearance and all protection. For the efforts we were vainly making to isolate our person completely from our personage it substitutes a quite different idea: that of accepting the clothing which God himself gives us, of choosing our personage—the personage God wills us to have.<sup>39</sup>

Tournier's answer (which resonates with the Scot's ideas) is that, while the person is not finally knowable, the more important point is to become the *kind* of persons who, rather than seeking to self-define, embrace definition by their Creator. This process takes the practical form of obedience.

### Summary and Implications

We have previously noted that, while Eriugena is profoundly influenced by Maximus the Confessor, the Scot diverges from Maximus in the matter of *ascesis*. In light of what we have seen in this chapter, it is now appropriate to revisit this fact and consider its implications. Eriugena speaks of obedience to God's commands, but not of *ascesis* per se. In this chapter we have presented a reading of the Scot which focuses on "the walk of the Lord God in . . . human nature," suggesting that this idea implies a moral encounter between God and the human person. We have seen in our examination of Macmurray that the moral is the interpersonal and vice versa. We have also considered Buber's idea that the I comes to actualization through a You. We finally examined Tournier's conception of the personage as a means through which the human person embraces definition by God rather than attempting to self-define. In light of these considerations, the absence of *ascesis* in the Scot's thoughts is not surprising. The ascetic

---

<sup>38</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon, Liber IV*, 231.

<sup>39</sup> Tournier, *The Meaning of Persons*, 76.

tradition lacks the clearly personal context which obedience to God's commands carries with it. Obedience to God's commands is a *moral*, and therefore an *interpersonal* way of thinking about the process of sanctification. While *ascesis* tends toward withdrawal from the world (and thus from relation to whatever is in the world), obedience to God's commands is patently relational; it both expresses and includes the mandate to "Be in the world, but not of the world." Through this intentional relation both to God and to His creation (which as His handiwork manifests His order) humanity begins to be restored.

Such a reading integrates a number of themes we have previously observed in Eriugena. First, we have noted the centrality of the interpretive act in Eriugena's thought. Within our proposed reading, this emphasis upon the interpretive takes on the quality of intentional listening. In creation, God is speaking. The Book of Scripture and the Book of Creation both bear witness to Christ, by whom and through whom all things have been made. Both are witnesses to God the Creator. Each is a text through which God discloses Himself to the attentive reader.

Second, we have noted that Eriugena's epistemological reflection, especially in the *Periphyseon*, highlights the question of human identity. Within our proposed reading, the conclusion emerges that self-knowledge is not finally what the human person needs, even if it were attainable. What the human person needs is not self-knowledge but knowledge that he or she *is known and loved* by God, who is the final arbiter of truth, goodness, and worth.

Third, we have noted that Eriugena draws upon the Maximian motif of humanity as participant in the unitive ministry of Christ. Within our proposed reading, this motif finds expression in the interpersonal concepts of care-giving, reconciliation, and fellowship. The nature of the human person as biological cannot come to actualization in a situation that precludes relation to God's creation because man's mandate as biological is precisely to be in

relation to the created world. Humanity is made to care for creation as well as to love God and neighbor.

Fourth, we have noted that Eriugena conceives the Fall as including the erosion of the boundary between self and other in human perception. This erosion manifests itself in the human impulses toward self-deification and toward self-abnegation. Within our proposed reading, obedience to God's commands is simply the appropriate remedy to this problem. The moral, as interpersonal, entails (1) the recognition of the other as other, (2) the affirmation of otherness as good, (3) intentional relation to the other, (4) responsibility for the other, and (5) the actualization of the I as a product of these.

God's first blessing upon and command to humanity is to be fecund and to lovingly govern the world He has made. This command is still in force, and the relational nature of the human person is integral to its fulfillment. Love can only be within the context of the recognition of the other as other. Only within the affirmation of the other as good can care be given in the way God has designed. Through obedience to God's commands, the human person is brought into alignment with this original mandate.

In sum, disordered relation lies at the core of the human problems of sin and death. These problems manifest themselves in a multitude of ways, including (but certainly not necessarily limited to) suffering, exploitation, and oppression. The "walk of the Lord God in . . . human nature" addresses these problems at their root by confronting the disordered relation between self and other in bestial man. In this event God, by virtue of the moral character of the encounter, confronts the human person as the ultimate Personal Other. Each particular human person responds in some way to this encounter, although the reason for one person to respond with trust and another with distrust is not one to which we can conclusively speak. Based upon our examination of Eriugena's eschatology, we can clearly see that some human persons will, in

effect, say “It” to God, thus closing off the possibility of loving mutuality with Him. At the same time, for each person who encounters God as he walks in human nature, there is also the possibility that this particular person might say “You.” If this happens, for whatever reason, the way is opened to loving mutuality with God. Through this mutuality the person begins a process which culminates in the eschatological consummation of the human person, which will be our focus in chapter 9. First, however, we will consider the Scot’s description of eschatological distinction-without-separation as an expression of his Trinitarian concern. This will be the focus of chapter 8.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE INTEGRITY OF PERSONS IN RELATION: DISTINCTION WITHOUT SEPARATION AS AN EXPRESSION OF A NICENE-CHALCEDONIAN ONTOLOGY OF PERSONHOOD IN ERIUGENA'S ESCHATOLOGY

One of the best-known—and most controversial—aspects of Eriugena's project is the radically unitive dynamic in his eschatology. In short, he describes the final return of all things in terms of all creation being brought into union with God. This statement on its face raises two concerns. First, this description of the eschaton has led to the accusation that Eriugena is in the end a universalist. Although we have examined and refuted the allegation that the Scot is a universalist in chapter 6, we shall speak again briefly to this concern toward the end of this chapter. Second, and more immediate, the question also arises whether the Scot's eschatology (and ultimately his project as a whole) is monistic. This concern will be the primary focus of this chapter. As we shall see, while the Scot's thinking on this topic is complex, and perhaps easily misunderstood due to his sesquipedalian prolixity, careful reading will show that he is in fact careful to rule out monism in his vision of the eschaton.

The tendency of mysticism toward monism is a perennial concern among those who are skeptical of mystical theology's compatibility as a project with orthodox Christianity. Perhaps the clearest evidence that this concern is not without some warrant emerges through the writings of certain Medieval mystics, one notable example being Meister Eckhart. At the core of this concern lies the very proper desire to safeguard doctrinally the uniqueness of the person in relation to God. It is certainly true that Eckhart in particular speaks of mystical union with God in a way that calls into serious question whether he does enough in his thinking to safeguard the

uniqueness of the person. The reader of Eckhart comes easily to the conclusion that union with God amounts to a glorified form of self-abnegation. Such a conception is fundamentally incompatible with the Trinitarian account of personhood which this study is concerned to present. The uniqueness of the person is neither an illusion nor a problem; on the contrary, it is proper to the person and comes under the “Very Good” of Genesis. This makes sense in light of our earlier observation that humanity is made in the Triune Image, which entails (1) uniqueness as well as relationality and, (2) the conception—which we appropriated from Pannenberg—that humanity’s purpose, its destiny, is fellowship with God. To be a human being is to be made for fellowship with God, and this destiny manifests itself in human nature as personhood, which entails uniqueness and relationality.

In light of this, the uniqueness of the person is integral to the fulfillment of the destiny for which God has created humanity. This uniqueness, therefore, must (along with purpose and relationality) be treated as axiomatic in any account of the person which is grounded in Trinitarian reflection. To present an account in which the person is absorbed into something else compromises the uniqueness of the person, obviously, but in so doing it also undermines any further attempt to present a robust account of personhood. To represent the inherent uniqueness of the person as a temporary thing which will ultimately be absorbed into something else is to move toward the position that personhood is illusory. Buber speaks to this concern when he argues that: “What has to be given up is not the I, as most mystics suppose: the I is indispensable for any relationship, including the highest, which always presupposes an I and You. What has to be given up is not the I but the false drive for self-affirmation.”<sup>1</sup> While it is not our concern to confirm or refute the validity of this overarching concern regarding the tradition of mystical

---

<sup>1</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1950), 126.

theology in any general way, we shall see through the course of this chapter that monism as a description of Eriugena's eschatology simply does not fit.

As we mentioned, Eriugena's vision of the eschaton is profoundly unitive in its character.

He describes the eschatological state of the saints in these words:

Only God will appear in them when they transcend the limits of their own nature, not in such a way that their nature will perish, but so that only He who truly has being will appear in them. The transcendence of nature is the non-appearance of nature, just as, to take our frequent former example, air when filled with light is not apparent, since only the light is dominant.<sup>2</sup>

In light of this passage (and others like it) it is easy to see why some readers of the Scot might believe his eschatology to be monistic. If, however, we take a closer look even at this passage, we can see that Eriugena is not in fact presenting a monistic scheme for two reasons. First, we need to note his insertion of the qualifier "not in such a way that their nature will perish." Simply, this means that even in the final union with God humanity will remain human. Second, the Scot's use of the word "appear" is significant. We have noted repeatedly that, for Eriugena, God's creation (as His handiwork) manifests His design and bears witness to His character. Creation as a whole and in all the particularity of its parts is theophany, the Book of Creation. In this context we can see that what the Scot means is that God's character, lordship, and glory will be unambiguously manifest in the eschaton, and all of creation will be the means of this manifestation. By employing the analogy of air and light, our passage itself bears out the idea that the Scot is speaking here of creation as theophany. Creation in the eschaton is not itself God, but it is united to God and He is manifested and glorified through it in the clearest way. Carabine also supports this reading when she remarks that "while all things will be restored to

---

<sup>2</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, trans. Myra Uhlfelder, with summaries by Jean A. Potter (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976), 52.

their principle, each retains individual properties. In this sense it becomes clear that Eriugena does not ‘conflate’ God and creation, even in the final movement toward unity.”<sup>3</sup>

These words from the Scot serve as a suitable point of entry to our discussion in this chapter for a number of reasons. First, this passage presents us with an example of the unitive dynamic in Eriugena’s eschatology. It is not our concern to demonstrate that this dynamic is present. Nevertheless, this passage provides us with a ready example of this pervasive dynamic in Eriugena’s conception of the eschaton. Second, the passage demonstrates the importance of careful reading where the Scot is concerned; both in the qualifier “not in such a way that their nature will perish” and in the broader context of creation as theophany we can see that the Scot is not monistic in his eschatology. Third, this passage shows us the importance of analogy in Eriugena’s thought. As we shall see, the Scot repeatedly addresses the eschatological distinction of the human person in union with God through the use of analogy. If we give these analogies careful attention and due weight in our examination of Eriugena, monism cannot accurately describe his eschatology. In fairness to the Scot, we need also to remember that a number of the analogies he employs in this particular discussion are not original; they come from his patristic sources and are originally presented as examples of the principle of distinction-without-separation in nature. In other words, these analogies in their patristic origins are demonstrations of how God can be both three and one, or how Christ can be both divine and human. The patristic use of analogy as an apologetic device in defense of distinction-without-separation serves as the Scot’s template. This also needs consideration as an evidence that Eriugena is thinking in Nicene and Chalcedonian terms as he develops his eschatology.

---

<sup>3</sup> Deirdre Carabine, *John Scottus Eriugena* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 96.

Our focus in this chapter is the principle of distinction as it emerges in the Scot's eschatology. As we said, the presence of the unitive principle in Eriugena's thought requires no defense for any reader who knows much more of the Scot than his name. We will consider the principle of distinction along a number of lines. First, we will consider the Scot's affirmation of bodily distinction in the resurrection. Second, we will note his affirmation of substantial distinction in the eschaton. We remarked in chapter 1 that the Scot uses the terms "person" and "substance" interchangeably in his Trinitarian reflection. In light of this, we shall consider the implications of this terminological move in relation to Macmurray's insights. Third, we shall note the Christological caveat which Eriugena presents regarding the union of all things with God. Fourth, we shall note the echoes of Nicene and Chalcedonian logic in the Scot's description of this union. Fifth, we shall examine a number of the analogies Eriugena employs in presenting the idea of distinction without separation. Sixth, we shall remark upon the importance of eternal suffering in the damned (which we saw clearly set forth in chapter 6) as a refutation of monism as well as of universalism. Seventh, we shall consider Eriugena's eschatology as a restoration of communion between God and humanity. Finally, we shall draw out some implications of our findings for our project as a whole.

### **Distinction of Bodies in the Eschaton**

Given the nature of human persons as embodied beings, it is intuitive for us that corporeal plurality is real plurality. It would be difficult to present a more immediately accessible and logically compelling evidence of real plurality—and hence necessarily some sort of distinction—to a human thinker than the plainly observable plurality of two or more bodies. A multiplicity of bodies means, at least at first impression, a multiplicity of beings. Eriugena remarks upon this most obvious type of plurality in these words: "Not only do I not deny that men... at the

resurrection will... have intelligible forms, but I even affirm it.”<sup>4</sup> The question arises at this point what the Scot means by “intelligible forms.” In order to place this remark in its proper context we need to consider what he says elsewhere: “Nothing exists in human nature which is not spiritual and intelligible, for even the substance of the body is intelligible.”<sup>5</sup> The description of the body as “intelligible” is parallel to the Scot’s use of “spiritual” as a *moral* term, which we observed in chapter 3. The opposite of “spiritual” for the Scot is not “corporeal;” it is “carnal.” The description of resurrected bodies as “intelligible forms” is not a rejection of corporeality; on the contrary, it is an affirmation that the body will finally be sanctified in such a way that it becomes a vehicle for theophany, a vessel for the noblest of use. Even if this were not so, the Scot’s use of the plural, “forms” in itself is counter-intuitive if his intention is monistic.

While it might be possible on the basis of this single sentence to question whether Eriugena intends to affirm the bodily resurrection of the saints, we can see in another passage that this is clearly his meaning:

At the resurrection,... each one will receive his own body again.... The transformation of human nature into God, therefore, must not be regarded as the perishing of substance, but as the remarkable and ineffable return to the pristine condition which it had lost by transgression.... Our nature, in the case of the worthy, will contemplate God face to face to the extent of its capacity.<sup>6</sup>

We have here a plain affirmation of bodily resurrection. At the same time, we need to note that the Scot upholds the particularity (and hence the uniqueness) of the person in his statement that “each one will receive his own body again.” This, in turn, is presented as evidence that the final union of all things with God “must not be regarded as the perishing of substance.” Not only does the Scot oppose the idea that the saints will be absorbed into God, he does so emphatically.

---

<sup>4</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 299.

<sup>5</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon (The Division of Nature)*, trans. I. P. Sheldon-Williams, rev. John J. O’Meara (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1987), 544.

Further, he speaks of the saints saying that humanity “will contemplate God face to face to the extent of its capacity.” This notion of the *Visio Dei* as contemplation will be more fully addressed in chapter 9, but suffice it to say for now and in this context that the language of face to face encounter bespeaks plurality, as does the limitation of human capacity. The persistence of this limitation even in the eschaton entails the persistence of human nature. If human nature were absorbed into God in the eschaton, this limitation would seem to be a redundancy, a contradiction, or both. Also important in this connection is the distinction between “the worthy” and everyone else. There cannot be a duality of the worthy and the unworthy without plurality. All of these factors underpin and confirm the basic notion of corporeal plurality in the Scot’s eschatology. This, in turn, militates against any meaningful description of Eriugena as monistic. We shall now turn to the Scot’s conception of substantial distinction in the final union of creation with God.

### **Distinction of Substances in the Eschaton**

Eriugena is convinced that, along with bodies, substances will retain their integrity in the eschaton. He argues that “there can be a unification of human nature without sacrifice of the properties of individual substances.”<sup>7</sup> In examining this statement, we need to remember what we observed in chapter 1; namely, that in his Trinitarian reflection Eriugena uses the terms “person” and “substance” interchangeably. Why this is so is open to speculation, but this statement from the *Treatise* offers a clue: “The will is according to nature human.... But since we see that it shares in the highest reason, we cannot doubt that it is a rational substance.”<sup>8</sup> Setting

---

<sup>6</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 287.

<sup>7</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon (The Division of Nature)*, 550.

<sup>8</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, trans. Mary Brennan with an Introduction by Avital Wohlman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 41.

aside the question of the will, this description of person in terms of substance echoes the (in)famous Boethian definition of the person.<sup>9</sup> It may be that in this regard the Scot has retained an artifact of the Boethian definition in his thinking. However this might be, the Scot does equate person with substance. (Whether this introduces an incoherency into his thinking is another question. What is important for our purposes is that when the Scot says “substance,” “person” is an appropriate synonym.) The “unification of human nature” of which the Scot speaks here ought to be understood in light of this fact.

If “substance” is (as we have already seen) a synonym for “person,” what the Scot is saying is that humanity can be united without human persons ceasing to be who they are as particular individuals. Macmurray observes on this point that: “In the relation of two agents . . . each remains himself and differentiated from the other; there must be no self-identification of one with the other, or the reciprocity will be lost and the heterocentricity of the relation will be only apparent.”<sup>10</sup> Macmurray echoes the concern (which we have already observed in Buber) that the integrity of the person be upheld. Macmurray’s point is that in the loving interrelation of two persons each must give himself to the other. In order for this to be possible the self must remain distinct from the other. Only if the other is always other can the self take action in the outward motion of giving. If there is no other to whom a gift is given, the notions of giving and receiving

---

<sup>9</sup> In his *Liber de persona et duabus naturis contra Eutychem et Nestorium, ad Johannem Diaconum ecclesiae Romanae*, Boethius defines a person as “an individual substance of a rational nature” (*Persona est naturae rationalis individual substantia*). This definition has been widely criticized for various reasons, but for our purposes the most important is the exclusively individualistic nature of the definition. It has been an important outcome of the contemporary Trinitarian discussion that the Boethian definition has been extensively called into question and a more relational conception of the person suggested in its place. While Eriugena certainly knew the writings of Boethius, it is notable that in the end his view of the person seems for the most part to have escaped the problem of individualism, tending instead toward the sort of relational conception which characterizes the contemporary discussion. We have considered one aspect of this in chapter 7 (the moral—and thus interpersonal—foundations of human identity), and we will examine further implications of this relational conception in chapter 9. For the original quotation in the *Liber de persona et duabus naturis*, cf. J.P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae Latinae Tomus LXIV*, Paris: 1891, 1343.

<sup>10</sup> John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), 189.

are meaningless. This is a manifestation of the impulse toward self-deification. At the same time, only if the self remains itself does it have anything to give. If the self disappears into the other its capacity for self-giving disappears because it has no self to give. This is a manifestation of the impulse toward self-abnegation. This concern does a great deal to explain, or at very least is thoroughly compatible with, the Scot's insistence upon the continual distinction of substances in the final unification.

This insistence upon substantial distinction comes up again, when the Scot argues that “the return with which we are now dealing will be not of substances, which remain unchangeably and indissolubly in themselves, but of qualities, quantities, and other accidents.”<sup>11</sup> Again, we see that the final return “will not be of substances.” In other words, persons will not be absorbed into God. At the same time, we see another idea which parallels our earlier observation about creation as theophany. The return of “qualities, quantities, and other accidents” echoes what we saw earlier in the analogy of air suffused with light. The use of the term “quantities” might seem to raise a problem in that it might seem to undermine the notion of eschatological plurality. This need not be the case, however, if we consider the idea of quantity in relation to the individual being, as in the case of size or weight. In other words, in light of what we have seen elsewhere it makes more sense to consider the idea of quantity as speaking to how much there is of a particular being. In any case, quality and quantity are both described as “accidents.” This lends itself to the idea that the final return is not an ontological unification but a radical reorientation of appearances in such a way that creation itself becomes unequivocally the vehicle for theophany. In the final return, the unification of human nature with God is not transformation but transfiguration.

---

<sup>11</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 292.

## Christology and the Union of All Things with God

In examining the principle of distinction in Eriugena's eschatology, it is also important to take note of a key caveat by which he distinguishes between the nature of *theosis* and that of the Theandric Union. (We shall examine the Scot's conception of *theosis* more fully in chapter 9.) For Eriugena the Theandric Union is a singular and unrepeatable event; only in Christ do divine and human natures substantially coincide. The union of human nature to God in the final return is of a different order than the union of human and divine in the person of Christ. In the course of a reflection upon the work of Christ, Eriugena says this:

He went forth, then, from the Father, and came into the world, that is to say, He took upon himself the human nature in which the whole world subsists: for there is nothing in the world which is not comprehended in human nature. And then he left the world again and went to the Father, that is to say, He raised up the human nature which He had taken upon Himself above all things visible and invisible, above all the heavenly powers, above everything which can be uttered or imagined, by unification with His Deity which is equal to His Father. For although He preserved wholly in Himself and in the whole human genus the whole of human nature which He wholly took upon Him, restoring some to their former state of nature, raising others because of the excellence of their worthiness beyond nature to the state of God: yet nowhere but in Himself alone is humanity united to the Deity in a single substance . . . For the Head of the Church reserved this property for Himself alone . . . to such a height none but He has ever ascended nor shall ascend.<sup>12</sup>

Only in Christ, then, is human nature substantially united to the Divine nature. Again, the term "substance" is important; we need to remember that when Eriugena says "substance," he means "person." Whether he intends *substantia* to mean "person" in the Boethian sense or simply as translating *hypostasis*, the import is the same. Only in the *person* of Christ are the Divine and human natures substantially united. Eriugena makes a similar statement just a few pages earlier. In connection with his treatment of the *Visio Dei* (with which we shall deal in chapter 9) he remarks: "I do not wish to imply that any creature save the Human Nature of the

---

<sup>12</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon (The Division of Nature)*, 583.

Word can transcend all the theophanies, or ascend without any theophany intervening to Him ‘Who only has immortality, and inhabits the inaccessible light.’”<sup>13</sup> Eriugena conceives the *Visio Dei* as a never-ending succession of finite manifestations of God. We shall explore this more fully in chapter 9, but for now the important point is that the *Visio Dei* itself is mediated through this succession of theophanies. Only for Christ is the union of human nature to God unmediated. Again, we see that humanity remains distinct, even as it is united to God. McGinn affirms this when he observes that, “The deification of the just . . . does not involve substantial identity with God. This highest level is realized only in the case of the humanity of the Word.”<sup>14</sup>

McGinn’s description of Christ’s humanity in the Theandric Union as being in “substantial identity with God” addresses cogently (for the purposes of this study) the uniqueness of Christ in that only in the *person* of Christ is divine nature united with human nature in such a way that neither can be separated from the other. The deity of Christ can be distinguished from His humanity, but the two are integral and equally true aspects of the same *person*. This observation leads us to another locus in our examination of the principle of distinction in the Scot’s eschatology: the echoes of Nicene and Chalcedonian logic in Eriugena’s conception of the final union of creation with God.

### **The Nicene and Chalcedonian Logic of Eschatological Union**

It is the thesis of this chapter that Eriugena’s conception of the final union of creation with God is not monistic but perichoretic. We have thus far examined a number of examples in which the principle of distinction is worked out in his eschatology. This perichoretic conception is not merely at work at a practical level, however; it manifests itself formally in the Scot’s thought as

---

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 577.

<sup>14</sup> Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God*, vol. 2 of *The Growth of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 108.

well. Eriugena distills from the logic of Nicea and Chalcedon a conception of distinction-without-separation as a philosophical principle. In his discussion of the final union of creation with God he repeatedly expresses his ideas in terms which show the influence of this principle and of these two councils.

The conceptual function of personhood in these two councils is different. In the logic of Nicea, person is the category which distinguishes Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; it signifies uniqueness, quiddity. In the logic of Chalcedon, however, personhood is the category by which the human nature and the Divine nature of Christ are conceived as one; it serves in this case as a category by which the same thing may be understood, we might say, as being multidimensional. In each of these cases, however, there is a common principle: two (or three) distinct things can be one without losing that distinctiveness in which their plurality consists. Father, Son, and Spirit can each and all be God without this entailing either modalism or polytheism. Christ can be both Divine and human in such a way that each is fully true and neither is compromised. This principle is a central dynamic in the Scot's eschatology.

As we shall see, the Scot presents a scheme in which persons can be one, while each retains his own identity (the Nicene principle). At the same time, this union also entails the integrity of the respective natures (the Chalcedonian principle) of the persons united. This is so because nature is an integral aspect of the holistic quiddity of any particular person. Nature distinguishes human persons from Divine persons, and the duality of Christ's nature distinguishes Him not only from the Father and the Holy Spirit but also from the rest of humanity. Thus, the Scot's vision of humanity in union with God entails (1) the perpetual uniqueness (identity) of the particular person and, (2) the persistence of the nature which constitutes an integral part of the whole which is a particular person. Person A remains fully himself in union with God; he does not become God at the level of identity, nor does he absorb God into himself. (In other words,

this union is neither self-deification nor self-abnegation.) At the same time, Person A is a *human* person, so he remains fully human at the level of nature as a part of the overall persistence of his integrity as a person. Eriugena puts it this way:

The whole man remains in soul and body according to his nature, and yet he is made through Grace in soul and body wholly a god. The property of each nature (soul and body) will be preserved; but they will form a unity; the properties of the natures will not destroy the unification, the unification will not destroy the properties of the natures.<sup>15</sup>

Eriugena here presents the very ordinary thesis (in the Eastern Church, at least) that in *theosis* the human being becomes by grace what Christ is by nature. At the same time, however, he is careful to point out that the human nature of the one deified retains its integrity. The deified human remains human. Further, his very specific statement that “the properties of the natures will not destroy the unification, the unification will not destroy the properties of the natures” echoes the “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation” of the Chalcedonian Definition. The final union of human nature with God is such that humanity remains distinct in all that is qualitatively human, as the Scot makes clear when he speaks of “the unification of natures, free from confusion, mixture or composition.”<sup>16</sup> At the same time, however, the Scot is concerned to emphasize that this union encompasses *persons* as well. This is not an absorption of one person into another, but a real union in which each person nevertheless remains distinctly himself. He says that “the unification of intelligible substances can be achieved without accumulation or composition, and without endangering the permanence of individual properties.”<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, he goes on to synthesize his concerns for the perpetual integrity both of the particular person and of the nature of the particular person when he argues

---

<sup>15</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon (The Division of Nature)*, 546.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 547.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

that “the unification of substances does not involve a disruption (of the nature of the substance) or transformation or confusion or mixture or composition.”<sup>18</sup> In sum, then, Eriugena makes use of the Nicene and Chalcedonian categories of person and nature in order to safeguard the integrity of the particular person in the final union with God. We shall now consider Eriugena’s use of analogy with a view to what these analogies suggest concerning his conception of distinction-without-separation in the final union of creation with God.

### **Analogies for Distinction without Separation**

It is not an unusual opinion that the use of analogy in an argument is the telltale sign of a formal weakness in that argument. To say this with regard to Eriugena’s thought, however, is to miss the point for at least four reasons. First, the Scot acknowledges repeatedly and at length that the Divine Mystery exceeds the capacity of formal language; his appreciation of Denis demands this. Second, Eriugena uses analogy to illustrate what he does say in formal terms (insofar as formal language is possible). Third, to rule out the use of analogy in apologetics is to place oneself at odds with a great part of the patristic tradition, to which Eriugena is deeply indebted. Fourth, our examination of these analogies is not intended to prove or disprove the Scot’s argument—there is ample evidence throughout the rest of this chapter to make the point that Eriugena is not a monist; rather, it is our intent to examine his use of analogy with a view to what the particular analogies he employs tell us about his thinking with regard to the principle of distinction-without-separation in the final union of creation with God. We shall examine a number of passages in which the Scot speaks analogically of this union. Each of these reveals different nuances in Eriugena’s thought on this topic.

We shall begin by examining two instances in which Eriugena describes the unity of light.

---

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 552.

In the first, he says,

At the time of the resurrection everyone will receive only his own, just as the light of many lamps is joined in such a way that there is no commingling in it and no separation. While it seems to be one and the same light, yet each lamp has its own light not commingled with the light of another; but whole lights are marvelously formed in wholes and produce a single light.<sup>19</sup>

Eriugena is clear in saying that the eschatological state of the particular human person is one in which “there is no commingling . . . and no separation.” Although each person remains distinct, each is also united to the rest and to God. In short, what he describes is *perichoresis*. In this passage, it is also notable that this union occurs in such a way that “it seems to be one and the same light.” Here again we see the Scot’s conception of the final union as not transformation but transfiguration. God will appear clearly through His creatures as they are united to Him; nevertheless, each remains itself. Eriugena develops this analogy further in another passage, in which he says,

Suppose a number of lamps burning simultaneously in a church, and radiating their light from different positions. The light which they give is single, is it not, so that no bodily sense can distinguish the light of one lamp from that of another? And yet it is most certain that the lights of the many lamps are by no means confused, though formed into one light. For if someone were to remove one of the lamps from the building in which they are burning, and carry it, still alight, into another place, it will leave behind it no trace of its own light in the brightness of the other lamps, nor take any of theirs with it. And the same would be true of any of the other lamps, no one of which, if removed, would take with it the light belonging to another, nor leave behind any of its own.<sup>20</sup>

Here Eriugena presents a similar exegesis of the analogy in that he says that “it is most certain that the lights of the many lamps are by no means confused, though formed into one light.”

While it might be saying too much to argue that he intentionally references Chalcedon in his use of the word “confused,” it is clear that the principle of distinction-without-separation underlies

---

<sup>19</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 59.

this statement. He goes on to add another layer to the analogy by presenting a hypothetical scenario in which one of the lamps is removed. Again, the fact that “it will leave behind no trace of its own light in the brightness of the other lamps, nor take any of theirs with it” can only be taken as a statement that the light of the individual lamp retains its particularity, just as the individual person does in union with God.

Eriugena also employs the analogy of musical harmony to describe the final union. He says this:

Every sound, whether of the human voice, or of the pipe, or of the lyre, retains severally its own quality while many of them in unity produce with suitable agreement a single harmony. Here also the argument from acoustics makes it clear that the sounds themselves are not confounded, although they are unified. For if any one of those sounds were to be muted, it alone will be silent, and none of the other sounds will supply the melody that came from the one that is now silent. From this it is clear that when it sounded with the others, it retained the property of its own quality. For if it had been confused with the rest, it could not have withdrawn the whole of it when it fell silent. For that which is confused or mingled cannot easily recover its own property.<sup>21</sup>

Our Irishman conceives the final union as an orchestra in which each instrument contributes uniquely to the sound of the whole. The persistence of the properties of the individual instruments, far from detracting from the unity, enhances its beauty. If a particular instrument is removed from the orchestra, its voice is conspicuously missing, and the sound of the whole is lessened. At this point, we should recall what we observed in chapter 6; namely, that in the eschaton all human beings will behold the *Visio Dei*. Eriugena goes further; all humanity will finally be united to God. If the reader will pardon the pun, we might say that this harmonizes neatly with Eriugena’s use of the musical analogy. Each person will contribute to the final union in which creation itself becomes theophany, although not all will experience this with joy. That

---

<sup>20</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon (The Division of Nature)*, 550.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

some will experience this as futility is a matter of individual experience; the beauty of the whole, however, is unaffected. Even those who finally experience God as the frustration of their impulses to self-deification or self-abnegation will nevertheless occupy a place in the eschatological union which contributes to the beauty of the whole. The damned will be transfigured *in spite of themselves*. This, however, does nothing to change the fact that they will experience the reality of God as hateful and painful; it only makes the reality of God even more unescapable. The Scot distinguishes sharply between the absolute reality of which God is the source and the human construction of reality through the narrative of reason, and he sacrifices neither to the other. Each is writ so large that even in union with God the person can hate Him and experience His presence only as torment and futility. Hell is the inescapable company of a hated Other. It would be difficult to more clearly illustrate the eschatological integrity of the particular person in the Scot's thought than through this example.

In another passage, the Scot employs the analogy of air and light, as well as that of fire and iron. These analogies serve to illustrate the principle of distinction-without-separation, which he sets forth just prior. He says this:

But we should not understand . . . that there will be a confusion or transmutation of substances, but rather a certain ineffable and incomprehensible becoming one of our substances . . . For nothing exists in human nature which is not spiritual and intelligible, for even the substance of the body is intelligible. And it is not incredible, nor repugnant to reason, that intelligible substances should become together so as to be one, and yet each not cease to retain its own subsistence and property—though in such a way that the lower are contained within the higher. For it conflicts with sound reason that the higher should be contained in the lower, or be attracted to it or consumed by it. But it is of the nature of the inferior to be attracted to the superior, and to be absorbed by it—not in such a manner as to cease to exist, but rather so as to be preserved in it, and subsist in it, and be one with it. For air does not lose its substance when it is wholly converted into the light of the sun, even though nothing appears in it that is not light: but the light is one thing, the air another. It is only because the light prevails over the air that the light alone appears to exist. Iron, or any other metal, when melted into the fire, is seen to be converted into fire, so that it appears to be pure fire: and yet the substance of the metal is preserved. It is in the same way, I think, that the substance of the body will pass into the soul, not so that

that which it is shall perish, but so that it shall be preserved in the better essence: and we should believe the same about the soul herself when she passes into mind: she is preserved therein in a more beautiful aspect, and one more like unto God.<sup>22</sup>

Here the Scot presents clearly the idea of the final union of creation with God as not transformation but transfiguration. In this final union it will be clear to all that God is Creator and Lord; everything will bear witness to this reality. That some persons will experience this reality as the frustration of their desires (and thus as futility) will not change the fact that God will be indubitably present to and in all. To express it simply, in the eschaton God's omnipresence will be clearly evident. Nevertheless, this fact does not change or compromise the particular identity of any part of creation. Eriugena is clear in this regard when he says that "air does not lose its substance . . . the light is one thing, the air another" and that "the substance of the metal is preserved."

At this point we shall examine one further analogy by which the Scot illustrates the principle of distinction-without-separation, both because it does so and because it leads nicely into our discussion in chapter 9. Eriugena says,

It is possible that the vision of a countless number of men and other animals that are gifted with sight can at one and the same time be directed upon a single visible object. For instance, a little golden ball placed upon the topmost pinnacle of a tower is simultaneously visible to all that stand about it in any direction, and each one of the beholders fixes upon it the rays of his sight, and no one says to another, remove your sight so that I may see what you are looking at: for all may see at once. If then so many rays of light may flow together into one, without any confusion or mixture or composition between them, for each one of the observers retains his own proper sight, so that all are by a wonderful unification directed upon one and the same object: why should not all men be restored into some sort of mystical unity, although each retains unimpaired the properties of his body, his soul, and his Mind?<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 544.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 549.

Eriugena, as we have noted repeatedly, is clear in expressing the distinction-without-separation of creation in union with God. He remarks that the united vision of the many beholders is “without any confusion or mixture or composition between them, for each one . . . retains his own proper sight.” He then goes on to say explicitly that “each retains unimpaired the properties of his body, his soul, and his Mind,” i.e. his particularity as a *person*. Equally compelling, however, is the Scot’s description of unity *through what is beheld*.<sup>24</sup> We shall develop this idea more fully in chapter 9, but let it suffice for now to say that this metaphor gives us an important glimpse of the Scot’s Christology. It is through Christ that God is most clearly seen; He is the Revealer of the Father, and it is ultimately through the return of Christ Triumphant that the final union will be accomplished. Through the manifest Lordship of Christ, the Lordship of the Father will be demonstrated, thus serving as the gateway to the *Visio Dei*.

### **The Logic of Damnation: Against Monism and Universalism**

We shall now turn to a question we raised at the beginning of this chapter: How can we reconcile the apparent monism of the Scot’s eschatology with his rejection of universalism? Although it should be clear at this point that Eriugena’s eschatology is not monistic, there is a further point to be made. The Scot’s rejection of universalism and the alternate view which he presents in themselves run counter to any claim that his eschatology is monistic. The simple fact that Eriugena can and does talk about eternal punishment for the damned has implications which contradict a monistic reading of his thought.

---

<sup>24</sup> Of course, Eriugena’s analogy presupposes an Aristotelian understanding of optics. Nevertheless, the important point for our consideration at the moment is that this analogy serves to convey the Scot’s conviction that the eschaton will be characterized by an ongoing particularity of persons. We shall revisit this passage in chapter 9 in connection with the idea of common referentiality, which suggests an alternate line along which this analogy might be developed.

We have seen in chapter 6 that the Scot believes eternal torment to be the futility which arises from the damned soul being confronted with God as absolute reality. He describes this as punishment of what God has not made, the evil will, which has no being. To try to read Eriugena's eschatology monistically is to ascribe to him the view that the evil will becomes part of God. Even if we were to willing to ascribe this level of impiety to the Scot, this would represent a glaring and fundamental contradiction in his thinking. It would be to say that nonbeing is accepted, united to Being Himself, and finally elevated to the level of divinity. While Eriugena has been criticized (and even anathematized) on many occasions by many thinkers, none has gone so far as to accuse him of this particularly egregious heresy. Further, Eriugena was nothing if not philosophically rigorous (so much so, in fact, that few of his contemporaries could even understand what he was saying) and such a basic and catastrophic error could hardly have escaped his notice. If this were indeed what the Scot taught, it would make him simultaneously a dualist (by elevating evil to divinity), a brazen blasphemer (by imputing evil to God), and a process theologian (by ascribing change to the divine nature). In light of the concern for orthodoxy which (as we saw in chapter 1) lies at the heart of Eriugena's project, such a charge is hardly credible.

Unless this accusation is true, however, the Scot *cannot* be a monist. To allow any distinction of the evil will from that of God is to assume an enduring plurality. It is in fact this plurality which simply rules out the possibility that the Scot is a mere Platonist (because—for the damned—to know the good is *not* to do the good; but God is the Good and always acts consistently with His own character), a universalist (because he does speak at length of eternal torment for the damned as expressed in the futility of their *continuing* desire to rebel against God) or a monist (because the desire to rebel is an expression—albeit a disordered one—of

personal particularity). If we consider these words from Pannenberg in this context, they cast significant light on this aspect of the Scot's thought:

God stands by his creation, and does so indeed in a way that respects his creatures' independence. This independence does not end in the eschatological consummation. Indeed, by this event it abides in its true sense, as the actualization of the true freedom of the creature.<sup>25</sup>

For good or for ill, the creature remains itself, and it is precisely for this reason that the Day of the Lord will be both great and terrible.

### **The Eschaton as Communion of God and Humanity**

We shall now consider the principle of distinction-without-separation in Eriugena's eschatology from one more angle: the Scot's conception of the final union as the restoration of communion. For Eriugena, the final union of creation with God is the reconciliation of everything which God has made with himself (of course, as we have observed, this does not include the evil will). Carabine notes that "the concept of unity without loss of identity is a specifically Christian adaptation of a Neoplatonic theme. Creation cannot perish or become absorbed in the divine nature, rather, it returns to its pristine state."<sup>26</sup> At this point it should be clear how this "adaptation" is "specifically Christian;" the principle of distinction-without-separation which underlies the Scot's eschatology at every turn is the philosophical expression of the ontology which emerges from the logic of Nicea and Chalcedon. Hence, it is not only possible but obvious for a thinker to whom Trinity and orthodox Christology are central to conceive of "unity without the loss of identity." Because this is so, a monistic eschatology is at best unnecessary for a thinker like the Scot. What emerges in its stead is a restoration of that

---

<sup>25</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 3:643.

<sup>26</sup> Carabine, *John Scottus Eriugena*, 96.

fellowship for which humanity has been made. That some human beings will experience this restoration as futility does not alter the reality of restoration, but it does alter their *interpretation* (and thus their experience) of this reality. Again, the distinction between reality and the narrative by which reason ascribes significance to that reality is crucial to properly understanding the Scot on this point.

In the final union God will be clearly present to all, as he was in the beginning, and the very fact that the damned will experience as suffering what is communion to the saints bears witness to the integrity of the person in Eriugena's eschatology. Carabine bears out this idea when she observes: "The changing of human nature into God is not . . . a perishing of substance but is rather a return to the condition it would have enjoyed but lost through transgression."<sup>27</sup> Eriugena conceives of God's victory over sin and death in the most radical terms, while he yet stops short of universalism. Death itself is literally "swallowed up" in eternal life. The distance between God and humanity is bridged. All, then, that remains is the urge (in the damned) to transgress, which itself is futile, and thus the source of torment. In the end, the person *will* be united to God. At the same time, although God through all eternity prohibits transgression, He never dissolves the selfhood of the would-be transgressor. God elevates to union with Himself all that he has made, which includes the humanity of the damned. Although the damned (because of the personal disposition of distrust) do not experience this elevation as joy, God knows it as the fulfillment of His purpose for humanity and thus as good. At the same time, however, in the very possibility that the damned can experience this elevation as futility, their personal particularity is manifest.

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

What we see in the Scot's eschatology, then, is the removal of those conditions which have made God's existence, character, and work ambiguous to humanity. In the final analysis, Eriugena's conception of the final union of creation with God is for the damned the terrible demonstration of God's Lordship. In this moment we see also the clear expression of God's justice in the sense that God acts with absolute equity toward all of humanity; each and all will be united to Him and will manifest His glory. At the same time, this moment is for the saints glorious; in the final union all of creation will be transfigured, will bear the clearest witness that God is Creator and Lord. The saints will experience this union as the ultimate validation of their faith and hope up to this point. Through the final union, the saints will experience liberation from doubt; God's promises have come to their ultimate fulfillment. What remains for the saints is eternal communion with One whose beauty and trustworthiness have been made most clearly manifest.

### **Summary and Implications**

It remains, then, for us to consider our findings as they relate to our project as a whole. We began by considering the question of monism. As we have seen, this description is simply inappropriate for Eriugena's eschatology; he underscores the eternal particularity of the person repeatedly. We examined the Scot's conception of eschatological and eternal particularity from a number of angles. We noted his affirmation of bodily distinction in the eschaton. We similarly observed his affirmation of substantial distinction. We considered his statement that only in the person of Christ is the Divine nature substantially united to human nature. We went on to consider the echoes of Nicene and Chalcedonian logic in the Scot's formal language as expressions of the principle of distinction-without-separation. We then examined a number of instances in which Eriugena sets forth this principle analogically. We then considered the fact that the Scot not only rejects universalism but provides an alternate view, which makes

universalism unnecessary, as a counter-argument against monism as well. We finally considered the Scot's conception of the final union of creation with God as a restoration of communion.

Having examined the question of monism in the Scot's eschatology from this variety of perspectives, it is clear that the principle of *distinction* is clearly operative in that eschatology. We said earlier that this principle would be our focus in this chapter. This is so because the principle of unity will be our focus in chapter 9. In this chapter we have so closely examined the principle of distinction as it is manifested in Eriugena's vision of the eschaton for two reasons: First, it is in the Scot's eschatology that this principle is most clearly visible. Second, and this brings us to the implications of our findings for our project as a whole, this eschatological distinction of the person in the Scot's thought functions as a clear affirmation that uniqueness is an integral part of the destiny for which God has created humanity.

The principle of distinction, in the context of personhood, necessarily tends toward a stronger view of personal uniqueness, which we suggested in chapter 2 as one important aspect of humanity's creation in the Triune Image. We noted that the Triune Image is not a present reality but a destiny for which humanity has been created. In the Scot's vision of the eschaton we are presented with what the realization of the Triune Image, the *perichoretic* Image, might look like. God has created the human person for the destiny of fellowship with Himself, and this destiny, although it is denied and rejected by fallen humanity, is established by God and not by man. Just as humanity has not made itself, it can not unmake itself or remake itself. The destiny of fellowship with God is part of humanity's creation; it is why humanity exists. This purpose, this destiny, is what we mean when we refer to creation in (meaning, "with a view to becoming") the Image of God. At the same time, the God who created us is Triune, which entails personhood and relationality. We suggested in chapter 2 that Eriugena's appropriation (from Augustine) of the Triune Image as a theological concept is useful precisely because it conveys to us these

concepts of uniqueness and relationality. Uniqueness, then, is integral to the realization of the destiny for which God has created us.

We also noted that personal uniqueness is integral to the dynamic of love. It is precisely when each person both remains fully who he or she is in relation to the other, and yet gives that self to the other, that we can say with full confidence that the relation between those persons is a loving one. Both the uniqueness of the self and the uniqueness of the other are necessary to the actualization of this dynamic. Further, each must be a continuing reality in order for us to speak of love continuing. The Scot's eschatology presents us with a picture of radical union in which the uniqueness of the person is upheld in equally radical terms, even to the point that some persons will be both loved and permitted not to love even as they are restrained from doing evil. This restraint is itself a loving act, one through which God affirms the goodness of unique personal life in the clearest terms. While neither self-deification nor self-abnegation will be possible, neither will love be compelled for the simple reason that love, if we take the term in any meaningful sense, although it can be commanded, cannot be compelled.

Eriugena's vision of the eschaton also presents us with a rich development of the idea that personal uniqueness is eternal. This is important to our project for at least two reasons: First, the eternal character of personal uniqueness serves to underscore in the most emphatic terms the idea that personal uniqueness is *real*. We observed early in this chapter that to allow eschatological dissolution of the person is to move toward the position that personal uniqueness is illusory. If the uniqueness of the person is not an eternal reality, especially alongside the affirmation of other eternal realities, the outgrowth can only be that personal uniqueness comes to be seen as less real, or at the very least less important. This eternal persistence of personal uniqueness which we have observed in Eriugena's eschatology stands against this tendency. For the Scot, the uniqueness of the person is neither temporary nor illusory. This, in turn, bears upon our previous

point—if personal uniqueness is in any measure either temporary or illusory, in the same measure we must also consider love itself to be so. Second, the Scot’s presentation of personal uniqueness as an eternal reality needs also to be understood in the context of God’s Lordship. The eternal persistence of personal uniqueness constitutes an emphatic statement that personal uniqueness is good. In the final union, when all of creation bears witness to God’s Lordship, it does so precisely through the uniqueness of each human person (as we recall from Eriugena’s analogy from musical harmony). Eriugena conceives the eschaton as the final and complete reordering of all creation in such a way that God’s Lordship and His design are made clearly manifest. In this complete reordering, the uniqueness of the person is upheld *eternally*. No clearer statement could be made that God still calls personal uniqueness “good.”

## CHAPTER NINE

### PERSONHOOD CONSUMMATED: *THEOSIS* AS INTERSUBJECTIVITY

In this chapter we will examine Eriugena's conception of *theosis* in light of contemporary reflection upon the theme of intersubjectivity. As we noted in chapter 8, the language of *theosis* (or deification) raises concerns for those who are skeptical of mystical theology as a project because it evokes a sort of monism. While mystical theology as a project is neither identical with nor reducible to the language of *theosis*, the language of deification (especially given its association with certain Western mystics such as Eckhart and Tauler) has seemed to some thinkers to suggest a dissolution of personal particularity. For these thinkers, *theosis* seems to imply monism, and the widespread usage of *theosis*-language within the mystical tradition thus represents cause for serious concern. We also saw in chapter 8, however, that monism is an inaccurate description of the perichoretic eschatology Eriugena describes. In fact, what we find in examining the Scot's view of *theosis* is that he is describing something that is rather different from what we see in the mainstream of mystical theology. As Carabine has noted, the Scot does not use the language of "mystical union."<sup>1</sup> This in itself should give us considerable pause in that it is precisely the theme of mystical union which most often tends to raise the question of monism.

Further, the project of mystical theology is often thought to be a syncretistic intrusion of Neoplatonism into Christian thought. Before we accept this objection as applicable to the Scot,

however, we need to remember that we also saw (in chapter 4) that the Scot conceives of the *Visio Dei* in terms of an infinite succession of finite theophanies. In other words, the Scot's eschatology is not static but dynamic. This would be an exceedingly odd thing for the Scot to say if he were operating with the Platonic notions that (1) movement is change, (2) if perfection changed it would no longer be perfect, and (3) perfection is therefore static.

One further concern that might be raised at this point is the tendency of mystical theology as a tradition toward introspection, not infrequently to such a degree that, while the mystic pursues union with God, his neighbor is all but forgotten. As we saw in chapter 7, however, Eriugena does not conceive of introspection as any sort of solution but as the very heart of the problem. Rather than being turned inward, the Scot's theology is turned radically outward toward God, neighbor, and all of creation. It is precisely through neighbor, and indeed through each particular being in the whole created world, that the glory of God will be manifested. For Eriugena, the eschaton is characterized by a universal transfiguration in which everything that is becomes clearly and manifestly a theophany.<sup>2</sup> As we will see in this chapter, our Irishman envisions Heaven as a remarkable and beautifully dynamic interplay of persons in vital relation to one another, and it is exactly through this inter-relation (and the relation of each to God) that each becomes more and more truly and fully who he or she is. This has important and immediate practical implications; rather than the Christian's neighbor being merely one with whom he shares a common destination, the neighbor is actually an important part of the formative process through which the Christian's personhood comes to realization. Not only this, but the Christian and his fellow believers will continue to form one another for all eternity. It is no overstatement

---

<sup>1</sup> Deirdre Carabine, *John Scottus Eriugena* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 103.

<sup>2</sup> Of course, seeing God everywhere and being happy about seeing God everywhere are, as we have noted in chapters 6 and 8, two different things. The universality of this transfiguration is in no way a universality of beatitude.

at all to say that Eriugena's conception of the eschaton helps us to see—in the form of what will be a lived reality for the saints—why the commands to love God and neighbor are the greatest. These commands are neither additions to nor means toward the Christian life; on the contrary, at the most fundamental level they *are* the Christian life, and will continue to be so for all of eternity.

Having just considered what the Scot does not say about the nature of *theosis*, our project in this chapter is to consider what Eriugena *does* say about it, and to show that what he describes using this name is, in fact, strongly suggestive of what we would now call *intersubjectivity*. The idea of intersubjectivity is at its root a philosophical rejection of Cartesian solipsism and also of the so-called “transmission model of communication.” Those philosophers who have employed this idea (notably Gabriel Marcel, whose ideas we shall shortly consider) have tended to do so as a way to name the pervasive human intuition that, *contra* Descartes and those who have built upon his foundation, other persons are *real* and *accessible*. To provide an everyday example, we take for granted whenever we speak to another person that 1) the other is real and not an illusion, 2) the other is able to hear us, and 3) the other is capable of arriving at a mutual understanding—of *something*—with us. The notion, therefore, that we can genuinely doubt either the existence or the accessibility of everything outside of ourselves—a *la* Descartes—can never be other than contrary to our lived experience. This experience points us toward a conception of personhood (which we have already seen in Buber, Macmurray, and Zizioulas) in which, for each of us, my neighbor is not in any way an incidental or dispensable part of my life but is, in a very real way, *integral* to and *constitutive* of my life as a person. The concept of intersubjectivity is a way of giving a philosophical name to this pervasive experience of our neighbor as *real*, *accessible*, and *important*. It is our project, as we earlier observed, to show in this chapter how the concept of intersubjectivity helps us to better understand Eriugena's conception of *theosis*. At the same

time, we will see that Eriugena's understanding of this idea is unusual, and thus sets him somewhat apart from what we usually consider to be the general direction of mystical theology. As we have already seen, he differs from much of that tradition in at least three important ways, but we will see through the course of this chapter that the fact that Eriugena does not deal in monism, the Platonic conception of a static perfection, or introspection is merely interesting. What is truly remarkable is the positive account he supplies in their place.

It remains, then, for us to consider how we might understand, integrate, and articulate the collective significance of these findings. It will be our endeavor in this chapter to set forth a somewhat more positive account of the Scot's conception of the human person in light of his conception of *theosis* as a theological expression of that lived relational dynamic which certain contemporary thinkers (such as Marcel) have called "intersubjectivity."<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> We have prepared to set forth this account at several points along the way. In chapter 2 we made the point that the Scot's thought opens the way for us to conceive the Image of God as the human destiny of fellowship with God. This creation of humanity with a destiny carries with it the idea that purpose is constitutive of the human person. At the same time, this destiny shapes the way in which humanity is created in such a way that to be human is to be *personal*. To be human is to be a person precisely because it is for fellowship with God that humanity has been created. The human person, as an expression of this destiny, manifests the fundamental conditions of interpersonal relation. On the one hand, the human person is unique, and on the other is oriented toward, and indeed constituted by, relation to the other. In chapter 3 we observed that the Scot conceives of the animal nature in humanity as the means by which creation is to be brought into fellowship with God. The vocation of biological man is to participate instrumentally in the unitive ministry of Christ. In chapter 5 we considered the fundamentally narrative and symbolic character of Eriugena's epistemology. This is important because, as we will see, the Scot conceives of language as mediating the reality of intersubjective union. We also saw in chapter 5 that the Scot considers the intellectual motion of the soul to be an *ecstasis*, a self-transcendence, which is not a human faculty but solely a divine gift, a product of grace. In chapter 6 we saw that Eriugena considers the interpretive act as fundamental to human personhood. This is important in that we will shortly consider intersubjectivity as something fundamentally other than knowledge, although related to knowledge. Knowledge does not produce intersubjectivity, although it is encompassed and transfigured in the intersubjective event. Throughout part 2, and most especially in chapter 4, we considered the Scot's framing of the human question of identity, noting at the end of part 2 that what he actually accomplishes is not so much an answer to the question as a thorough demolition of the illusion that self-knowledge is possible. In chapter 7 we saw that Eriugena's thought leads us to the conclusion that the quest for self-knowledge is not only futile but actually destructive. What is important for the human person is not to know himself but to trust that he is known and loved by another, by God. We have also referred repeatedly along the way to the twin problems of self-deification and self-abnegation. As we saw in chapter 7, neither of these impulses can culminate in true interpersonal encounter precisely because the nature of this encounter (most fully expressed in love) necessitates both the uniqueness of the person (which precludes self-abnegation) and the orientation of the person to relation with the other (which precludes the self-deifying urge to subsume all that is other into the self, thus negating its otherness). In chapter 8 we considered how this simultaneity of uniqueness and union with the other finds expression in the Scot's eschatology. Of course, it has been our purpose (as we noted in the Introduction) to set forth

We will begin by examining the Scot's conception of *theosis* in light of a passage in which he describes something like what we would now call intersubjectivity. It would not be amiss, if we were to offer a synonym for intersubjectivity, to suggest the term *communion*. In order to flesh out this idea, we will draw upon the thought of Gabriel Marcel, who presents the idea in terms of love and community. Having done this, we will consider the idea of Christ as the common referent, the mediator of the intersubjective union of God with humanity, taking a theme from Charles Kraft as our point of departure. While we will develop the relation between communication and the Incarnation differently than Kraft does, his insight is useful insofar as he recognizes the connection between Incarnation and communication (which, in light of the mediating function of language, is obviously important to more fully developing the implications of the Scot's Christology and his soteriology). We will then consider the character of intersubjectivity as love and participation rather than as knowledge. In this phase of the discussion we will again draw upon Marcel's ideas as a way to shed some light upon the idea of participation. Having done this, we will then examine the mediating function of symbols, most especially in the form of language. Along with Marcel, we shall draw upon some thoughts from Mikhail Bakhtin in order to more fully consider the relationship between intersubjectivity and the mediating role of language and symbol. We shall then consider Eriugena's conception of the *Visio Dei* as an infinite succession of finite manifestations. As Marcel will help us to see, relationships—at least, living ones—in which human persons are involved entail the idea of development, and this remains true even in eternity. In this connection we will also touch upon Pannenberg's useful insights.

---

not merely a speculative *account* of the human person, but a speculative *theology* of the human person, and specifically one that is in harmony with Christian orthodoxy. Because this is so, we have taken some pains to show (especially in chapters 1, 2, 4 and 8) the Scot's dependence upon and development of ideas from his patristic sources.

## Theosis as Intersubjectivity

We noted in chapter 8 that the Scot conceives of the final union of creation to God as one in which creatures retain their particularity. In what sense, then, does the Scot speak of union with God? The final union is not one of identity, so how does Eriugena understand this eschatological reality as a unity? We also noted there the perichoretic character of the Scot's eschatology and recognized this as an outworking of Nicene and Chalcedonian categories in his thought. As we have repeatedly seen, theology and philosophy are an integrated whole for Eriugena. Having already examined the theological aspect of the Scot's view of the final union, a question still remains: how might this conception be developed philosophically? As a point of entry to our examination of intersubjectivity, we will consider these words from the *Periphyseon*:

Whenever, in fact, the pure intellect knows something perfectly, it is made in that thing and becomes one with it... we too, while debating, are made in each other. When I understand what you understand, I become your understanding (*intellectus*), and in some ineffable way I am made in you. Similarly, when you plainly understand what I plainly understand, you become my understanding and from two understandings there is made one, formed from what we both understand wholly and unhesitatingly. For example, to take an illustration from numbers: you understand that the number six is equal to its parts. I have the same understanding, and I understand that you understand it, just as you understand that I understand it. The understanding of both of us becomes one, formed by the number six; and hence, I am created in you and you in me. For we are not one thing and our understanding something else.<sup>4</sup>

It is important for us to remember in this connection that Eriugena does not see "intellect" as synonymous with "reason." For the Scot, the intellectual motion is that in which the soul is lifted beyond its own limits. The intellectual motion, in other words, is that by which the soul experiences self-transcendence. As we noted in chapter 5, the intellectual motion is not properly

---

<sup>4</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, trans. Myra Uhlfelder, with summaries by Jean A. Potter (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, Inc., 1976), 255.

a faculty but an event which the soul sometimes experiences by the action of Divine grace.<sup>5</sup> What emerges, then, in this passage is more important than a moment of mutual knowledge as such; the intellectual motion is toward self-transcendence precisely as a means toward union with the other. At the same time, we can see another important aspect of this intersubjective union, one which serves as another indicator of the Scot's concern that the particularity of the creature be upheld. This union of understanding is one which is *mediated* by the common referent, the thing which is mutually understood (such as the number six). Mediation entails plurality; it is the role of one thing in uniting two others. We will consider the mediating function of symbols (especially language) later. Nevertheless, it is already clear that the Scot does see this mediation as occurring within the context of dialogue; it is "while debating" that persons are "made in each other."

Marcel relates this idea of ecstasis to faith when he says,

Faith is infinitely more than a state of consciousness, and . . . it is impossible to reduce it in any instance to a vague feeling, or to the even vaguer picture of it which the man may have who has been granted a share of it. In so far as he is a believer, he is perpetually beyond himself, and by *himself* must be understood what I shall call his imaginative equipment, which as a rule is after all very limited.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, faith (in the sense of trust) involves a movement beyond the limits of knowledge; it operates in the realm of what cannot be conceptualized. At the same time, however, this ecstatic movement is the ground of intersubjective union. We will consider the difference between knowledge and intersubjectivity shortly, but for now let it suffice for us to recognize the ecstatic character of faith and its qualitative difference from knowledge. While it might be going too far to equate faith with the intellectual motion as the Scot conceives it, the two are certainly

---

<sup>5</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon, Liber II*, ed. I. P. Sheldon-Williams, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 9 (Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1972), 115.

<sup>6</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery Of Being*, vol. 2 of *Faith and Reality*, trans. René Hague (London: The Harvill

strongly complementary ideas. This point is important; if we accept that faith and intellection, while they might be distinguishable from one another, are practically inseparable, we find that intellection—contrary to what we should expect if Eriugena were merely echoing his predecessors in the mystical tradition—is not a rare experience for the enlightened few. Instead, we can plainly see that faith is a pervasive element of life as a human person. We fail to recognize the reality of intellection/intersubjectivity, not because it is rare, but because it is so pervasive in human life that we take it for granted. At the same time, we need to remember that intellection is not a capacity of the human person; rather, it is the lifting of the soul beyond itself *by grace*. The pervasiveness of this grace does not change the fact that it does, in fact, come *from outside* the human person, from God.

The ecstatic character of intersubjective union emerges in the *Homily* as well; Eriugena remarks concerning John the Evangelist that: "The mystical bird, who flies fast and looks upon the face of God—I mean John, the 'theologian'—rises above every visible and invisible creature, soars over all understanding, and, deified, enters into God who deifies him."<sup>7</sup> John is presented in this context as being lifted beyond the limits of the human capacity to know. We need at this point to make two observations. First, in the context of what we observed in chapter 8 concerning the Scot's description of union with God, it should be clear that the human person, when lifted beyond himself, does not cease to be himself, but receives an otherwise unattainable fullness of God's self-disclosure and thus becomes in a sense *more* than before, but not *different*. Second, as we have already noted, this infilling of the person with God is not something which the human person can attain by any effort. That it is strictly an instance of grace is clear, both from what we observed concerning the intellectual motion in chapter 5, and also from what the

---

Press, 1951), 150.

Scot has said shortly before,

O holy John... To which of those skilled in the knowledge of God has the grace been given that has been given to you, namely to penetrate the hidden mysteries of the highest good and to make known to human minds and senses what has been revealed and made clear to you?<sup>8</sup>

It is evident in this passage that the Scot sees the event of intersubjective union with God as beyond the capacity of the human person to accomplish. When this event happens, it is God who has brought it to pass. At the same time, this event of self-transcendence is not merely for the person who experiences it. On the contrary, John has been graced “to make known to human minds and senses what has been revealed.” This event, in other words, is the impetus toward testimony, toward bearing witness to the hope of the Gospel. This hope, by its very nature is directed outward, is intended to be shared with others. We might ask whether John’s case is unique in this way, but Eriugena suggests otherwise; he presents Peter and John as symbolizing, respectively, faith and intelligence.<sup>9</sup> In other words, he presents Peter and John as models of the Christian life; the Christian who believes like Peter will deepen in understanding like John; he will also, like John, will be moved to bear witness. Marcel’s view concerning hope in general helps both to confirm and elucidate this idea; he says that “to hope cannot but be to hope for us, for all of us. It is an act which in some way embraces in itself the community which I constitute with all of those who have been sharers of my own venture.”<sup>10</sup> In light of what we have already seen we might say that the hope of the Gospel is hope for a community because the eschatological union of the saints to God is intersubjective.<sup>11</sup> Intersubjectivity and community are

---

<sup>7</sup> John J. O’Meara, *Eriugena* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 160

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>10</sup> Marcel, *The Mystery Of Being*, 2:171.

<sup>11</sup> See especially chapters 7 and 8.

inextricably linked to one another. The radical eschatological immanence of God to every creature, while it does allow for the experience of futility in the damned, is directed toward realizing the communion of the saints.<sup>12</sup> Marcel helps us to see how this can be so when he says,

What we have to find out is whether one can radically separate faith in a God conceived in His sanctity from any affirmation which bears on the destiny of the intersubjective unity which is formed by beings who love one another and who live in and by one another. What is really important, in fact, is the destiny of that living link, and not that of an entity which is isolated and closed in on itself.<sup>13</sup>

While it will be the case that the damned will be “isolated and closed in” on themselves, this does not change the fundamental direction of God’s design. The radical immanence which the Scot describes in the eschatological union of creation to God serves a different purpose, that of Divine self-disclosure in the clearest terms, in universal theophany.<sup>14</sup> The *Visio Dei* is the means by which God reveals Himself *for the purpose of intersubjective union with his creatures*. What is anticipated and begun in the hope of the Gospel is consummated through the *Visio Dei*. For Marcel, as for Eriugena, the concepts of intersubjectivity, anticipation-hope, and teleology-eschatology are all interrelated. Another remark from Marcel helps us to see how this is so:

The most important of these propositions consists, I think, in asserting philosophically. . . the indissolubility of hope, of faith, and of charity . . . we cannot fail to see that intersubjectivity, which it is increasingly more evident is the cornerstone of a concrete ontology, is after all nothing other than charity itself . . .<sup>15</sup>

A recurrent theme in Marcel’s Gifford Lectures (from which the above is drawn) is this concern for “a concrete ontology,” as distinguished from one which is “abstract” (meaning impersonal, and thus untrue to the nature of human experience). As we can clearly see in these words, the conclusion Marcel draws is that *love* (rather than empirical knowledge) is the basis of

---

<sup>12</sup> We dealt with this in chapter 8.

<sup>13</sup> Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, 2:155.

<sup>14</sup> What we described in chapter 8 as “transfiguration”

this concrete ontology. At the same time, however, we are concerned with Eriugena's conception of intersubjectivity, which entails the mediation of the common referent. We shall now, therefore, consider how our understanding of the mediation of Christ might be illuminated by this concept of the common referent.

### **Christ as the common referent**

We have examined Eriugena's eschatology at length and from several perspectives in previous chapters and will do so further through the course of this one. It is now appropriate for us to suggest a Christological implication of Eriugena's eschatology, which we can then keep in mind as we consider the nature of symbology and its relation to intersubjectivity later in this chapter. It is not the intent of this section to present an explicit view of the Scot's so much as to draw out a possibility in light of what we have thus far seen. Having said this, let us take a moment to recapitulate several elements which we will then attempt to draw together within a Christological context. To begin, we need to say again that the Scot sees the return of Christ (as we saw in chapter 6) as catalyzing and ushering in the eternal reality of the *Visio Dei*. As we have said, this event ushers in both futility for the damned and joy for the saints.

With regard to the damned, we need only to say that intersubjectivity and flow (which we might define initially—although we will soon have more to say—as the dynamism and evolving nature of living relationship) are contingent upon the emergence of living relationship, which is in turn contingent upon the personal disposition of trust. Where there is no trust living relationship cannot emerge. Thus, for those who meet God with distrust, there can be no dialogue, no personal growth, and no realization of the person. The futility of the damned is a direct product of distrust and the alienation it produces, which in turn culminates in an eternally

---

<sup>15</sup> Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, 2:170.

static futility.

The situation of the saints, however, is radically different; it is characterized exactly by dialogue, personal growth, and the realization of the person. It is our project in this section to consider how this might be so. We have already mentioned (in chapter 4) Eriugena's conception of the *Visio Dei* as an infinite succession of finite theophanies. We will shortly consider this in light of the mediating function of symbols. Symbols, as we will see, are interpersonal and as such serve as the ground of intersubjective encounter. We might say that what is true of theophanies in general is true *a fortiori* of the returned Christ. We need also to remember that, in our examination of Eriugena's Christology in chapter 1, we saw that he speaks of Christ as both the Eternal Word and as the Revealer of the Father. In light of the interpersonal nature of words (which, again, we shall explore shortly), it is not inappropriate to say that Christ is not only the Eternal Word, but also God's Word *to humanity*. Charles Kraft makes this point when he remarks that

A . . . characteristic of God that is crucial to his communicational strategy is his personalness. He does not . . . seek either to love or to communicate impersonally. Rather, he (a) identifies personally with his receptors, (b) as a person interacts with and becomes vulnerable to his receptors, and (c) himself becomes his message. When he sends, he sends persons. When he comes, he comes as a person. Incarnation—personal participation in the lives of his receptors—is his constant method. And as in all life-changing communication, the person (whether God himself in Christ or another person as God's representative) is himself the major component of the message he conveys. . .<sup>16</sup>

This linkage between Incarnation and communication is both insightful and useful to our current discussion. In a very real way, Christ *is* in Himself the medium, content, and actualization of the message of salvation. Kraft goes on to say that: "It is because God's aim is a relationship that the

---

<sup>16</sup> Charles H. Kraft, *Communication Theory for Christian Witness* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983), 26.

means of communication must be so personal.”<sup>17</sup>

We have here the following elements thus far: (1) Christ as God’s saving Word to humanity, (2) The nature of salvation as interpersonal relationship, and (3) our description of the Scot’s eschatology as intersubjective. How do these elements relate to one another? I would suggest that we can in this context understand Christ as the common referent *par excellence*, and that this understanding, while not explicit in the Scot’s writings, is thoroughly compatible with his project. In order to see how this is so, we should consider a few key ideas. First, we have earlier considered the Scot’s vision of the return of Christ in terms of confrontation with God as absolute reality. Related to this theme is the simpler idea that Christ’s return will be seen *by everyone*. No referent could be more *common* than one that is clearly seen by each and every person. Second, we need to remember the Scot’s description of the final union in his analogy of the golden ball. In this analogy, it is precisely through what everyone sees together that their sight is united. The juxtaposition of this analogy with what we have just said concerning the fact that everyone will see Christ’s return is evocative of what we are suggesting. Third, we have already mentioned that what is true of theophanies as God’s self-disclosure is *a fortiori* true of Christ. That is to say, insofar as a given theophany serves as the symbol by which God discloses Himself in a finite way to finite minds, no theophany could be conceived to be more perfect than the Word made flesh. Fourth, these theophanies, which we will shortly consider in connection with the concepts of language and symbol, serve as the ground of intersubjective encounter with God. Again, this is *a fortiori* true of Christ. The full particularity and full unity of the two natures in the one person of Christ suggests a further dimension. As we can easily see in light of Carabine’s description of Eriugena as presenting an eschatology of “eternal discovery,” God’s

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 27.

infinity always leaves more to discover for the human person.<sup>18</sup> Christ as God manifests this infinity in His Divine nature. At the same time, we have also spoken of flow as an indispensable element of human relationship (which we will explore shortly). Christ, as fully human, represents the eternal and intimate entry of God into the intersubjective flow of the saints in eternity. Through Christ, God participates in this eternal joy in a thoroughly human way. Eriugena, then, does not present us with a picture of mystical union in the Dionysian sense because he offers a better alternative. Rather than the rather sterile and abstract idea of incomprehensible union with a supra-personal God (in line with the pseudo-Areopagite's view), the Scot opens the way for us to conceive of a dynamic and loving relationship with a God who, for all His infinity, meets us throughout eternity as Incarnate, as a human person. This theme of loving relation is fundamental to a proper understanding of intersubjectivity. We shall now consider this concept as it emerges in the Scot's thought, making use of some ideas from Marcel which will help us to flesh out what we find in Eriugena.

### **Intersubjectivity as Love and Participation rather than Knowledge**

One contrast which emerges clearly between orthodox Christianity and Gnosticism lies in the differing roles which each view ascribes to knowledge. In the Gnostics knowledge is the answer to the human problem. The correct answer, the secret, liberates its possessor. For the Gnostics, salvation comes simply from having the proper information. Christianity, on the other hand, has persistently argued that knowledge is not in itself the solution to the human problem. Knowledge has a part to play, but it is ultimately only a means to vital relationship with God. We might refer to the common distinction between what we call knowing *about* someone and truly *knowing* someone. This idiom is obviously problematic in the sense that, as we have seen, the

---

<sup>18</sup> Carabine, *John Scottus Eriugena*, 107.

human person is in a real sense unknowable; nevertheless, it does serve to convey that apprehension of facts about a person does not constitute living relationship. Living relationship enfolds and incorporates the things that one person knows *about* another, but at the same time it transcends these facts. Living relationship, which in its fullest expression we could call love, intersubjectivity, or communion, is what Macmurray describes as “the self-realization of the personal.”<sup>19</sup> It is in this context that we will examine Eriugena’s conception of intersubjectivity. The Scot’s eschatology can be conceived as the fullest emergence of an order in which intersubjective union between God and humanity is in fact the *telos* toward which all of creation has been directed from the beginning. The eschatological consummation is in particular the consummation, the fully realized emergence, of human personhood. This full realization of human personhood centers around the transfiguration by which the glory of God is seen through all things. Nevertheless, this eschatological clarity and universality of theophany does not in itself constitute intersubjective relationship with God. Futility is the very real and possible alternative, and this is so precisely because knowledge is not in itself relationship. Marcel describes a similar scheme when he remarks that

God could . . . be defined as the keystone of the kingdom of love. And everything that has previously been said about the acts by which individual minds affirm one another as immortal would, from this new point of view, merely symbolize the living communication of the individual with God. This communication, as we already know, is participation. We know that it is not mere knowledge, and that it ceases as soon as the individual mind, seeking to free itself from God, claims to posit Him before itself as a being; we love only insofar as we do not try to know. Love is always a belief.<sup>20</sup>

The solution to the human problem is not God as fact but God as person. In this connection, we can begin to see how the conception of Christ which we just described helps to

---

<sup>19</sup> John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), 158.

<sup>20</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Philosophical Fragments 1909–1914 and The Philosopher and Peace* (Notre Dame, IN:

enrich our conception of eternal bliss as intersubjectivity. The eternal entry of the Incarnate Christ into human relations underscores the *personal* nature of this intersubjective union in the most radical terms. To address God as fact can never lead to intersubjective union; this union can only take place within the context of God as alive, active, speaking, and loving—in a word, as person. The human treatment of God as It rather than as You (to borrow Buber’s nomenclature) culminates in futility. Intersubjectivity, as we have already said, enfolds and incorporates knowledge while transcending it. It requires a movement away from the security and predictability of knowledge toward trust, which necessitates the affirmation that the You cannot be encompassed in the field of knowledge. To attempt to so apprehend another person is to say “It.” The Scot expresses this idea in these terms:

O Lord . . . You always pass through in the intellects of those who seek and find You. You are always sought by them and always found, and yet You are not always found. You are found in Your theophanies, in which, in many ways as in mirrors, You are reflected in the minds of those who understand You, as You allow Yourself to be understood. You allow men to understand not what You are but what You are not, and that You are. But You are not found in the superessentiality with which You go beyond and surpass every intellect that wishes and rises to comprehend You. You administer Your presence to Your people, then, by the ineffable manner of Your appearance. You go beyond them by the incomprehensible loftiness and infinity of Your essence.<sup>21</sup>

Taking the Scot’s definition of “knowledge” as *precise circumscription*, he is right to say that God cannot be known for the simple reason that He cannot be circumscribed, encompassed, by human knowledge. To attempt to do so is to depersonalize Him and portray Him as merely a fact, an It. At the same time, however, God’s self-disclosure emerges through particulars, through facts. These particulars are, to the person who is personally disposed toward trust in God, theophanies. In all the particulars of creation God reveals Himself, and these theophanies

---

University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), 101.

<sup>21</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 345.

are the medium of what Marcel calls “the living communication of the individual with God.”<sup>22</sup> God, then, cannot be known, but He can be experienced, trusted, and loved as He meets and personally engages us as His creatures. The condition of this relationship, however, is trust.

In this connection, we should consider the relation between freedom and faith as Marcel envisions it; he says,

. . . freedom does not exist for itself, cannot be conceived of as freedom, except by affirming that its relation to experience is founded on God. This affirmation is faith, that is, participation itself. But since participation is not a truth, it cannot be affirmed without contradiction by one who does not affirm it.<sup>23</sup>

It is important that we note here that Marcel does not define freedom in terms of capacity for action so much as in terms of *authenticity*. Freedom does not consist in being able to do or not to do; instead, freedom is that condition in which the particular person truly is finds complete expression. Freedom, then, arises from the affirmation that God is God and that each particular human person is His creature. It is in the recognition that each human person is a *creature* rather than an accident, a nothing, or a god, that human personhood begins to become authentic. At the same time, freedom is liberation from the slavery of the objective, which is founded in the tragic realities of error, miscommunication, deception, and distrust. It is through the movement away from knowledge (and the sense of control it implies) and toward trust that the human person begins to come into harmony with his or her true nature as a creature. Rather than through the insistence upon self-definition, self-knowledge, and self-control, the liberation—and actualization—of the human person comes through the fullest awareness of his or her own creaturehood.

---

<sup>22</sup> Marcel, *Philosophical Fragments 1909–1914*, 101.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

To be a creature suggests a further notion, to which we will now turn: contingency. It is as contingent creatures—and there is no other kind—that humans participate in union with God. The rejection of this contingency introduces a basic inauthenticity into human life, which leads to the bondage of self-deception and culminates in futility. On the other hand, in the acknowledgement of his own creaturehood and contingency, the human person discovers the absoluteness of God and the ubiquity of His grace. Eriugena describes this in the *Homily*:

Human nature, even if it did not sin, could not of its own proper resources shine; for according to its nature it is not light, but partakes of light. For it is capable of wisdom, but it is not wisdom itself, by participation in which it can become wise.... The light, therefore, shines in the darkness, because the Word of God, the life and the light of men, does not cease to shine in our nature which, examined and considered in itself, is found to be a certain darkness without form; nor has that light wished to abandon it, although it sins, nor has it ever abandoned it: it forms it, containing it through nature; it reforms it, deifying it through grace.<sup>24</sup>

Alongside the motifs of contingency and participation, we see and should note an echo of Eriugena's remark in the *Periphyseon* that God walks in the Garden "which he never abandoned."<sup>25</sup> The persistence of God's presence is the continual action of His grace and the demonstration of His trustworthiness. The human person is, as we see here, true to his nature in acknowledging his contingency. Even human nature as originally created "could not of its own proper resources shine; for according to its nature it is not light, but partakes of light." In short, humanity is created for fellowship with God, and it is within this fellowship that the human person comes to full realization. Eriugena develops this idea further in his remarks about John the Baptist:

[John the Baptist] was a burning lamp, but he did not burn, lit with his own fire; he did not give light with his own light. He was the morning star, but he did not receive

---

<sup>24</sup> John J. O'Meara, *Eriugena*, 168.

<sup>25</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon, Liber IV*, ed. Édouard A. Jeuneau, with the assistance of Mark A. Zier, trans. John J. O'Meara and I. P. Sheldon-Williams, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 13 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1995), 231.

his light from himself. The grace of him whom he preceded burned and shone in him. He was not the light, but he participated in the light. That which shone in him and through him was not his. As we said earlier, no rational or intellectual creature is through itself and substantially light, but participates in the one and true substantial light, which shines intelligibly everywhere and in all things.<sup>26</sup>

It is because the Baptizer “participated in the light” that he “was a burning lamp.” The nature of union with God, as we earlier observed, is such that it turns the human person so graced outward toward others. It is true not only that John could not have been the prophet he was apart from this grace but also that it was the quality of this grace to point him outside himself toward the action of bearing witness. Hope, as Marcel says, includes the other.

We noted at the end of section 1 that Marcel equates intersubjectivity with love, and we have developed this idea through the vocabulary of communion and living relationship. It is fitting that we understand the function of the idea of participation (and ultimately that of *theosis*) in the Scot’s thought in this sense. Eriugena makes a similar connection in the *Periphyseon*:

Deification is given only to the nature of angels and men, and not to all of them, but only to the angels who, burning with the love of their Creator, remain fixed in the contemplation of the truth, and only to men called according to the divine plan.<sup>27</sup>

This is so simply because angels and men (at least according to Eriugena) are *persons*. Only persons can truly love and only persons can truly be called. To address an impersonal object is to *personify* it in the literary sense, but this personification is only figurative. Intersubjectivity, as the outgrowth of loving communication, is inherently personal.

One further passage from Marcel serves to underscore the nature of intersubjectivity as love and participation rather than knowledge, while also providing a point of entry to our next section. He says:

---

<sup>26</sup> O’Meara, *Eriugena*, 170.

<sup>27</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 308.

We ought to linger, also, over this idea of non-objectivity itself; emphasizing its value, emphasizing the fact that it is the condition of the reality of participation itself. . . it is in fact only by virtue of the idea that participation emerges; the idea, around which non-objective participation becomes possible, is itself the principle of the emergence of participation.<sup>28</sup>

We can see here that “non-objectivity” is “the condition of the reality of participation.” In other words, what is known cannot be met intersubjectively. Knowledge, as Buber would put it, is the realm of It. At the same time, this passage helps to illuminate what Eriugena means by “formed by the number six.” Reason has a part to play in the movement toward intersubjectivity insofar as it is reason which conducts the narrative operation of the mind. At the same time, the mutuality by which the common referent (which begins as an element of the mind’s narrative, i.e., as a single symbol) is recognized as truly common (we might say “inter-personal”) happens in the moment of intellection. This recognition transcends the operation of reason, which is the operation by which the *individual* relates particulars to one another. The intersubjective moment is, however, a moment of *intellecion*, in which the soul is moved outside its own limits, that is, ecstatically, into a relation with the other in which the common referent (the “idea”) is the locus of a participation in which both persons are mutually involved. The common referent, then, is the ground upon which intersubjectivity occurs. This mutuality is trans-rational and trans-objective. At this point, given the importance of this common referent to the reality of intersubjectivity, it becomes clear that we should take some time to consider the mediating function of language and symbol.

### **Mediation of Language and Symbol**

Intersubjectivity as Eriugena conceives it is, as we have seen, a genuine “meeting of minds.” At the same time, however, we need to note that this unity does not occur in a vacuum;

---

<sup>28</sup> Marcel, *The Mystery Of Being*, vol. 1 of *Reflection and Mystery*, trans. G. S. Fraser (London: The Harvill

rather, the Scot sees the unity of two minds as “formed by the number six.” In other words, the common referent—the symbol which is recognized as mutual—serves as that which mediates this unity. We noted in chapter 5 that the Scot’s epistemology is narrative and that his conception of knowledge in general is symbolic. The correlation of a symbol to a particular reality cannot be verified in the strict sense. He conceives of language, we might say, as a grand extension of the act of naming. At the same time, however, as two minds recognize (both in the sense of knowing and in that of affirmation) their common conception of the symbol (such as the number six), this symbol serves as the ground of a real mutuality in their thought. Because this is so, we shall take some time to consider the mediating function of symbols. In particular, we will focus on language, both because it will help to underscore and flesh out our description of the Scot’s epistemology as narrative and because it will also serve to illuminate the interpersonal character of language. As we consider Bakhtin’s views in particular, we should always keep in view the broader application of his views on literature to the symbolic and interpersonal character of language. We also need to remember what we have said previously concerning the nature of the eschatological union as universal theophany. In the final union, everything that is will be a clearly recognizable symbol by which God makes Himself known, a Divine communication. This is important for the Scot in that the radical immanence which will characterize the eschaton will still and always be balanced by the radical transcendence of God. Knowledge of God will never be other than symbolic, but the symbols can be true symbols and can serve their mediating function with the result that the human person can experience intersubjective union with God precisely through these symbols. Eriugena describes it this way:

Some theophanies are so sublime that they are understood to be exalted above all creatures in a very close contemplation of God and are believed to be, as it were,

---

Press, 1950), 113.

theophanies of theophanies. For God in Himself is not wholly visible to any creature, but is seen in the clouds of speculation. As the Apostle says: “We shall be taken up in the clouds to meet Christ, and so we shall always be with Him.”<sup>29</sup>

To begin, we need to clarify the nature of the phrase, “theophanies of theophanies.” It might be tempting to translate this along the lines of “images of images,” but this would be a misunderstanding. These theophanies are not inferior, in the fashion of “copies of copies.” On the contrary, they are not at the bottom of what we might call the symbolic hierarchy but at the top. This phrase needs to be understood as an emphasis of these theophanies’ surpassing excellence, as in the case of “King of Kings.” In other words, as persons draw closer to God, they meet with clearer manifestations of His character, i.e. with better symbols. Nevertheless, these symbols are not a temporary state of affairs; encounter with God will always be mediated. It cannot be otherwise in that human knowing is always symbolic and narrative in character.

The nature of these symbols, however, is to invite that they be transcended in intersubjectivity. The symbol can never be removed from the equation, but the symbol in its rational role is not the final point. The intent is that persons move beyond the realm of objective knowledge (which is impersonal) to intersubjectivity. The symbol is the gateway to this intersubjectivity, but it can only be so if those who mutually refer to the symbol come to see it less as simply a thing and more as a point of connection to the mind of another person. Marcel speaks along these lines when he remarks that

a word (*une parole*) as such cannot be reduced to a content which is to be assessed according to pre-existing standards: there is a being for whom it is ‘my word;’ it is supported, very unequally supported moreover, by the man who utters it.<sup>30</sup>

To put it simply, a word is always *someone’s* word, the word of a person. Language by its very nature is personal. Bahktin makes a similar point specifically about the written word:

---

<sup>29</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 310.

The text as such never appears as a dead thing; beginning with any text—and sometimes passing through a lengthy series of mediating links—we always arrive, in the final analysis at the human voice, which is to say we come up against the human being.<sup>31</sup>

This observation carries with it the implication that the mediating role of symbology extends beyond the spoken word. The idea of intersubjectivity is not confined within the realm of verbal dialogue; on the contrary any symbol is a symbol because it is directed toward mutuality. Bakhtin goes on to say that

we somehow manage . . . to endow all phenomena with meaning, that is, we incorporate them not only into the sphere of spatial and temporal experience but also into a semantic sphere. This process of assigning meaning also involves some assigning of value.<sup>32</sup>

In other words, experience is catalogued and in a sense named by the person whose experience it is. At the same time, this includes “some assigning of value.” This assigning of value is what we have elsewhere called “the interpretive act.” As the assigning of *value*, however, interpretation is not objective and does not fall within the realm of knowledge. As we earlier noted, the naming and ascription of value to a phenomenon, the conversion of that phenomenon into a sort of symbol, defies the process of verification strictly defined.

At the same time, however, it is precisely in particulars that experience happens; it is reason which relates these particulars to one another in the context of narrative. The particular phenomena which as an aggregate comprise experience (it is reason which makes of them not merely an “aggregate” but an integrated “whole”) also carry with them a spatial and temporal context into their role as symbols, and these contextual elements are an integral part of the interpretive act. Bakhtin describes the mediating function of language as creating a sort of

---

<sup>30</sup> Marcel, *The Mystery Of Being*, 2:179.

<sup>31</sup> Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), 252.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

intersubjective place and time, a mutual “here and now” within which the mind of the writer and that of the reader come together through the text. For this to occur, however, the mediating function of the individual symbols which comprise the narrative is indispensable. Bakhtin puts it this way:

Whatever these meanings turn out to be, in order to enter our experience (which is social experience) they must take on the form of a sign that is audible and visible for us (a hieroglyph, a mathematical formula, a verbal or linguistic expression, a sketch, etc.) Without such temporal-spatial expression, even abstract thought is impossible.<sup>33</sup>

Both unity and particularity are necessary in the construction of a coherent narrative. A collection of sayings is not in itself a *narrative* because it may lack the unity which characterizes a narrative. At the same time, particularity is also integral. A single word repeated over and over cannot tell a story, and a single sentence repeated over and over might be a proposition, but not a narrative in the proper sense. The particularity and variety of words and sentences is necessary to truly tell a story, to create a narrative. We might suggest that even in the construction of a simple sentence the principle of distinction-without-separation is apparent. Bakhtin offers us a hint as to why this might be so: “Verbal discourse is a social phenomenon—social throughout its entire range and in each and every of its factors, from the sound image to the abstract meaning.”<sup>34</sup> Language is by its nature inter-personal. It is spoken by persons to persons. Further, language presupposes the idea of interaction. Bakhtin makes this point when he argues that “every literary work *faces outward away from itself*, toward the listener-reader, and to a certain extent thus anticipates possible reactions to itself.”<sup>35</sup> Language is not merely information; it is properly a means by which the speaker engages in a sort of interaction with another person, which is to say

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 257.

that it is the ground of an interpersonal encounter. The ideas of language as interpersonal and interactive, if applied more generally to the concept of symbol, offer a useful way of understanding the nature of theophany in the Scot's eschatology. In the final union of creation with God, *everything* in creation becomes a clearly symbolic representation of the God who created it. Each particular thing remains what it is, but is at the same time transfigured into a moment of Divine self-disclosure. At the same time, however, it is in their particularity (and finitude) that theophanies point beyond themselves to God. This implies the idea of a kind of succession, what we earlier called a "flow," in the eternal dialogue between God and the saints rather than some sort of total and static simultaneity. We will now consider this idea as it emerges in Eriugena's eschatology.

### **Continual Development**

There can be no doubt that the Scot presents the *Visio Dei* as a dynamic rather than a static reality. It is not in fact a single, complete and unchanging "Vision of God" so much as an infinite succession of "Visions of God," each of which is finite (we might say a particular symbol). By way of analogy, the *Visio Dei* is not a mural but a motion picture (notably, a kind of narrative). Eriugena describes it in these words:

Because the ultimate object of desire and longing [God] is unattainable by any creature, the longing and the motion [toward Him] are eternal. The soul forever seeks and in a marvelous way finds what it seeks; it does not find what it cannot find. That is, the soul finds God through theophanies, but God as He is in Himself it cannot find, for He is beyond the contemplation of any creature.<sup>36</sup>

This progression of theophanies, which we have described using the terms "narrative" and "flow," is necessary for at least three reasons. First, God is infinite and human beings are finite. The idea of an infinite God instantaneously disclosing Himself in His totality to a finite human

---

<sup>36</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, 317.

person is immediately problematic, if not formally contradictory. Second, such a singular disclosure would lack the dynamism, the “flow,” which Eriugena’s narrative conception expresses. Great truths are never well expressed—if they can be expressed at all—in a single word. It is context which makes the single word rich, profound and evocative. This same principle helps us to understand the Scot’s description in terms of a sort of flow. It also helps us to better see how growing closer to God, although He is never *apprehensible*, leads to the “better symbols” we mentioned earlier, the “theophanies of theophanies.” Third, it is the nature of dialogue to consist in such a flow. Dialogue, the movement of persons toward intersubjectivity through the recognition of mutual symbology, by its very nature consists of symbols *in sequence and relation*. An infinite simultaneity of symbols can only be either chaos or the disappearance of each symbol’s particularity into a single uncontextualized whole. To say everything is to say nothing. There can be no context without particularity, and there can be no communication, as we saw in Bakhtin, without context.

Marcel underscores the importance of such a flow in a fully personal eschatology:

Salvation can also be better conceived by us as a road rather than a state; and this links up again with some profound views of the Greek Fathers, in particular St. Gregory of Nyssa. I may also add that if there is a sense in which salvation is indistinguishable from peace, it is a living peace that is in question; it is certainly not a spiritual stand-still, our being as such getting congealed in the contemplation of some fixed star. This living peace, however, could be nothing but a progress in love and in truth, the consolidation, that is, of an intelligible city which is at the same time and above all else a city of souls.<sup>37</sup>

This passage makes two important points for our discussion. First, we should note Marcel’s allusion to Gregory of Nyssa. This idea of an infinite succession of theophanies does indeed appear in Gregory’s writings, specifically in the *De opificio hominis*, which Eriugena cites in this

---

<sup>37</sup> Marcel, *The Mystery Of Being*, 2:182.

context.<sup>38</sup> Second, Marcel's idea of a "living peace" is simply another way of describing what we have elsewhere described as *communion*. This entails that our conception of communion be dynamic. The idea of flow, then, is consistent with such a conception. As Zizioulas has noted, the emergence of personhood as a concept is intimately intertwined with the attempt to develop a vocabulary that integrates ontology and teleology.<sup>39</sup> Humans as persons are not merely "beings;" they are also in a real sense "becomings." Pannenberg makes this very point in his discussion of eschatology:

If . . . our earthly lives are to undergo such far-reaching changes from the standpoint of eternity, can we speak of an *identity* of the future life with our present life? Is it still *our own* life that we shall find again in this form that is so changed from an eternal standpoint? Obviously there is not an identity of content in the sense that nothing is added or subtracted. Nevertheless, we may find an identity of the eschatological consummation with human life as it now is on earth if we consider what it is that constitutes the identity of a person even now in this earthly life. On the one side are the concrete conditions and experiences and realities of life that we cannot suppress but that we are to integrate into the unity of our selfhood. On the other side is this selfhood, our destiny as human beings and as specific individuals, and what exactly constitutes this selfhood we can grasp only provisionally because we are still on the way to it, and in one form or another we constantly go beyond what we already are and were. All the same, we are also already in some sense what we shall be. Hence in the process of building identity we always find together both identity and change, including change in the significance of what we experienced earlier.<sup>40</sup>

This passage from Pannenberg evokes a number of the themes we have examined so far. In particular, we can see the idea of personal particularity integrated with the concept of flow. This flow is in a sense dialogical. On the one hand, we can see that identity evolves. On the other hand, however, we can also see "change in the significance of what we experienced earlier." In other words, our *interpretation* evolves as our identity does. If we consider this in light of what

---

<sup>38</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon (The Division of Nature)*, trans. I. P. Sheldon-Williams; rev. by John J. O'Meara (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1987), 590.

<sup>39</sup> John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993), 70.

<sup>40</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI:

we have already read, we can see that what emerges in our reading of Eriugena's eschatology is a dynamic relation between self and other in the context of what we have called flow. In this context, (1) phenomena are experienced and interpreted, (2) identity evolves in light of this interpretation, (3) the evolution of identity leads to a reinterpretation of prior experience (not necessarily different, but certainly taking the form of a distinctly new interpretive moment) and, (4) the person's experience—as a constitutive element of this symbolic flow—of new phenomena, which initiates this progression anew. The Scot helps us to see that the living relationship that Macmurray describes as “realization of the personal,”<sup>41</sup> is in fact the endless evolution of intersubjective union, which can never be static for the simple reason that human persons are not static. What we see is, in the final analysis, an inexhaustibly complex interrelation of each person to God and others in light of his or her own experience, which is also continually illuminated in new ways by new experiences of God and of neighbor, who is also continually evolving. Although God does not change, His infinity means that there will always be more of Him to know. At the same time, the uniqueness of each person includes a certain uniqueness of experience and interpretation which, in ongoing dialogical relationship with God and neighbor, means that part of the beauty and glory of the *Visio Dei* is that it never exhausts the possibilities of discovery and the newness of joy which accompanies the discovery of beauty.

### **Summary and Implications**

It is now appropriate for us to summarize our findings and draw a few implications. We began by considering the Scot's conception of *theosis*, using the idea of intersubjectivity as a framework. We saw in this connection the fundamentally ecstatic character of intersubjectivity

---

Eerdmans, 1997), 3:639.

<sup>41</sup> John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), 158.

and observed this dynamic within the Scot's description of the intellectual motion and its being mediated through the common referent. Next, we reflected upon a possible understanding of Christ's mediation between God and humanity which is (1) grounded in the idea of common referentiality and (2) arises readily from the Scot's writings in light of our previous observations concerning intersubjectivity. We then considered the qualitative difference between intersubjectivity and knowledge, noting that while intersubjectivity incorporates knowledge, it also transfigures and transcends it. We went on to relate intersubjectivity to love, and then to draw the connection between intersubjectivity and trust. Next, we considered the mediating function of symbols as the ground of intersubjective encounter, focusing in particular on language and the notion of common referentiality. We then considered what we have called "flow," which we could describe in the context of communication as the succession and interrelation of symbols in such a way as to create a context within which intersubjectivity occurs. We then considered the Scot's eschatology as an expression of this dynamic. Finally, we suggested that the Scot's conception of the *Visio Dei*, as an expression of this dynamic, is deeply consonant with the nature of human persons both ontologically and teleologically.

We can draw four implications from these findings. First, we observed earlier that Eriugena's eschatology helps us to see how it is that love toward God and neighbor *are* the Christian life. In light of what we have seen, the import of that statement is now clearer. Humans have been created in the Image of the Triune God, which is as much as to say that we are created for a purpose, and also created in such a way that both uniqueness and relationality are constitutive of our nature as *persons*. Our uniqueness and our orientation toward relation with the other are both manifestations within our design of the destiny for which God has made us. We have been made for communion with God and neighbor. Eriugena's intersubjective conception of the eschaton presents us with a lucid and systematic outworking of the way in which our

destiny comes to realization. We are to love God and neighbor because God has designed us for exactly this purpose; any other way of life puts us at odds with the destiny for which God created us as persons. The purpose of humanity is precisely eternal intersubjective union with God and neighbor. The Scot understands the human person as one formed with a view to and drawn toward an eschatological reality in which the uniqueness and relationality of each person are integral to the eternal joy and growth that await.

Second, we can see how the mediation of Christ in this context is not only an accomplished action, but also an ongoing and eternal reality. Of course, the mediation of Christ must be considered as completed from the viewpoint of justification. At the same time, however, a conception of Christ's mediation as ongoing provides an explicitly interpersonal context within which to frame the concept of sanctification. The entry of Christ into the eternal intersubjective flow which characterizes the Scot's eschatology represents a profound expression of God's irrevocable love for, and identification with, humanity.

Third, we have remarked repeatedly upon the centrality of the interpretive act in the Scot's view of the human person. As early as chapter 1, we also remarked that the Scot's Christology draws heavily upon the cosmic Christology of Maximus. In this connection, we can begin to see that Christ is not only the creative Word, He is in a sense the interpretive key Who makes sense of *all* words, in fact, of all creation. Christ helps us to see the significance of every sign, every letter within the Book of Creation even now. The hermeneutical spiral between Scripture and creation which characterizes this life is transfigured in the next into eternal doxological reflection upon everything God has made, and that process of transfiguration begins here and now as we come to see our world through the lens of Christ.

Fourth and finally, our reflection upon the nature of eternal personal growth brings to mind a cautionary note from Marcel:

The most serious error of which the converted can become guilty is that of believing that he is placed or installed once and for all in some privileged position from which he can look condescendingly on the tribulations of those who have not yet joined this sort of 'home.' It is just this idea of 'home' which must be rejected with the utmost emphasis, at least if this 'home' is conceived not as a goal, as something to be reached, but as being already dwelt in.<sup>42</sup>

Even as we will continue to grow throughout eternity, we are growing here and now; indeed, we have just begun to grow. It befits us, as beginners with all eternity before us, to live, think, and explore with wonder, care and, especially, great humility.

---

<sup>42</sup> Marcel, *The Mystery Of Being*, 2:134.

## EPILOGUE

It remains for us to draw out a few implications from our findings in this study as a whole. In a sense, what we have seen in Eriugena is a development of central doctrinal themes in such a way that they are presented as fundamental aspects of reality. In other words, the doctrines of the Christian faith are simply statements about how things truly are; it is the result of sin that things seem otherwise to us. We will conclude, then, by presenting several examples of this principle as it has emerged in the course of our inquiry.

First, we have made the point repeatedly that relationality is constitutive of the person. In light of what we have seen, it should now be clearer what we mean when we speak in these terms. To be human is to be created as a person, which means that any discussion of what it means to be human (created in the Triune Image) ought to do so in the context of Trinitarian communion. To be human is to be made for the purpose of intersubjective relation to other persons, in which the uniqueness and distinction of the person are centrally important *especially* in the movement toward union with the other.

We have considered Cartesian solipsism as alienation, but this is only one manifestation of the problem. Equally problematic are the impulses toward self-deification and self-abnegation. The loss of the self to the other, the reduction of the other to an extension of self, and alienation of self from the other are each distortions of the nature of *love*, for which humanity has been made. It bears repeating that love for God and neighbor is neither an addition to nor a means toward the Christian life; on the contrary it *is* the Christian life. Furthermore, the Christian life is precisely the life for which humanity has been made—it is the life in which human personhood fulfills its destiny and comes to fullest actualization.

Nevertheless, humanity is fallen; we cannot be confident that we recognize, desire, or move toward the life for which we have been made. In this light, the function of God's Law becomes clearer. We have seen how Eriugena's thought brings us to an understanding of the Law in which that Law specifies what it means to love God and neighbor. Through obedience the believer is brought into a way of living that increasingly reflects the life of love for which humanity has been made.

This brings out another important consideration: the content of the Christian faith as set forth in Scripture and the Rule of Faith (most especially the creeds). Again, because of the problem of sin (which we described as the impulse toward self-definition, and which runs counter to our nature as beings designed and created by God for intersubjective relation to Himself and each other) our understanding of what it means to love is fatally distorted. The content of the faith provides the necessary corrective to this distortion by setting before us the destiny for which we have been made. We have not been made for our own purposes but for God's, and to live in pursuit of any ends but those for which God has made us is to live in a condition of self-contradiction which can only culminate in futility.

We have also considered the Scot's conception of intellection as the ecstatic motion toward union with the other. This motion, which is in every case a product of Divine grace, manifests itself most especially in what we have at different times called intersubjectivity and love. This particular grace manifests itself as well in the act of communication. By means of words and symbols we both go forth to meet and are met by God and our neighbor. We have also considered Christ as the supreme example of this principle, as the Word in Whom God comes to us and through Whom we are drawn into intersubjective union with God. At the same time, Christ is also the creative Word, the *Logos* through whom God discloses Himself through His

design in all the created world. Further, because of the Word God has spoken to and for us, we are moved in response to speak both to and of Him.

This brings us to another point. We have examined at some length how Eriugena conceives of the function of reason. We have observed that his epistemology is realistic, narrative, and interpersonal. In light of what we have just observed, a further implication emerges. Narrative by its nature is dialogical; it anticipates being heard by the other. At the same time, the coherence of the narrative is ultimately contingent upon its congruence to the reality of things as they are. We have seen that the Scot builds his thought upon the conception of God as absolute reality. In the end, it seems that Eriugena envisions the rational motion as that by which the soul moves toward speech to and about God (or to and about those gods it futilely attempts to make for itself). The rational motion is the movement of the soul toward *doxology*, which in the believer manifests itself in praise to God and testimony about Him to neighbor.

In sum, Eriugena shows us that the content of the Christian faith and that of the Christian life are inseparable. To be a human being is to be made for the Christian life, the life of love for God and neighbor, not conceived in the abstract but in all their particularity as the Triune and Living God of the Bible and as each person whom we encounter in life. Neither God nor neighbor can be conceived as an abstraction precisely because to do so is to deny the identity, and thus the personhood, of a being who is not categorizable as a “something” but is irreducibly and eternally a *someone*. At the same time, each of us as been made as such a someone, as a *person*, and it is only in the full and continual affirmation both of our own uniqueness and that of God and our neighbor that the eternal dialogue and the loving union for which we have been made can truly come to be. We are made *for* each other because it is *in* each other that we come to be who we truly are.

## APPENDIX

### ERIOGENA AND GREGORY NYSSEN ON GENESIS

In considering Eriugena's perspective (especially in chapter 7), it is necessary for us to set our discussion within the context of the Scot's exegesis of Genesis 1 and 2. In the *Periphyseon*, Eriugena spends a great deal of time considering the creation narrative. In fact, he spends roughly the last third of book 3 and the entirety of book 4 on his exegesis of these two chapters. His exegesis in book 3 is concerned with the first five days of creation, while book 4 is dedicated to reflection upon the creation of humanity. For Eriugena, Paradise represents human nature as God created it to be, so his reflection upon Genesis 2 is at its root concerned with discovering what light Genesis can shed on the question, "What is man?" Eriugena develops the implications of Genesis 2 by means of an extensive allegorical reading, in which he interacts at length with Augustine, Ambrose, and especially Gregory of Nyssa. Of course, we have already noted that the *De opificio hominis* of Gregory was an important influence upon the Scot, and in his exegesis of Genesis this influence finds expression in a particular formulation which is important for our study. The *De opificio hominis* includes an allegorical examination of the two trees in Paradise, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Gregory refers to the tree of life as the  $\pi\alpha\nu$ , and the tree of knowledge as the  $\gamma\nu\sigma\tau\omicron\nu$ ,<sup>1</sup> and Eriugena adopts this taxonomy verbatim even as he modifies its content. He follows Gregory<sup>2</sup> in equating the tree of life with

---

<sup>1</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, vol. 5 of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 2nd Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 409.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Christ,<sup>3</sup> but as we shall see, he understands it in another way as representing the interior sense.

He then goes on to say that the tree of knowledge represents the exterior sense, as we can see in the following passage:

You will also find, if I am not mistaken, that mind holds the highest place in human nature, and the material body the lowest. And if you now turn to the intermediate parts of the same nature you will find below mind, on the upper side, reason, and above body, on the lower side, vital motion, by which I mean the nutritive life principle; and again in the midst of this nature, as in the midst of Paradise, two senses, the exterior which adheres to the vital motion and the body, and the interior sense which is inseparably joined to reason and mind, and is consubstantial with them. Therefore, these two senses, occupying as it were the two middle positions of the Paradise of human nature, represent those two intelligible trees,  $\pi\alpha\nu$  and  $\gamma\nu\omega\sigma\tau\omicron\nu$ ,<sup>4</sup> the interior  $\pi\alpha\nu$  and the exterior  $\gamma\nu\omega\sigma\tau\omicron\nu$ .

In the Scot's treatment of the two trees, he makes them—quite literally—central to the question with which we are concerned. For Eriugena, the roles of exterior and interior sense are pivotal.

The context of Genesis adds another layer to the discussion in that the narrative of chapter 2 makes it quite plain that the Fall of humanity consists in humanity partaking—in disobedience to God's command—of the tree of knowledge. Eriugena is not blind to the import of equating the tree of knowledge with the exterior sense; it is precisely in following the lead of the exterior sense that humanity falls into sin. This raises a question, however, with which we must now deal.

There is an apparent inconsistency in the Scot's thought at this point in that he argues, "The proper abode of falsehood is in the corporeal sense. For no part of human nature is the recipient of error except the exterior sense, and that is the means by which the interior sense, the reason, and even mind are very often led astray."<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, we have already seen that the Scot

---

<sup>3</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, trans. Myra Uhlfelder, with summaries by Jean A. Potter (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, Inc., 1976), 277.

<sup>4</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon, Liber IV*, ed. Édouard A. Jeuneau, with the assistance of Mark A. Zier, trans. John J. O'Meara and I. P. Sheldon-Williams, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 13 (Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1995), 199.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

believes the exterior sense to reliably represent the created world in that he says,

By the arts [man] moves the fivefold sense of the body to recognize sensible things with zealous care to understand them. This motion . . . furnishes no little aid to the rational soul in its contemplation of the truth of sensible things, with all falsehood removed and with true and whole knowledge.<sup>6</sup>

In what sense, then, is the exterior sense the “abode of falsehood?” We have already observed that reason strives on the basis of premises supplied it by faith (or unfaith) to set forth a narrative which coherently integrates those premises with sense experience. We have also seen that the Scot understands the Fall as a disordering of human nature in that the animal nature is set over-against the Divine Image by the human attempt at self-definition. Reason is properly the motion of the soul by which the human person *interprets* sense experience on the basis of its premises; interior sense knows things as particulars, while exterior sense experiences them as sensory data. Eriugena sees the disordering of the human person as consisting (at least in part) in the application of exterior sense to the function which should be properly be performed by reason: interpretation. This change from reason to exterior sense as the interpretive dynamic in the fallen human person is consonant with, and parallel to, what we have already observed concerning the Fall as the change of man from biological to bestial. The exterior sense is “the abode of falsehood” in the sense that in fallen humanity it has come to take priority over the interior sense, reason, and mind. In this state of affairs things are not assigned significance by reason; on the contrary, they are merely experienced as pleasant or unpleasant, with pleasure becoming the fallen man’s standard for goodness. The problem, of course, is that what is pleasurable is not always good.

---

<sup>6</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, 219.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anselm of Canterbury. *Basic Writings*. Translated by S. N. Deane. Introduced by Charles Hartshorne. LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1962.
- Augustine of Hippo. *The City of God*. Vol. 2 of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. 1st Series. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *On Christian Doctrine*. Vol. 2 of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. 1st Series. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *On the Holy Trinity*. Vol. 3 of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. 1st Series. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993.
- Ayer, A. J. *The Concept of a Person and Other Essays*. London: Macmillan, 1963.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Edited by Michael Holquist. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Beierwaltes, Werner. "The Reevaluation of John Scottus Eriugena in German Idealism." In *The Mind of Eriugena: Papers of a Colloquium Dublin, 14–18 July 1970*, edited by John J. O'Meara and Ludwig Bieler, 190–99. Dublin: Irish University Press, 1973.
- Berdiaev, Nikolai. *The Destiny of Man*. London: G. Bles, 1954.
- Bernstein, Richard J. *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983.
- Bett, Henry. *Johannes Scotus Eriugena: A Study in Mediaeval Philosophy*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1964.
- Bieler, Ludwig. "Remarks on Eriugena's Original Latin Prose." In *The Mind of Eriugena: Papers of a Colloquium Dublin, 14–18 July 1970*, edited by John J. O'Meara and Ludwig Bieler, 140–46. Dublin: Irish University Press, 1973.
- Blowers, Paul M. and Robert Louis Wilken, eds. *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: Selected Writings from Maximus the Confessor*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003.
- Boethius. *De persona et duabus naturis contra Eutychem et Nestorium, ad Johannem Diaconum ecclesiae Romanae*. In *Patrologiae cursus completus seu bibliotheca universalis, integra, uniformis, commode, oeconomica, omnium ss. patrum, doctorum scriptorumque ecclesiasticorum sive latinorum sive graecorum... Series Latina... Patrologiae Latinae Tomus LXIV*, edited by J.-P., 1337–54. Migne. Paris: 1891.
- Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. Translated by Ronald Gregor Smith. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1950.

- Carabine, Deirdre. *John Scottus Eriugena*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Congar, Yves Marie Joseph. *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*. New York: Seabury, 1983.
- Davies, Oliver, ed. *Celtic Spirituality*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999.
- Descartes, René. *Descartes: "Discourse on Method" and "Meditations."* Translated by Laurence J. Lafluer. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960.
- Eriugena, John Scottus. *Jean Scot: Homelie sur le Prologue de Jean: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction et Notes*. Number 151 of *Sources Chretiennes*. Translated by Edouard Jeuneau. Paris: Cerf, 1969.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Periphyseon, Liber I*. Edited by I. P. Sheldon-Williams. *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 7. Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1968.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Periphyseon, Liber II*. Edited by I. P. Sheldon-Williams. *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 9. Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1972.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Periphyseon, Liber III*. Edited by I. P. Sheldon-Williams. *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 11. Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1981.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Periphyseon, Liber IV*. Edited by Édouard A. Jeuneau, with the assistance of Mark A. Zier. Translated by John J. O'Meara and I. P. Sheldon-Williams. *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 13. Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Periphyseon (The Division of Nature)*. Translated by I. P. Sheldon-Williams Revised by John J. O'Meara. Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1987.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*. Translated by Myra Uhlfelder with summaries by Jean A. Potter. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Treatise on Divine Predestination*. Translated by Mary Brennan with an Introduction by Avital Wohlman. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Voice of the Eagle*. Translated by Christopher Bamford. Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 2000.
- Fletcher, F. T. H. *Pascal and the Mystical Tradition*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1954.
- Gilson, Etienne. *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*. New York: Random House, 1955.
- Goffman, Erving. *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face to Face Behavior*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1967.
- Gregory of Nyssa. *On the Making of Man*. Vol 5 of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. 2nd Series. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994.

- Grenz, Stanley. *The Social God and the Relational Self: a Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.
- Gunton, Colin E. *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991.
- Häring, Nikolaus M. "John Scottus in Twelfth Century Angelology." In *The Mind of Eriugena: Papers of a Colloquium Dublin, 14–18 July 1970*, edited by John J. O'Meara and Ludwig Bieler, 158–69. Dublin: Irish University Press, 1973.
- Hall, Calvin S. and Gardner Lindzey. *Theories of Personality*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1957.
- Jenson, Robert. *The Triune Identity*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982.
- Kierkegaard, Soren. *Fear and Trembling*. Translated by Alastair Hannay. New York: Penguin Books, 1985.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Works of Love*. Translated by Howard and Edna Hong. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.
- Kraft, Charles H. *Communication Theory for Christian Witness*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1983.
- Kreeft, Peter. *Christianity for Modern Pagans: Pascal's "Pensees" Edited, Outlined & Explained*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993.
- LaCugna, Catherine Mowry. *God for Us: The Trinity & Christian Life*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993.
- Leff, Gordon. *Medieval Thought: St. Augustine to Ockham*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1958.
- Lewis, C.S. *The Screwtape Letters*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1958.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Till We Have Faces*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956.
- Lewis, H. D. *The Elusive Self*. London: Macmillan, 1982.
- Lossky, Vladimir. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. London: James Clarke, 1957.
- Louth, Andrew. *Maximus the Confessor*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Lull, Ramon. *Romancing God: Contemplating the Beloved*. Edited by Henry L. Carrigan. Brewster, MA: Paraclete, 1999.

- Luscombe, David. *Medieval Thought*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*. Translated by George C. Berthold. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985.
- Macmurray, John. *Persons in Relation*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Self as Agent*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957.
- Maddi, Salvatore. *Personality Theories: A Comparative Analysis*. Homewood, IL: Dorsey, 1968.
- Marcel, Gabriel. *The Mystery Of Being*. Vol. 1 of *Reflection and Mystery*, translated by G. S. Fraser. London: Harvill, 1950.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Mystery Of Being*. Vol. 2 of *Faith and Reality*, translated by René Hague. London: The Harvill Press, 1951.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Philosophical Fragments 1909-1914 and The Philosopher and Peace*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965.
- McGinn, Bernard. *The Growth of Mysticism*. Vol. 2 of *The Presence of God*. New York: Crossroad, 1996.
- Meek, Esther Lightcap. *Longing to Know: The Philosophy of Knowledge for Ordinary People*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003.
- Miel, Jan. *Pascal and Theology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969.
- Moody, T. W. and F. X. Martin, eds. *The Course of Irish History*. Cork, Ireland: The Mercier Press, 1967.
- Moran, Dermot. *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena: A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Mühlen, Heribert. *Der Heilige Geist als Person. Beitrag zur Frage nach der dem Heiligen Geiste eigentümlichen Funktion in der Trinität bei der Inkarnation und im Gnadenbund*. Münster: Aschendorf, 1963.
- Nicholas of Cusa. *Nicholas of Cusa on Learned Ignorance: A Translation and Appraisal of De Docta Ignorantia*. Translated by Jasper Hopkins. Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*. Translated by H. Lawrence Bond. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Vision of God*. Translated by Emma Gurney Salter. Escondido, CA: The Book Tree, 1999.

- O'Meara, John J. "Introduction." In *The Mind of Eriugena: Papers of a Colloquium Dublin, 14–18 July 1970*. Edited by John J. O'Meara and Ludwig Bieler. Dublin: Irish University Press, 1973.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Eriugena*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.
- Oden, Thomas C. *The Living God*. Vol. 1 of *Systematic Theology*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992.
- Otten, Willemein. "Carolingian Theology." In *The Medieval Theologians*, G. R. Evans, ed. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Anthropology of Johannes Scottus Eriugena*. Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 1991.
- Pascal, Blaise. *Pensees*. Translated by A. J. Krailsheimer. New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 1995.
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Systematic Theology*. 3 vols. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991–1997.
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*. Translated by Matthew J. O'Connell. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985.
- Pelikan, Jaroslav. *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)*. Vol. 1 of *The Christian Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600–1700)*. Vol. 2 of *The Christian Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600–1300)*. Vol. 3 of *The Christian Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300–1700)*. Vol. 4 of *The Christian Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Peters, John Durham. *Speaking Into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Polanyi, Michael. *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Tacit Dimension*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1966.
- Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*. Translated by Colm Luibheid. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987.
- Rahner, Karl. *The Trinity*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999.

- Russell, Robert. "Some Augustinian Influences in Eriugena's *De diuisione naturae*." In *The Mind of Eriugena: Papers of a Colloquium Dublin, 14–18 July 1970*, edited by John J. O'Meara and Ludwig Bieler, 31–40. Dublin: Irish University Press, 1973.
- Schwoebel, Christoph. *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays in Divine Being and Act*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. *Persons Divine and Human*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999.
- Sheldon-Williams, I. P. "Eriugena's Greek Sources." In *The Mind of Eriugena: Papers of a Colloquium Dublin, 14–18 July 1970*, edited by John J. O'Meara and Ludwig Bieler, 1–15. Dublin: Irish University Press, 1973.
- Smalley, Beryl. *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964.
- Strawson, P. F. *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*. London: Macmillan, 1982.
- Stock, Brian. "Intellego me esse: Eriugena's cogito." In *Jean Scot Erigene et l'histoire de la philosophie: Actes du II Colloque international Jean Scot Erigene*, edited by René Roques, 327–36. Paris: CNRS, 1977.
- Stout, Jeffrey. *The Flight from Authority*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.
- Thunberg, Lars. *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus Confessor*. Lund: Gleerup, 1965.
- Torrance, Alan J. *Persons in Communion: Trinitarian Description and Human Participation*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996.
- Torrance, Thomas F. *The Mediation of Christ*. Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard: 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Trinitarian Faith*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994.
- Tournier, Paul. *The Meaning of Persons*. New York: Harper & Row, 1957.
- Ware, Timothy. *The Orthodox Church*. London: Penguin Books, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Orthodox Way*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003.
- Wendebourg, Dorothea. "From the Cappadocian Fathers to Gregory Palamas: The Defeat of Trinitarian Theology." *Studia Patristica* 17 (1982): 194–98.
- Wohlman, Avital. "Introduction." In John Scottus Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*.

Translated by Mary Brennan. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998.

Wojtyla, Karol. *The Acting Person*. Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1979.

Wolfson, H. A. *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956.

Yu, Carver T. *Being and Relation: A Theological Critique of Western Dualism and Individualism*. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987.

Zizioulas, John D. *Being as Communion*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993.

## VITA

Carey Bailey Vinzant

December 24, 1970

Vicksburg, Mississippi

### **Collegiate Institutions Attended**

Mississippi College, Clinton, Mississippi, B.A., 1994.

### **Graduate Institutions Attended**

Wesley Biblical Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi, M.Div., 1999.