

Eriugena's Eschatological Imagination: Alienation, Theophany, and the Ascent to the Logos and the Unbounded

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I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

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Dedication

*This thesis is dedicated to beloved Leopold,
2012-2024.*

*My anam cara,
A wonderful exemplar of a theophany.*

*“For God shall be all in all, and every creature shall be converted to God, as the
stars when the sun arises.” (Periphyseon 689 A).*

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Abstract

This research examines the eschatological vision of John Scottus Eriugena in relation to his understanding of the interplay between alienation (rooted in the Fall), theophany and deification. Especial focus is accorded to Eriugena's exegesis of the two Trees in Eden and how their dialectical relationship serves as a key to understanding the resolution of human alienation and the return to God, through Christ the Logos.

In the second chapter I engage with key figures in the early Christian concept of deification, especially those who influenced Eriugena, such as Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor, situating Eriugena in a long mystical tradition. The third chapter focuses on Eriugena's exegesis of the Fall, with a particular emphasis upon the symbolism of the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. This analysis elucidates his understanding of human nature and its descent into alienation. The fourth chapter examines alienation in greater depth, marking the turning point from the Fall before the ascent. The fifth chapter engages with Eriugena's concepts of *natura* and theophany, highlighting the role of Creation as a manifestation of the divine. Finally, the sixth chapter follows his path of contemplation leading to union with the Unbounded through the Logos.

This study seeks to contribute a fresh insight into Eriugena's views on the Fall and subsequent alienation, demonstrating how the theophanic movement of the divine through Creation effects restoration and reconciliation of all things to God.

Contents

Introduction.....	7
Chapter One	10
Eriugena, His Works and the Contemporary Discussion	10
Chapter Two.....	27
Deification: A Brief History in the Context of Hellenic Influences and Early	
Christian Proponents.....	27
Chapter Three	44
The Two Trees.....	44
Chapter Four.....	56
Alienation or Promise of Return?	56
Chapter Five.....	65
Creation and Theophany.....	65
Chapter Six.....	75
Wisdom, Logos, and Deification: The Contemplative Path in Eriugena's	
Eschatology.....	75
Conclusion	86
Bibliography.....	90

Introduction

I first alighted upon the name of John Scottus Eriugena in my late teens, over twenty years ago, when I encountered an obscure text on Rudolf Steiner's view of Christianity, at a Steiner fair in Stroud. The initial introduction opened the way to a thinker whose integration of nature, mysticism and theology would later crystallise certain intuitions, experiences, and beliefs that I held, but had yet to articulate fully. Eriugena's thought resonates profoundly with my Christian faith, which though rooted in tradition, reaches somewhat beyond it in certain regards – particularly through an interest in Gnosticism and a deep affinity with nature spirituality, an interest I have explored as a member of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids (OBOD). What drew me especially to Eriugena was his understanding of nature as transcending the physical, and his vision that, as William Blake might have stated, 'everything which lives is holy'. The vibrant, luminous spirit which I believe to have animated the souls of the earliest followers of Christ was captured by Eriugena's thought, even within an age which is often mistakenly cast as dark and spiritually desolate. His *Homily on the Prologue of the Gospel of John*, among other works, demonstrates that the quest for divine wisdom was indeed alive. Eriugena's emphasis on the mystical *Logos* - Christ as Word - brings these aspects into alignment and kindles a unifying spirit connecting all aspects of Creation within one seamless, divine realm. It is this vision which I hope to illuminate further by exploring his eschatological imagination and its implications for the reconciliation of humanity with the divine.

The research undertaken within this thesis mounts an argument on the intersection of Eriugena's ideas upon alienation and the Fall and its remedy, theophany leading to deification. This thesis explores Eriugena's vision of an eschatological resolution and how the reconciliation of humanity, and by corollary, creation, and the divine are effected in ways often unanticipated in the Western theology of his milieu. As will be argued, deification is far from an isolated concept, and indeed is at the heart of many mystical traditions and the work of philosophical predecessors of Eriugena. John Scottus Eriugena's thought flourished in the midst of the Carolingian court of Charles the Bald, but its roots draw deeply from the fecund soil of Neoplatonic and patristic traditions and the distant shores of Ireland. In exploring Eriugena's eschatological imagination, the locus of the Word as central both as sustainer and catalyst for the ascent of humanity to the divine becomes readily apparent. However, his emphasis upon human nature's momentous role in the cosmic order augments the

significance of human responsibility towards all Creation; such a grave yet exalted purpose particularises the path of ascent, for both the individual and the collective.

The first chapter, being the *Status Quaestionis*, will serve to delineate the chronology of previous research in Eriugenian studies, particularly those pertinent to this research. It also provides theological backdrop and contextualises the trajectory of this analysis.

Chapter Two focuses upon deification as the *telos* of the Christian soteriological journey, which is equally inseparable from Eriugena's eschatology and the summit of sanctification. The chapter seeks to contextualise his approach by examining this in relation to certain striking influences, his theological predecessors, such as Plotinus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor. This seeks to clarify the foundations of the path on which Eriugena cast a new, revitalising light, and clarifies the innovative developments he contributed to this tradition.

Chapter Three enters into a close reading of Eriugena's exegesis of Genesis 1-3, with a particular focus upon the symbolism of the two trees. Eriugena understands paradise to relate to true human nature existing within the mind of God, whilst the Fall is perceived as an allegory for humanity's descent into limitations and the ensuing fall into illusion. The chapter investigates the intricate symbolism of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life and their surprising relationship to one another, illustrating how these apparent paradoxes illuminate Eriugena's concept of a postlapsarian humanity and its inherent potential for restoration.

Chapter Four continues from the findings of the previous chapter and enters into analysis of Eriugena's radical interpretation of Genesis 3:22b. Here he writes of the movement of the divine mercy which nonetheless does not encroach upon man's free will. This leads to examination of his views upon likeness and image and where Eriugena's conception of theodicy might lie, and how human nature in its pure state nonetheless rests inherently in God. The act of *metanoia* begins to be framed here, where the solution to humanity's alienation abounds even in the midst of postlapsarian dilemma, indeed, even at the nadir, in order to begin the process of *reditus*.

Chapter Five addresses the honing of Eriugena's vast concept of *natura*, which encompasses all that is seen and unseen, including God in His state of being. This chapter analyses Eriugena's vision of Creation as an extension of God's being into manifestation.

Chapter Six follows the path of contemplation with particular reference to *praktike physike* and *theologia* and the path of participation in the Word leading to union. There is indeed to be sourced in Eriugena a dynamic mystical path, and this explores the centrality of

Christ as *Logos* and creative wisdom. This chapter also engages with Eriugena's view of Christ as the key to resolving alienation through contemplative wisdom. He enunciates a dialectic sustained in what I term a *logosophiacal* understanding of the divine. The research engages in further exploration of the relationship between the two trees of Eden and how these relate to the process of *reditus*. Eriugena's eschatology reveals the Incarnation as a turning point which is also enacted within Creation and leads ultimately into diverse levels of participation and deification through believers' relationship with Christ.

Chapter One

Eriugena, His Works and the Contemporary Discussion

John Scottus Eriugena (circa 810 - 877) was an Irish theologian, poet and translator. Much of his biography remains uncertain, but it is known that from at least 850 he was associated with the court of the West Frankish King Charles the Bald, most likely teaching the liberal arts. He later succeeded Alcuin as head of the Carolingian Palace School at Aachen. It is often assumed that he was a priest or monk, but it is not known as to whether he ever assumed an ecclesiastical position. Eriugena coined his epithet, meaning *scion of Ireland*, for himself, possibly influenced through a term he read in Virgil – *Graiukena* – meaning ‘scion of Greece’. The latter possibility is an appropriate one, as Eriugena was considered to be unique for his knowledge of Greek as a Western scholar, within a period wherein Latin was favoured in the West. He was commissioned by Charles the Bald to translate Pseudo-Dionysius’s *Celestial Hierarchies*. The process of translating and writing commentaries on this text deeply influenced him, particularly in terms of the development of his own Neoplatonic ideas, which in turn shaped his best-known work, the *Periphyseon*.¹

The *Periphyseon* is one of the few works of Eriugena to survive intact, but it bears comparison to Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica* in terms of both its magnitude and the breadth of topics covered, with each of the five volumes examining, in the form of a dialogue between a student and teacher: God; the primordial Forms; Creation; the human being; and salvation, or the return of all things into Divine Source, respectively. In spite of his association with scholastic philosophy, Eriugena diverged from this system in many ways, especially through his engagement with Neoplatonic concepts and the mystical theology of certain church fathers, in particular Origen, Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor.

George Burch perceived Eriugena to be not so much the first medieval philosopher, but perhaps the last ancient philosopher. This is, he notes, especially apposite if ancient philosophy is to be defined as a quest for truth, whereas medieval philosophy, when perceiving itself as possessing truth through the dogma of the Church, sought to find a means

¹ Also known as *The Division of Nature*.

to understand and explain knowledge of that truth.² Eriugena was accused of promoting pantheistic ideas and was often criticised in various quarters of the Church. The censure escalated and continued posthumously, wherein many of his ideas were held to scrutiny and condemnation.³ There is little evidence that his works have been intentionally destroyed, but it is likely that many have been lost, although the exciting possibility exists that more writings may be rediscovered in the future. The Eriugenian renaissance is a relatively recent phenomenon, and he remains obscure in contrast to some of his theological successors on whom he had some influence, such as Aquinas and Meister Eckhart, hence the relative paucity of materials available, in terms of both primary and secondary.

Eriugena's manner of categorising the divisions of nature are unique to him, although drawn from Maximus's divisions. These categories are - creating but not created; creating and created; created and not creating; and not created and not creating. The first relates to God and the second to the Primordial Forms. Creation is the third category and the fourth belongs to the return and ascent to God. Ultimately it may be said that the first and fourth divisions reflect God as the beginning and end of all, as that which is beyond all and yet in all as their realisation in all fullness. There is movement through these categories however, and their effects are fluid rather than concrete. His balance of the cataphatic and apophatic means to understanding God as both manifest and unmanifest demonstrates the closeness of the divine and yet the ineffability of its mystery. The fourth category of his divisions may also be referred to as non-being, a term which Eriugena frequently accords to God 'for it shall return to Him Who, because He transcends being, is called Not-Being.'⁴

Creation itself, in terms of theophany, results from a 'descent' which reveals the mystery of God's being. Thus all living things are a type of aspect, and also a signpost pointing back to the journey 'upwards' back towards the divine Creator. *Theosis* by contrast emerges from the journey of ascent and return. Eriugena emphasises that there are degrees of union with God, as both participation and deification, unique to all. "Therefore we hold that no other beatitude is promised to those who are worthy, and that there will be no other end of

² George Bosworth Burch, *Early Medieval Philosophy*, Columbia University, (New York, King's Crowns Press, 1951), p.30.

³ The Periphyseon was first proscribed at the synod of Sens in 1224, being declared as 'swarming with worms of heretical perversity' by Honorius III.

⁴ John Scottus Eriugena, (translation by I.P. Sheldon-Williams, revised by John O'Meara) *The Periphyseon*, (Book I), (Washington, Dumbarton Oaks, 1987), p.568, 897 D.

this world, but the ascent beyond places and times of all those who shall receive the glory of *theosis*, that is, deification.’⁵

Whilst Eriugena had been accused of promulgating pantheistic ideas, this accusation often occurred through misunderstanding of the divisions of nature and his concepts of theophany. Whilst the divine sustains and reveals itself through Creation, God is transcendent and above all. Appearances are but divine fantasies, whilst true manifestations of the divine are theophanies. The human mind cannot apprehend anything as it subsists in the mind of God as a primary cause, but the presentation to the mind of facets of the causes is understood in the form of a theophany. However, Eriugena considers Creation in what might be termed a panentheistic manner, wherein everything is contained in God, for the causes of all things subsist and have their true existence within God.

Apprehension of God revealed in His theophanies emerges from a higher form of understanding, a type of revelation akin to *gnosis* formed through degrees of contemplation. This in turn forms the basis of Eriugena’s mystical theology, which is the contemplative path, resulting in union with God. He notes in his *Homily* how John flew higher than Paul, surpassing the third heaven through direct knowledge of God.⁶

One of the chief subjects of this work is the centrality of deification to John Scottus Eriugena’s thought, particularly in relation to his concepts of theophany and return in the *Periphyseon*. I will also engage with, to a lesser extent, his *Homily on the Prologue to the Gospel of St. John*. I will be examining Eriugena’s eschatological imagination through alienation and its resolution through theophany and knowledge of Christ as the *Logos*.

Dermot Moran stated in his comprehensive 1989 work on idealism within Eriugena’s thought that Eriugena is better approached via negative theology rather than knowledge.⁷ Thus he states as a corollary, that one might assume that human nature can be more appropriately described as ‘non-being’ than as being.⁸ Human nature is considered by Eriugena to have an uncreated component, which subsists as its true nature in spite of the Lapsarian state. The fluid component of human nature, in moving through created and uncreated states, would be impossible without the inherent unity of created and uncreated

⁵ John Scottus Eriugena, (translation by I.P. Sheldon-Williams, revised by John O’Meara) *The Periphyseon*, (Book I), (Washington, Dumbarton Oaks, 1987), p.74, 482 C-D.

⁶ John Scotus Eriugena, ‘*Homily on the Prologue to the Gospel of St. John*’ in *The Voice of the Eagle: The Heart of Celtic Christianity*, (translated and with introduction and reflections by Christopher Bamford), (Massachusetts, Lindisfarne Books, 2000), p.75.

⁷ Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena: A Study in idealism in the Middle Ages*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.167.

⁸ Ibid.

nature. What matters concerning this assertion is the pinpointing of the human nature, in an uncreated state, to be already at rest within the Godhead. This also raises the question concerning whether the individual merely needs to place aside one's sinful nature, as both Saint Paul⁹ and the Gospel of Thomas discuss, as being divested in order to attain to the light. His approach to Eriugena in this work examines his idealism and what Moran perceives as the tendency in Eriugena to describe the human condition as primarily *nous*, rather than a body-soul-spirit composite. This is a justifiable opinion to hold of Eriugena, especially when using the *Periphyseon* as a main source, but it may also be argued that Eriugena's ideas are complex and sometimes ambiguous, especially when one takes his ideas upon transcendence and apophatic theology into account and relate these to the individual. Human nature is eternal as situated within its cause, but in its world-bound state is limited. Both the spiritual, ungendered body and the soul, Eriugena states, were created at the same point, in the image of God.¹⁰ Within another work, *The Secret Folds of Nature*, Moran demonstrates how Eriugena enriched the Christian conception of nature, even where Neoplatonism was considered to be unreceptive. He demonstrates the dialectical complexity of Eriugena's concept of *natura* and how he overcomes the Latin separation of nature and spirit.¹¹ Whilst Moran's approach to negative theology highlights an important aspect of his thought, his emphasis upon non-being can be seen to oversimplify Eriugena's complex metaphysical framework. Eriugena's conception of human nature as both created and uncreated suggests a more nuanced view that incorporates being and non-being. My own research, examining the resolution of alienation through theophany and knowledge of Christ, expands upon Moran's interpretations and fills a gap where his research tends towards abstraction, which is a common scholarly construal of Eriugena's thought. This is partially due to the *Periphyseon* being selected as a chief resource upon Eriugena's thought, wherein its dialogue tends to abstraction and often does not, in earthly terms, give specific examples. I hope that to some extent, my research places the *Periphyseon* in its context and demonstrates another, albeit often latent aspect of Eriugena which seeks to resolve the human dilemma and indeed that of the broader issues of how-to-be within a world of apparent suffering, when all creation is always sustained by the divine.

⁹ Ephesians 4:22 and Gospel of Thomas logion 37.

¹⁰ *Periphyseon*, pp.187-188, 582 B-C, for example.

¹¹ Dermot Moran, 'The Secret Folds of Nature', in *Re-Imagining Nature: Environmental Humanities and Ecosemiotics*, edited by Alfred Kentigern Siewers, (Lewisburg, Bucknall University Press), 2014.

Thomas O'Loughlin observed Eriugena's engagement with Julian of Toledo's methodological approach of *antikeimena*, which utilises oppositional inferences to enhance theological arguments.¹² This is particularly pertinent to Scripture, which rather than being perceived as static, would be perceived by Eriugena as being part of a mosaic of truth.

Donald F. Duclow wrote of Eriugena's radical reading of Genesis 3:22, regarding the phrase 'let him not put forth his hand',¹³ emphasising the eschatological reorientation implied in this verse, and the passage of salvatory memory being rechannelled into futurity. This repositions the *telos* in a linear framework, which nonetheless is in accordance with the divine plan for redemption.

Theophany in Eriugena's thought is connected with many facets of his theology. Deirdre Carabine states that for Eriugena, theophany is equivalent to penultimate vision.¹⁴ Thus it can be seen to denote more than an appearance of God in this realm, and by implication, draws the individual toward a state of participation in the divine. However, Mooney warns that theophany must be seen as a signpost rather than an end in itself.¹⁵ The Incarnation is central to theophany as being instrumental in the Return to God, which Eriugena focuses upon in the fifth book of his *Periphyseon*, although he is by no means systematic, referring to the theme of Return throughout the text. One must follow the example set forth through the Incarnation within the life of Christ, not only in ascent back to the Father, but as a salvatory pattern to manifest within one's life, as John F. Gavin suggests in highlighting the often-overlooked Christology within Eriugena's work.¹⁶ Carabine argues that the attainment of knowledge is possible within earthly life, as a measure of the true knowledge of all things but understood this type of *gnosis* to occur in fullness when all returns to its Source.¹⁷ The theophany which Moses experienced ascending Sinai to receive the Commandments is said to hold greater weight with Gregory of Nyssa and Dionysius than for Eriugena as a metaphor for the soul's ascent. A revitalised perspective is given by

¹² Thomas O'Loughlin, "Biblical Contradictions in the Periphyseon," in *Iohannes Scottus Eriugena: The Bible and Hermeneutics*, edited by Gerd Van Riel, Carlos Steel and James McEvoy, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), pp.103-126.

¹³ Donald F. Duclow, 'Denial or Promise of the Tree of Life? Eriugena, Augustine and Genesis 3:22 b', in *Iohannes Scottus Eriugena: The Bible and Hermeneutics*, edited by Gerd Van Riel, Carlos Steel and James McEvoy, pp.221-238, (Leuven, Leuven University Press), 1996.

¹⁴ Deirdre Carabine, *John Scottus Eriugena*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), p.106.

¹⁵ Hilary Anne-Marie Mooney, *Theophany: The Appearing of God According to the Writings of Iohannes Scottus Eriugena*, (Tubingen, Germany, Mohr Siebeck, 2009), p.211.

¹⁶ John F. Gavin, *A Celtic Christology: The Incarnation according to John Scottus Eriugena*, Oregon, (Cascade Books, Eugene, 2014), p.89.

¹⁷ Carabine, *John Scottus Eriugena*, p.105.

Eriugena in re-engaging apophatic theology to that of John and Paul, wherein the clouds of darkness (here we can perhaps perceive intimations of later theologies which developed, such as the cloud of unknowing and the dark night of the soul of St John of the Cross) part to give way to the Transfiguration and modes of ascent for the soul. Eriugena is, Carabine states, set apart from Pseudo-Dionysian tradition in his development of negative theology here even whilst relating it to a theophany. Clouds in the *Periphyseon*, ‘symbolise the only means of experiencing a theophany of the invisible God.’¹⁸ Thus the ineffable vision may be reached in a contemplative state, to some degree, in this life, not as a ‘face to face’ encounter with the divine, but as that which necessarily entails some type of *gnosis* as both theophany and divine darkness, for this transcends the rational, fallen mind.

Carabine analyses Eriugena’s ideas in terms of division and resolution, linking these to descent and return. Within this thesis, I intend to demonstrate the connection between these modes but within the framework of Fall and Return (or ascent) as patterns of deification within Eriugena’s theology. The two trees of the Garden of Eden are accorded especial attention pertaining to the narrative of the Fall in relation to the direction of the human soul, which in turn draws all of Creation into its ontological drama. It is noted within Carabine’s work that she does not focus upon his theological stance, and also does not enter into his commentaries, but the interweaving of such writings would possibly lead to lesser refinement. Akin to other researchers, she notes that a central concept within the *Periphyseon* is Creation as a manifestation of the divine and therefore an expression of the sacrosanct. The modes of Fall and Ascent are connected by the activity of the Word, both as division or separation and resolution as cosmic Return.¹⁹ The Word is the unifying catalyst, assisting through its Incarnation the human mind to overcome ignorance and to begin to come to the knowledge of things in their essences.²⁰

In spite of providing such valuable detail (for an introductory piece on such a complex thinker as Eriugena) regarding his views upon the work of the Logos in human ascent and *gnosis*, there are certain omissions which detract from a comprehensive understanding of Eriugena’s view of *natura*. Whilst Carabine’s emphasis upon subsuming God’s manifest and unmanifest nature into a dialectical formulation provides a holistic perspective, it overlooks the effects of all the divisions of nature upon human understanding in varying degrees, which is an important element of Eriugena’s thought, wherein the dialectic may be transcended.

¹⁸ Eriugena, *The Periphyseon*, 1000C.

¹⁹ Carabine, *John Scottus Eriugena*, p.29.

²⁰ Ibid, p.88.

Similar to Mooney's supposition, she sees theophany in Eriugena's thought as pertaining to signs and symbols of God's presence being made manifest, and not necessarily as a mediating presence. Whilst the former assumption is often held of theophany, I believe that it may pertain to the latter, for theophanies proceed from God, unknowable in essence, even as divine apparitions,²¹ producing as much as the human mind may contemplate or understand of God. The divine essence and theophany are to be distinguished, which is a differentiation of the utmost importance to make in Eriugena's thought. Interestingly she notes in her epilogue of Dionysius and his successors as trying to 'lay hold of God in His nakedness' and grasp Him in the mystical knowledge of God's self.²² Carabine however speculates that Eriugena differs in this sense, as God cannot be perceived as divested because God is intimately involved in creation. He can only be perceived, at this level, through His vestments, which are theophanies and expressions of the divine threads working always through Creation and sustaining it.

The fifth chapter of Eriugena's *Homily* on the Prologue to the Gospel of St. John emphasises the importance of becoming like unto God²³ in order to transcend all and unite with God. For Eriugena, the moral component of 'becoming worthy' does not only entail the reception of grace but is also necessarily a work on the part of the individual will. In the context of this *Status Quaestionis*, Gavin notes the necessity within Eriugena's theology, often overlooked, of pursuing an 'ascetical program that follows Christ's ascent through manner of living'.²⁴ The dual necessity of grace and the engagement of free will in the path to deification is emphasised here, which is implied in Gavin's analysis of Eriugena's specifications of "givens" and "gifts".²⁵ The individual's inherent, and therefore authentic nature, given by God, enables the unfoldment of potentiality in accordance with its design. Nonetheless, it is the work of one's own will that helps this unfold and grace as a gift, which allows one to reach a state of participation in God. Rather than overtly engage with Eriugena's use of apophatic and cataphatic dialectic, Gavin demonstrates the interrelation of various means to union with God as a tripartite process. These are *praktike*, *physike*, and *theologia*. These 'processes' as divided into such stages, are intrinsic to mystical Christian ideas on deification, which also parallel Pseudo-Dionysius's thought, in particular, within his

²¹ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, p.308, 681 C.

²² Carabine, *John Scottus Eriugena*, p.110.

²³ Indeed, Eriugena's words indicate becoming divine in order to participate in God. Eriugena, *The Voice of the Eagle*, p.76.

²⁴ John F. Gavin, 2014, p.90.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p.91.

*Celestial Hierarchies*²⁶, as catharsis, illumination and mystical union. Eriugena is sometimes considered to have preferred the apophatic form as a means to articulate the transcendent nature of God, but his theology centres upon the dialectic of being and non-being, immanence, and transcendence. Eriugena's vision of God as both superseding language, yet also representing the height of positive terms, such as love, goodness, holiness, has been discussed by scholars. Gavin's *A Celtic Christology* emphasises the importance of the Incarnation in relation to the *reditus*, and examines often overlooked Christological components of Eriugena's theology. However, it does not engage with the Celtic aspect of Eriugena's intellectual or spiritual heritage. His insights into Eriugena's Christology meanwhile are valuable in terms of understanding how the Word mediates between Creation and Divinity in the eschatological return. Despite his emphasis upon the contemplative dimension of Eriugena's thought, and the role of grace and free will, the focus also enters into the practical dimension of asceticism and moral striving, which is a lesser-known component of Eriugena's work. I do think however that moral striving is a form of passage for Eriugena and virtue a natural effect of growing in grace. My research seeks to deepen this understanding into a broader eschatological framework, which also attempts to seek the root cause for Eriugena of the falling away from the divine, and thereby engage with a remedy which demonstrates the mystical and transformative facet of Eriugena's eschatology.

Paul Rorem suggests that deification is synonymous with salvation within Eriugena's thought. It is noted that Eriugena's balance of influences retains the Orthodox notions incarnation and deification, wherein God becomes human in order that the human may become divine. Whilst the angelic realm is considered to be closer to God, and Eriugena does not deny this, the divine *Logos* incarnated as a human being, and it is the human which is considered to bear all Creation within itself, thus the deification of humanity may be said to divinise all creatures and indeed the totality of nature. This is of particular consequence in order to understand the intersection of Eriugena's ideas of creational eschatology and Neoplatonic ascent.

Rorem notes that Eriugena's ascent to God necessitates symbols for humans but these are not required in the deification process for celestial beings.²⁷ Eriugena's belief in a requirement of the use of symbols in terms of human perceptions as tools and pointers could be considered to deepen the essential engagement of cataphatic terms. The latter are a human

²⁶ Which Eriugena both translated from the Greek and provided his own commentary.

²⁷ Paul Rorem, *Eriugena's commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*, (Toronto, Canada, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2005), p.170.

necessity, informing part of the perceptions of humanity arising from the Fall yet intrinsic, in a resourceful manner, to their salvation.

In a related manner, Hilary Mooney discusses theophany as pertaining to a signifier rather than a 'structured encounter-event'.²⁸ According to Mooney, there are seven grades to be discovered in Eriugena's path to deification.²⁹ The end-state involves perception and intellect.³⁰ The Sheldon-Williams translation of *Periphyseon* calls this the mind being subsumed into Truth, or taking Truth into itself, as far as is possible for a creature.³¹ Mooney states that theophany allows for encounter with God which involves numerous ways of seeking the divine, likening it to John 14:2. The most vital methodological distinction within Eriugena's work is hailed by Mooney as the cataphatic and apophatic ways of discussing God,³² and whilst the root of this conceptual framework is heavily indebted to Pseudo-Dionysius, the matter of God being incomprehensible to Himself is uniquely Eriugenian. In agreement with J.F. Gavin's thoughts on the necessity of grace in the process of deification, Mooney states that Eriugena's ideas on divine incomprehensibility suggest that true knowledge of God may only be received as a divine gift.³³ Theophany is an expression of this divinely endowed knowledge, and also in Mooney's view, Eriugena demonstrates an aesthetic mediating of the revelation of God in theophany, particularly wherein the Word is embodied as a human. There are hierarchical variations which indicate various capacities for receiving the knowledge of God and its expression.³⁴ Within these passages, Mooney is striving to convey the centrality of Jesus Christ to the Eriugenian notion of theophany. There is at times a shifting away from his Neoplatonic aspect of thought in order to emphasise Eriugena's rootedness in biblical theology. Due to much of Eriugena's work being lost, it is difficult to form a coherent idea of the overall shape of his theology. I would argue that his Neoplatonism is one of the most striking components of his theology. Eriugena is more biblically oriented than he is generally estimated to be, but Mooney goes so far as to define

²⁸ Mooney, *Theophany*, p.211.

²⁹ Mooney, *Theophany*, p.171. These are the corporeal body transforming into vital motion, which becomes sensation, sensation into reason, which becomes as mind (or intellect). The mind becomes the knowledge of all things, which becomes wisdom (*sapientia*) and wisdom thereon ascends in its transformation to become God.

³⁰(*Secretissima diuina mysteria beatis et illuminatis intellectibus ineffabili quodam modo aperientur*) (*Periphyseon* V, 1020D – 1021A) as cited in Mooney, *Theophany*, p.171. Unification with the divine effects a penultimate transmutation, wherein the mind of the creature passes from darkness into the light of the mysteries, but the experience of the blessed from here is such that words cannot possibly be sufficient.

³¹ *Periphyseon*, 1020D.

³² Mooney, *Theophany*, p.189.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.181.

his material on the theophany of God as being ‘biblically centred’.³⁵ The citation from the *Periphyseon* which justifies this theory,³⁶ speaks of God’s revelation within His theophanies, and His procession through the diverse forms of the Creation. God’s being ‘made in all things’ is not specific to biblical ideas of indwelling, apart from certain interpretations of the procession of the Word made flesh as delivered in the prologue to John’s gospel. Whilst Eriugena’s commentary on the Gospel of John only survives partially, it is considered here that he was heavily influenced by Greek theologians such as Dionysius and Maximus.³⁷

The ‘return of all things into their causes’³⁸ is also a Neoplatonic concept, and certainly not ostensibly to be discovered in the Old Testament. The dual movement of descent and ascent or Fall and Return are not, at least upon a surface reading of the Old Testament, to be found within the will of God as depicted therein. Plotinus states that it is the preciousness of the soul which means that one may attain to divinity.³⁹ Thus, where Eriugena states that the individual may be ‘converted into God as the air into light,’⁴⁰ as Mooney cites in the above passage, it may be seen that there are clear Neoplatonic influences at work in this aspect of Eriugena’s thought, often taking precedence over a biblical one. Whilst it may be argued that there are references to participation within the Bible,⁴¹ and more strongly over deification, the passage cited does not prove Eriugena to be a distinctly biblical theologian, but rather it is in his emphasis upon the centrality of the Word, his reliance on the exegetical tradition of the church fathers, and his frequent engagement with Scripture to reinforce his arguments that demonstrate his firm biblical foundation. Mooney does however closely examine the intricacies of how theophany might be considered to operate and its implications for the human soul. She also entertains the idea of transcendence, and akin to Carabine she cites the pericope of Moses’ journey to summit of Sinai as a symbol of such, perceiving a translucency rather than opacity as leading to an enlightening of all reality,⁴² so that there is nothing to interpose between the creature and God. Carabine perceives in Eriugena’s engagement with these pericopes an emphasis on clouds and darkness leading to divine splendour which

³⁵ Ibid, p.115.

³⁶ *Periphyseon*, 683 B-C.

³⁷ Dan Batovici, “Eriugena’s use of Byzantine Biblical Exegesis in his Commentary on the Fourth Gospel” in *Papers from the First and Second PostGraduate Forums in Byzantine Studies: Sailing to Byzantium*, (edited by Savvas Neocleous), Newcastle Upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009, pp.105-126, p.105.

³⁸ *Periphyseon*, 683 B.

³⁹ Plotinus, (translated by Elmer O’Brien), *The Essential Plotinus: Representative Treatises from the Enneads*, (Indiana, Hackett Publishing Company, 1964), p.93.

⁴⁰ *Periphyseon*, 683 B-C.

⁴¹ Psalm 82:6; John 10:34; 2 Peter 1:4.

⁴² Mooney, *Theophany*, p.116.

however blinds.⁴³ Carabine focuses on the negative theological tradition within Eriugena's thought and how he transcends it, to the point where at the summit one is blinded by the divine light and is thus arrayed in Unknowing in the final vision. For Mooney, such a union is manifested through the creature as a theophanic expression manifesting such a light. The light blinds and radiates but the emphasis is upon the Neoplatonic concept of unknowability in Carabine's view. In Mooney's work, the translucency of union demonstrates a limited knowledge but does attempt to show how this operates within created reality. Mooney enquires as to whether Eriugena's writings on the appearing of God contradict the meaning of the Scriptures and concludes that his ideas on the appearing of God are rooted in a selection of scriptural passages with which he engages to validate his conclusions.⁴⁴ There is, I believe, a great difficulty in evaluating the extent to which Eriugena actually meant for his extracts to inform the centre of his ideas upon theophany. There are arguments which state that Eriugena preferred to present philosophical ideas over elements of faith, but within his broader context, Eriugena's writings mirror his deep-seated Christian faith and idealism. Mooney does however overemphasise his rootedness in the scriptures at the expense of the importance of Neoplatonic philosophy for Eriugena. One example is the matter of divine ignorance within the *Periphyseon*, which is not a term used within the scriptures, and for which Eriugena cites Augustine and Dionysius's influences.⁴⁵ The term theophany was likely first discovered by Eriugena in the process of translating the works of Pseudo-Dionysius.⁴⁶ The latter does not make use of the term as frequently as it appears within the *Periphyseon*, and Eriugena very much adapted the term and expanded it within a Christian soteriological framework. One of the chief principles of Neoplatonic thought is that being is intelligible. To be intelligible is both beauty and goodness and is thus 'the unfolding or manifestation of beauty itself, or God'.⁴⁷ Mooney does highlight Eriugena's engagement with scriptural verses in order to illustrate examples of the appearing of God,⁴⁸ but does acknowledge an Augustinian influence on his consideration of theophany within his commentary of John's gospel and the *Homily*.⁴⁹ His more innovative ideas however are far from Augustinian in their influence.

⁴³ Carabine, *John Scottus Eriugena*, pp.103-104.

⁴⁴ Mooney, *Theophany*, p.213.

⁴⁵ *Periphyseon*, p.206, 597D.

⁴⁶ John J O'Meara, *Eriugena*, (The Cultural Relations Committee of Northern Ireland, 1969), pp.20-21. Charles the Bald commissioned Eriugena to do the translation in 860.

⁴⁷ Eric D. Perl, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, (New York, State University of New York Press, 2007), p.43.

⁴⁸ Mooney, *Theophany*, p.213.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.188.

What also must be taken into consideration is the distinction which Eriugena makes between knowledge by faith and philosophical reasoning,⁵⁰ which will be examined in relation to *theosis* further within the dissertation. Akin to J.F. Gavin, Mooney writes of the reception of divine gifts being bestowed upon the individual as knowledge of God, which she terms also ‘encounter-in-knowledge’.⁵¹ The divine generosity is said to be in this instance foundational for Eriugena’s application of theophany. Gavin states that humankind in its fallen state only sees Creation in reference to itself rather than its authentic state within God, which can become an obstacle to the process of divine return.⁵² Human contemplation tends to apply division and resolution, mirroring the divine *exitus-reditus* schema.⁵³ Philosophy thus can heal the divisions which result both via and as a result of self-reference as a turning away from God. The human mind is said to have destroyed, in its fallen state, the unity of creation through its self-interested seeking.

Dermot Moran enters into a very comprehensive account of *natura*, mentioning the expansiveness of Eriugena’s considerations of nature,⁵⁴ and seeks to account for the four divisions of nature in the *Periphyseon*. These are the ‘self-externalisations’ of the divine nature, a form of demonstrating God’s nature as the ‘beginning, middle and end of all things.’⁵⁵ His work on the *Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*⁵⁶ in particular is broad in its scope. Herein he acknowledges that within Eriugena’s thought, the negative and positive routes of theology are consistently placed in a dialectical tension.⁵⁷ The human mind must transcend these differentiations in order to reach a state of unity with the Godhead. In accordance with Gavin, Moran describes contemplation (as *theoria*) as leading to oneness with its object whilst providing a partial view of the divine. Gavin states that *physike* as philosophical contemplation heals divisions, where separation and multiplicity occur through the fallen rational mind and its attendant perceptions.⁵⁸ This is not a cognitive exercise, but a spiritual one, which aims to perceive that ‘the soul of Christ transforms the flesh’.⁵⁹ This

⁵⁰ Such as within: Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, p.318, 689 C – 690 A.

⁵¹ Mooney, *Theophany*, p.100.

⁵² Gavin, *A Celtic Christology*, p.79.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p.100.

⁵⁴ Dermot Moran, *The Secret Folds of Nature*, in *Re-Imagining Nature: Environmental Humanities and Ecosemiotics*, (Edited by Alfred Kentigern Siewers), (Lewisburg, Bucknall University Press, 2015), pp.109 – 125 (on p.109 Moran notes that he radically redefined the concept of nature within Christian philosophy).

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.118.

⁵⁶ Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena: A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.148.

⁵⁸ John F. Gavin, *A Celtic Christology: The Incarnation According to John Scottus Eriugena*, p.100.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p.101.

stage engages with a rational motion of the human soul however which perceives God as the root and cause of all things in existence. Thus a transformation of the individual's perception of reality and a sense of drawing nearer to God in greater participation with him (hence catalysing a divinising process) is indicated by both Gavin and Moran in their appraisal of Eriugena's understanding of nature as theophany.

Moran considers one definition of creation in Eriugena's thought to be the manifestation of oneself into another, which he deconstructs as the divine darkness manifesting itself into light.⁶⁰ He indicates that 'divine ignorance' extends beyond the limited perceptions of humans even to God. Because the essence of God is inexhaustible, so God cannot know what He is, only that He is.⁶¹ This segment of dialogue leads to Eriugena discussing the importance of Pseudo-Dionysian negative theology in relation to the topic.⁶² Nonetheless, Dionysius supported a hierarchical cosmology, as did Eriugena, from which all proceeds, the latter in particular emphasising the importance of a Trinitarian source which flows into Creation. Moran notes that Eriugena's philosophy is often viewed in the light of hierarchical metaphysics, but wished to demonstrate that his work is an idealist system in which nature is to be perceived throughout its diverse expressions as 'produced by the multiplicity of perspectives of the viewing subject'.⁶³ To focus upon the hierarchical components of Eriugena's four divisions of nature is to fail to see the interplay of relations between the human and divine in his works, such as non-being and being, uncreated and created, as extant within the entire process of Creation. Divine nature is seamless in Eriugena, and the fourfold division is an expression of ultimate unity. Moran's interpretation of Eriugena's philosophy of nature as essentially a philosophy of perspectivism adds innovative insights into his work, not least in terms of a theophanic understanding. In this framework, all things do not merely proceed from the one and ultimately return, but they are unique for the journey – forming an Otherness within the divine. The signature of Neoplatonic influence as revealed in Medieval writers such as Eriugena reached further into Western philosophy than

⁶⁰ Dermot Moran, *Spiritualist Incrassatio: Eriugena's Intellectualist Immaterialism: Is it an Idealism?* in Stephen Gersh and Dermot Moran (edited by), *Eriugena, Berkeley and the Idealist Tradition*, (Notre Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), p.136.

⁶¹ Moran, *Spiritualist Incrassatio*, p.136.

⁶² 'Over this last question of yours we need not expend much labour – especially as the theologian St Dionysius the Areopagite expounds for us with the utmost truth and by the surest argument the mystery of the Divine Unity and Trinity...For it is not unity or trinity of such a kind as can be conceived by human intellect however pure, or by any angelic intellect however serene, but in order that the religious inclinations of pious minds may have something to think and something to say concerning that which is ineffable and incomprehensible...' *Periphyseon*, 456 A.

⁶³ Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, p.282.

is commonly appreciated by many scholars, and this is established by his daring to examine the world of non-being.⁶⁴ The aforementioned dialectical tension between the negative and positive polarities are resolved in theophania, wherein every contemplation (*theoria*) grasps but a facet of the vision of the Godhead, being a revealed manifestation of God.⁶⁵ The soul does possess *gnosis* of itself and God, and self-knowledge contains the knowledge of all things.⁶⁶ Moran largely by his own admission focuses upon the *Periphyseon* for his chief work on Eriugena, but his elucidation of the fourfold division of nature delineates the uniqueness of Eriugena's best-known work, which in spite of its characteristic medieval hierarchical framework, sees the infinite becoming finite, and the omniscient becoming temporal.

Catherine Kavanagh's work on Eriugena's hermeneutics examines his innovative integration of dialectic and exegesis,⁶⁷ where dialectic serves as an ontological tool rooted in the Platonic rather than Aristotelian tradition. Kavanagh observes that, for Eriugena, both nature and Scripture function as 'texts' to be interpreted, unified by Christ as the ultimate hermeneutical key. She underscores that Eriugena does not see a division between philosophy and exegesis; rather, his dialectical approach, as engaged in his discussion of the Tree of Life in the fifth book of the *Periphyseon*, synthesizes metaphysical structure with sacred history. For Eriugena, the *Logos* is both the interpretive key and the message itself, indeed the bearer of heightened reality, thus Scripture is a vehicle of theological truths and cosmic wisdom. Kavanagh's observation that Eriugena amalgamates nature and Scripture through Christ the Word aligns closely with my thesis, particularly in its focus upon the Tree of Life as Divine Wisdom in later chapters. Whilst I share her emphasis on the *Logos* as the hermeneutical key, my focus later branches away and tends to emphasise the experiential aspect of uniting with Christ – namely through *praktike*, *physike* and *theologia*. In this context, I argue that nature and Scripture both express and fulfil the deifying grace and interaction of the Word in a participatory sense, in order to realign humanity with divine reality and counteract the distortions in perception wrought by the Fall.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.284. Moran notes that Western philosophy has traditionally been believed to be primarily concerned with ontology, but this explanation is insufficient, veiling Neoplatonic thinkers and the legacy of such as Eriugena's influence in the history and development of Western philosophy.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p.148.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p.163.

⁶⁷ Catherine Kavanagh, "Eriugena the Exegete: Hermeneutics in a Biblical Context", in *A Companion to John Scottus Eriugena*, edited by Adrian Guio, (Boston, Brill, 2020), pp.326-348.

Mac Aogáin writes of three levels within deification in Eriugena's thought, where the human realm, having access to all levels, lies within the middle. Angels may be considered to be closer to God in a hierarchical manner, but the human being possess a type of centripetal ontology inasmuch as it brings together the aspects of Creation which are only found in isolation from one another when they have their existence elsewhere in the universe.⁶⁸ Whilst it has not been possible to personally source a full copy of what survives of the Eriugenian commentary on John, Aogáin does provide some citations from the work, and also devotes a chapter to the *Homily* and partially intact *Commentary Upon the Gospel of John*, helpfully noting a thematic motif in Eriugena's repeated use of the wilderness. This is not only a reference to a spiritually parched state of the soul nor his perception of the material world when viewed apart from divine source, but alludes also to the ascetic monastic ideal, and ultimately, the divine nature. This reasonably contains ideas of praktike. In Aogáin's view, the wilderness is a perspective for Eriugena, not a mere concept for intellectual discussion.⁶⁹ Aogáin enters into an analysis of the experience of aloneness with the divine in these Eriugenian texts, one which implicates theophany in the simple majesty of the appearance of God within creation. He conveys several examples of Eriugenian texts which demonstrate how he engaged with symbols through works which are likely decades apart within his literary output.

Mihai Grigoraş writes of the importance of the active component of faith to Eriugena, which is commonly overlooked in his writings.⁷⁰ Praxis is also central to the Byzantine way of deification, and is thus to be found in certain writers who are among the spiritual forbears of Eriugena, such as Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor, the latter stating theology without practice is a theology of demons. As Grigoraş states, the assumptions against Eriugena - the absence of a personal God and the lack of an ascetical programme are unfounded,⁷¹ and largely based upon the *Periphyseon*, but do not examine his other works. Refreshingly, Grigoraş conducts his study from the standpoint of Christian Spirituality, rather than the philosophical focus which Eriugena largely receives. The core of Eriugena's mission as detailed in his writings are, in Grigoraş's opinion, the leading of one to mystical union with God, which is my belief also. There are differences however between *theosis* and

⁶⁸ Eoghan Mac Aogáin, *Eriugena: Medieval Irish Philosopher, Poet and Translator*, (Ireland, Evertime, Portlaoise, 2017), p.108.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.110.

⁷⁰ Mihai Grigoraş, 'Theophany and Asceticism in John Scottus Eriugena', *RES (Review of Ecumenical Studies)*, Volume 13, Issue 2, August 2021, pp.295-316, p.295.

⁷¹ Ibid, pp.298-299.

participation. As Eriugena states, each will find union with God according to their own capacity,⁷² as he also delineates in his description of John's ascent, likening him to the eagle, flying far beyond Paul's visit to the third heaven, 'beyond every heaven and every paradise'.⁷³ The implication within Grigoraș's uncovering of Eriugena's ascetical perspective on theophany is that the three 'classical' mystical stages of purification, illumination and union are present within his works, as was discovered likewise by Gavin.⁷⁴ The purgation stage as an ascetic route to union, purged by 'faith and action' is a divestment of self in order to contemplate the divine. Just as Eriugena's theology possesses a negative and positive component, so does his ascetic programme entail catharsis, through repentance, self-abnegation, and mortification. This also includes a positive aspect; - just as the cleansing of the soul uproots and makes room for the presence of God, so the sowing of the virtues, the latter being manifestations of theophanies of the goodness of God, may then blossom within the individual. This study also demonstrates how Eriugena's understanding of theophany is endowed with greater meaning and purpose than explored by Dionysius. His spiritual predecessors may have set a precedent, but Eriugena considerably augmented the concept of theophany through exploring its implications, laying new groundwork, and creating a precedent for many Christian mystics to follow.

T. Alexander Giltner, in accordance with Gavin, argues that Eriugena's Christology is often undermined, and this is largely due to the over-emphasis placed upon the Periphyseon to the detriment of smaller lesser-known works.⁷⁵ Indeed, the linkage of later works such as the *Homily* to the Periphyseon enhances its theological perspective. Christ is at the heart of the *Homily*, and as Giltner states, the *Homily* can be seen to demonstrate the cosmic soteriology at the centre of John's prologue. The historical intervening of the Word, directly interplaying with Creation, places the Incarnation as the fulcrum which instigates the journey of ascent back to the divine, hence to participation in God and deification. As an indicator of where Eriugena scholarship is presently, both Mooney and Gavin acknowledge that a further appreciation of his theology is emerging. Mooney states that the theological interpretation of

⁷² Periphyseon, 981 B-C. 'By this are we given to understand that all men are placed according to their degree within the precincts of the natural Paradise... but only those who are sanctified in Christ, shall enter into its upper parts, and of these again only are those who are in the Supreme Pontiff, Christ, and are made one with Him and in Him, will be brought into the Holy of Holies, or innermost part of all'.

⁷³ Eriugena (ed. Bamford), *The Voice of the Eagle (Homily on the Prologue of John)*, p.75.

⁷⁴ Gavin, *A Celtic Christology*, especially see pp.95-102.

⁷⁵ T. Alexander Giltner, '*Intimae Theologiae: The Christocentric Cosmology of John Scottus Eriugena in the "Homilia Super" <<In Principio Erat Verbum>>*', *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age*, Vol.83, 2016, pp.7-32, p.8.

Eriugena's presentation of the manifestation of God in creation follows the biblical account of the creation of the world and culminates in a theological anthropology which centres on the image of God. It seems sometimes that the nature of the *Homily* is overlooked, which is very different in tone to the *Periphyseon*. As it is likely to be his penultimate work, it may indicate a development of his eschatology and flourishing of his own contemplative journey.

Chapter Two

Deification: A Brief History in the Context of Hellenic Influences and Early Christian Proponents⁷⁶

There is not one single definition of deification, even when placed solely in a Christian orthodox framework. The concept and practice of deification was not remote to the earliest Christians, although it manifested in a variety of ways according to the culture, spiritual or even political manifestation with which it was associated. Western Christianity has vastly overlooked the topic of deification, and even in contemporary times it can incite fear and outrage in certain quarters. Yet metamorphosis of the individual entailing union with God is truly at the centre of Christianity, as its *telos*, and its ultimate expression of sanctification.

According to Finlan and Kharlamov, Christian monotheism does not espouse ‘god-making’, but rather deification is related to transformation of character, mind and a redefinition of selfhood.⁷⁷ There are, however, ways of expressing oneness with God, even in Christian thought, which has neared divine self-identification, but this is due to a sense of merging so complete, that it can be impossible to extricate one’s self-awareness from that of awareness of God.⁷⁸ Later examples of this are to be gleaned from mystics such as Meister Eckhart, who likened the soul to all things, being a reflection of God.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ For the sake of brevity, most of these influences referred to are those which are known to have influenced John Scottus Eriugena. Much might be written on the diverse ‘Gnostic’ movements or those which were not taken into mainstream Christianity, such as Valentinus, or the mystical theology of the Gospel of Thomas. There unfortunately is not space to describe these here, and it is unlikely that Eriugena was familiar with these movements or philosophies, although he might have read something of these, for example, through the references to such made by Irenaeus of Lyons, partisan as these references evidently were. For example, Elaine Pagels notes that Irenaeus redacted certain elements of Valentinian doctrine in his *Excerpts of Theodotus*, which has conditioned how Valentinian was subsequently interpreted, particularly until the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Codex. (Elaine Pagels, ‘Conflicting Versions of Valentinian Eschatology: Irenaeus’ Treatise vs the Excerpts from Theodotus’, *Harvard Theological Review*, volume 67, Number 1, 1974, pp.35-53).

⁷⁷ Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov (edited by), *Theosis, Deification in Christian Theology (volume one)*, (Cambridge, James Clarke and Co Ltd, 2010), p. 1.

⁷⁸ Such experiences are often ephemeral, however even if often repeated, and are understood to be a foretaste of a more permanent state of being after transition from earthly life.

⁷⁹ Meister Eckhart, (Edited by David O’Neal) *Meister Eckhart, from Whom God Hid Nothing: Sermons, Writings and Sayings*, (Colorado, New Seeds Books, 1996), p.86. The soul ‘has being with the stones, and growing with the trees and feelings with the beasts and understanding with the angels’, and ‘God renews the

Mosser writes how Christian ideas of deification were commonly assumed by scholars to have their root in the early church fathers initially and their bold interpretations of Psalm 82:6 ('I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High') and Jesus's statement in John 10:34-37, ('Is it not written in your law, I said ye are gods?')⁸⁰ One interpretation was to perceive the Psalm's citation as a justification of the Hellenization of Christianity through the styluses of the early church fathers, or otherwise to pertain to a means of bolstering their teachings with a multitude of scriptural references. However, Mosser considered some of the earliest forms of exegesis of the Psalm to be rooted in second temple Judaism. It is likely that a multitude of streams informed a universal leaning in a common goal of *exitus*, freedom and ascent.

Glenn Magee connects mysticism with *gnosis*, for *gnosis* was acquired by those who took part in *ta mysteria*, which is a direct apprehension of the ultimate truth of what is.⁸¹ If deification could be considered the pinnacle of mystical experience, it is therefore the most intimate form of coming to knowledge of the highest reality. Another term often equated with *theosis* is partaking of the divine nature. This is typically used in Christian mysticism, especially that of the Eastern Orthodox, for it demonstrates union with God with retention of individuality, and not being fully identified with the Creator. The central focus is a relational one.

Some forms of deification which persisted in the centuries leading into and within the first centuries of the common era are, in modern terms, associated with encouraging the means to wield and amplify worldly power, such as that of Caesar. There is no single definition of deification, but in Christian mystical thought it is generally associated with a salvific return to God, entailing union and restoration of likeness to God, rather than becoming God. There are levels of divinity, and equally there are levels of divinisation or sanctification.

Given the influence of Plato and Neoplatonic philosophy upon Eriugena and certain of his theological predecessors, I consider it pertinent to briefly examine ancient Hellenic expressions of divinisation first.

soul so that the soul beholds herself in the pure being of God' (Ibid, p.88). The famed quote 'the eye with which I see God is the same with which God sees me,' is another example of immersive encounter with God, even at the ground of being.

⁸⁰ Carl Mosser, 'The Earliest Patristic Interpretations of Psalm 82, Jewish Antecedents, and the Origin of Christian Deification', *Journal of Theological Studies*, Volume 56, Issue 1, April 2005, pp.30-74, (pp.31-35).

⁸¹ Glenn Alexander Magee (editor), *The Cambridge Handbook of Western Mysticism and Esotericism*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016), p.xvi.

Hellenistic views upon Deification and a Dionysian Involvement

The Pythagorean philosopher Empedocles (circa 492-432 BC), provides an example of ‘self-deification’ or divinisation, declaring himself to be a god, as is shown in a surviving fragment of his *Purifications*.⁸² Empedocles believed that, exiled from previous godhood, he was finally near to the close of his cycle of fallen incarnations. As will be explored, there are striking patterns of lost godhood or divinity throughout most conceptions of deification, particularly before Christianity became increasingly institutionalised.⁸³ The *daimon* can be seen in Empedocles’ thought to demonstrate the potentiality of the divine condition which may manifest when the elements are separated once more.⁸⁴ It is the mingling of the elements which brings a type of fragmentation and differentiation which is almost akin to the ‘ten thousand things’ of Taoism, leading to a sense of separation from inherent divinity. Love can broadly be seen as the force which knits together separated divinities in the world and strife the counterforce which initially caused multiplicity. As *daimons* or gods incarnated, (there is some dispute among scholars as to whether these might not be interchangeable in Empedocles’ thought) a being must be purified in order to re-ascend into godhood, particularly through immersion in each of the four elements.⁸⁵ One possible interpretation of this could be seen to run parallel with Eriugena’s ideas upon the division of nature and the elements becoming subsumed into Being.

The Neoplatonic philosopher Plotinus (205-270) believed that a part of mind always remained in the divine realm; thus a part of the psyche always resides in what he termed the intelligible world. There is thus a component which always remains divine, and rather than aspiring to *become* divine, one might be said to need to simply become more aware of this inherently divinely sustained state, rooted in God, through contemplation. The results of Plotinus’s amalgamation of Aristotelian and Platonic ideas gives rise to three hypostases: the One which is the First Cause; Intellect, corresponding to the Forms or realm of Ideas; and the

⁸² ‘All hail, O friends! But unto ye now I walk/As god immortal now, no more as man’. Empedocles (translated by William Ellery Leonard), ‘The Fragments of Empedocles’, in *The Monist*, Vol. 17, No.3, July 1907, pp.451-474 (p.468).

⁸³ This may be seen as a gradual process of definition and redefinition over ensuing centuries, after Christianity became the official religion of Rome in 380.

⁸⁴ Carlo Santaniello, ‘Θεός, Δαίμων, Φρὴν Ἱερή: Empedocles and the Divine’, in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, Vol. 75, No.3, (2012), pp.301-313 (pp.304-305).

⁸⁵ M. David Litwa, *Posthuman Transformation in Ancient Mediterranean Thought: Becoming Angels and Demons*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021), p.34.

Soul, which links matter to Intellect.⁸⁶ Everything which has life is immortal within its core, but souls are nonetheless culpable. Firstly, for descending and also for committing wrongs. As a type of lesser divinity the soul falls into this realm by voluntary inclination.⁸⁷ Whilst Plotinus believed that the soul would be punished for misdemeanours and especially reprehensible actions, it does not fully participate in the lower world. It is not directly connected with the body, but rather an ‘illumination’ of soul connects the two which forms a composite.⁸⁸ There is a difference between intelligible divinity and divinity of the soul: whereas the first is of Intellect and the Forms, the latter may enter and participate in the conditions of the world.⁸⁹ Thus an ascent from the psychic to the intelligible is implicated in the journey of deification for Plotinus. However, the intelligible is not the divine itself, but the soul can only reach a state of certain proximity to the One, rather than be absorbed into it. The One transcends the divinity, which is the rightful heritage of the soul, however.

Marc Antony’s identification with the Greek god Dionysus represents a very different manner of encountering divinity to the foregoing and that which follows, in what might be equated to a much earthlier and more visceral event which nonetheless emphasises wielding this power to be transferred to worldly advantage. ‘Scholars deny the possibility of a real incarnation of Dionysus in order to prevent exposing themselves to criticism’, says M. David Litwa⁹⁰ and that it also represents a failure of our imagination. I would add that this is indicative of the inability to place the contemporary mindset in that of even a not-so-distant ancient past outside of scientific materialism which places engagement with reality as functioning through modes of objective conceptualisation. It must be noted that incarnation in Hellenistic thought could imply a temporary ‘enfleshment’ of a god as a divine epiphany in a human body and the given god could identify authentically with a multitude of individuals at once, but this process tended to be short-lived.

Deification According to Clement of Alexandria

⁸⁶ Travis Patten, ‘The Purification of Love: Heavenly Ascent from Plato to Dante’, *Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies*, Volume 4, No.1, 2012, Article 2, pp1-46, (p.13).

⁸⁷ Plotinus (translated by Elmer O’Brien), *The Essential Plotinus: Representative Treatises from the Enneads*, (Indiana, Hackett Publishing Company, 1964), p.67.

⁸⁸ M. David Litwa, *Becoming Divine: An Introduction to Deification in Western Culture*, (Oregon, Cascade Books, 2013), p.105.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p.104.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p.39.

One of the earliest surviving references to deification within Christianity has been ascribed to Clement of Alexandria, within which he cites Psalm 82:6. As a middle Platonist, he perceives that the ultimate end for a human being is to become as much like God as far as is possible. Imitation of Christ is for Clement a facet of deifying *gnosis*.⁹¹ He also stated in *Exhortation to the Greeks* that the ‘Word of God speaks, having become man, in order that such as you may learn from man how it is even possible to become a god’.⁹² For Clement, it is the *Logos* which enables us to participate in the life of God. It has been proposed that Clement held three theses of human nature.⁹³ These are autonomy of will, that humans are educable, and that our salvation lies ultimately within our own hands. Adam was not a realised being, but was created childlike and receptive in order that he might grow in virtue.⁹⁴ The Fall thus was perceived by Clement to have occurred through ignorance and lack of reason rather than a wilful act of self-seeking intent. Through personal striving and following Christ, humans may ‘grow to angelhood,’⁹⁵ reversing the cosmic descent and rectifying this through becoming as God intended. Sin was considered to be a measure of how far one had strayed from God, but divine virtue cannot be fully realised except in a contingent sense.⁹⁶ The process of reaping true virtue is a God-given grace, stimulated from divine action. However, Clement adhered to and recommended strict asceticism in order to invoke this process. Thus grace *and* effort are to inform the work of *theosis* as an amalgamation of the process between God and the individual. Virtue requires divesting oneself of self, casting away as far as possible all that is ‘merely human’.⁹⁷ The suppression of one’s earthly desires, selfish modes of thought and physical renunciation are just some of the forms of self-directed paths to *theosis* which Clement suggests, the epitome being martyrdom for Christ’s kingdom. He calls Christian martyrs Gnostics who are ‘superior to the world’.⁹⁸ This implies not only the importance of sacrifice to Clement, in imitation of Christ perhaps, but also a view that *theosis* may be only

⁹¹ Russell, p.126.

⁹² Clement of Alexandria, (translated by George William Butterworth), ‘*Exhortation to the Greeks*’, in *Clement of Alexandria*, (London, William Heinmann, 1919), p.23.

⁹³ Walter H. Wagner, ‘*After the Apostles: Christianity in the Second Century*’, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1994), p.175.

⁹⁴ <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/02106.htm> (Clement, ‘*Stromata*’, book 6, chapter 12).

⁹⁵ Walter H. Wagner, *After the Apostles: Christianity in the Second Century*, p.175.

⁹⁶ Russell, p.147.

⁹⁷ G.W. Butterworth, ‘The Deification of Man in Clement of Alexandria’, *The Journal of Theological Studies*, Volume XVII, no.1, 1916, pp.157-169 (p.158).

⁹⁸ Clement, cited in David M. Litwa, ‘You are Gods: Deification in the Naasene Writer and Clement of Alexandria’, *Harvard Theological Review*, Volume 110, Issue 1, January 2017, pp125-148 (p.133).

partially realised in an imperfect, transitory world, within the fragile vessel of the human body.

Throughout his *Exhortation to the Greeks*, Clement proposes a human evolution of belief, culminating in knowledge of the Logos. *Gnosis* as a divine gift could not be fully realised in the human sense,⁹⁹ and faith lay the groundwork for the receiving of knowledge of the divine.¹⁰⁰ Practical wisdom arising from one's *gnosis* renders one 'like God',¹⁰¹ even whilst imperfect, unlike the human pathway of personal ascetic practices which alone do not make one deified. It has often been implicitly assumed that *gnosis*, being an individual pathway, is not overly concerned with moral philosophy, for the things of this world must pass away. *Gnosis* has its eyes set upon greater heights than moral and social codes. If one abides in the state of godliness, virtue will naturally follow, and the individual need not analyse morality in relation to the laws of man. True *gnosis* allows for the passing of self and makes room for the life of God within the individual. Thus Clement suggested that those who are on the route to being deified, abiding in Christ, transcend these moral laws and proceed beyond and above these, for they dwell in grace.¹⁰² When room for God had been created within, *theosis* will be sought for love's sake rather than mercenary reasons.

Faith is vital for Clement, and begins with an awakening process similar to that of the Gnostic awakening. This burgeoning faith is both relational and increases wisdom, which leads the individual to that 'perfect end which knows no end',¹⁰³ and to live out whilst within earthly temporality something of the life which will be lived afterwards 'with the gods, according to the will of God.'¹⁰⁴ These degrees of faith can deepen into a mutual friendship with God, which is the greatest work to be attained to, and is participation itself, between the knower and the known. There are echoes of the *Gospel of Philip* in this concept,¹⁰⁵ where like is drawn to its reflection, and in order to become spiritualised, one must contemplate Spirit. There are also parallels with certain Gnostic understandings of cosmology within Clement's

⁹⁹ Clement acknowledged that as divine wisdom could not be conveyed directly to human minds, allegory, parable and metaphor were necessary for conveying these truths.

¹⁰⁰ Clement of Alexandria, (translated by William Wilson), *The Writings of Clement of Alexandria*, (Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1895), p. 9.

¹⁰¹ Russell, 2004, p.126.

¹⁰² 'Of this gnostic assimilation the canons, as it appears to me, are gentleness, kindness, and a noble devoutness.' Clement in Henry Chadwick (editor), *Alexandrian Christianity*, (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1954), p.101.

¹⁰³ Ibid, page 129.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ James M. Robinson (editor), *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, (New York, HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), p.156.

thought upon the journey towards deepening participation in God after death, where he refers to passing through the ‘Hebdomad’ or seven spheres in order to approach the ‘blessed abode of the Lord’.¹⁰⁶ Even where Clement necessitates the importance of personal responsibility for one’s own salvation and effort towards participation in God, he acknowledges the power of grace, where God’s loving force is as a magnet, drawing all toward Him. He does however involve the virtue of the individual, which comes about through asceticism and meditation upon the Word. Also, the attraction of the Holy Spirit draws the virtuous to the ‘highest mansion’.¹⁰⁷ The pinnacle to be reached, as a metaphor for union with Christ, is depicted as a journey through successive phases and gradations, where angelic states may be superseded. One’s place in the universe is thus dependent upon one’s internal state and assimilation to virtue and righteousness, the true form of which only arises from the divine. As an extension of grace God draws those who live a life of purity towards Him. Even whilst the Gnostic ‘reforms and recreates himself’,¹⁰⁸ and through his proximity of participation in God, he possesses the ability to confer this *gnosis* of assimilation to others through wise counsel, humility, and piety. For Clement, deification is ecclesiastical, in that baptism and the Eucharist are the dynamic movements the Spirit, bringing purification, renewal and healing. Those who partake of the Eucharist in faith are sanctified in body and soul, for to drink of Jesus’s blood is to partake in his immortality.¹⁰⁹ Much of his writing centres upon the work in which the individual must engage, through giving practical moral instruction and philosophical advice, rather than the anagogical approach of Origen.

Deification according to Origen of Alexandria

A contemporary of Plotinus and student of Clement, the theologian Origen of Alexandria (c.185-254), is widely considered to be a significant church father and one its most important early biblical scholars. Origen did not write extensively on the topic of *theosis*, but the theme is woven into his writings, particularly within his Christology. *Theosis* is rooted in relationship for Origen, where participation between God and the soul is compared to, in the latter’s earthly questing, a bride seeking out its bridegroom who is the Word, finding him and

¹⁰⁶ Clement in Chadwick, ‘*Alexandrian Christianity*’, p.129.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p.98.

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/02107.htm> (Clement, ‘*Stromata*’, Book VII, Chapter Three).

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf02.vi.iii.ii.ii.html>

seeking him again, often in the wrong places. This speaks of the soul's propensity for restless action, until it is purified, which is linked with Origen's views upon the Fall. All living things were created initially for the contemplation of God, but turned from the Creator to varying degrees, except for one, who is Christ, the First Born of God. All rational creatures, Origen states, who are incorporeal, once succumbing to negligence, may gradually decline and take to themselves bodies which are suited to the regions to which they descend.¹¹⁰ Unfortunately, he deems 'irrational animals', to be the most negligent and therefore of the grossest body, which he equates with vice rather than types of theophany as Eriugena's more affirmative concepts of nature might proceed. However, there are numerous parallels between Origen and Eriugena's theology, not least in their conceptualisation of the Fall.

Origen wrote in *First Principles* of the Fall as a type of negligence, a 'cooling of souls', which may also be translated as indifference leading to forgetfulness or even a determined desire to experience autonomy, thus neglecting the original kinship which was held in communion with God. Angels fell too, even those considered to be of great holiness, albeit to a lesser degree than humanity. All souls and rational natures, regardless of inclination to good or evil, are incorporeal in regard to their truest nature, but nonetheless made by God through Christ (as Logos).¹¹¹ Christ is however somewhat subordinate to the Father in Origen's thought, as the first born of Creation. Yet the Saviour is, in alignment with Paul's writing, (Eph 1:21) above all powers and dominions in all spheres. Origen's Christology is complex, but indispensable to deification, for Christ as the Logos becomes the bridge between humanity and God the Father. Having received divinity from God the Father as the uncreated source of All, the Logos bears this within him and communicates this divinity to those who receive him, making them in turn images of God.¹¹² As the Word, the Son proceeded forth from God, but Origen argues in his *Commentary on John* that Christ has a separate hypostasis, which whilst sharing in the qualities of God the Father possesses an essence of his own.¹¹³ His subordinationist ideas were held to be offensive to the church in the ensuing centuries, which unfortunately censored much of Origen's broader exposure within theology. He had attempted to establish a theology marked with Christian

¹¹⁰ Origen (based on a translation by G.W. Butterworth), *On First Principles*, (Indiana, Christian Classics, 2013), p.52.

¹¹¹ Origen, *On First Principles*, p.77.

¹¹² Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004), p.145.

¹¹³ (Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, book one, paragraph 23)
<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/101501.htm>

Neoplatonism, even whilst his teachings are more scripturally based and less philosophical than his teacher Clement, at a time wherein the church was becoming increasingly intolerant of any ideas which arose from pagan philosophy.¹¹⁴ Not only was Origen a great exegete, but the practice of reading Scripture was one of active engagement which could raise the soul to contemplation of the divine. Biblical texts were to Origen a means of understanding the spiritual and cohering these with the world of time and matter,¹¹⁵ and turn the ear of the heart to the workings of the Spirit.

To be deified was to be perfected by the knowledge which the Logos imparted to the soul. Purification, especially through ascetic practice, was one of the primary means of attaining to deification for Origen. The threefold division of scriptural exegesis into literal, or ‘corporeal’ meaning, followed by psychic or ‘soul’ level and ultimately spiritual interpretation, reflected the ordering of the human composition. Eriugena’s later emphasis upon *praktike*, *physike* and *theoria* had been vital to Origen and indeed for the dawning monastic tradition as a route to *theosis*. The stage of *praktike* as the goal of *apatheia*, which is for Origen fulfilled by the practice of the ascetic life, assists the soul on the way to true knowledge, for knowledge cannot dwell in a soul filled with passions.¹¹⁶ These diverse levels are also reflected in the process of experiencing deification, wherein even within the Godhead there is a hierarchy of experience – the Word of God is the archetypal divine image, a form of an image of the Divine Prototype – a form of *arche*, wherein one is made anew within that archetype.¹¹⁷ Origen wrote of a form of deification experienced in the Holy Spirit, and in the Son, but stated that the pinnacle of spiritual perfection was to be experienced through participation with God the Father.

Origen perceives humanity as possessing a natural affiliation with *pneuma*, and therefore, a type of dormant relationship with the Holy Spirit, which is however actuated through baptism. He does not lay the same ponderance of emphasis upon baptism as does Clement, but it nevertheless serves as a form of initiation and renewal wherein each person of

¹¹⁴ Origen’s condemnation by the church was a lengthy process drawn out over centuries, mostly ensuing after his death. The second council of Constantinople in 553 drafted the 11th anathema declaring Origen to be a Christological heretic, but it is uncertain as to whether his name was not inserted later. The chief areas of condemnation were levied against Origenist groups. The effect still held against Origen’s teachings however.

¹¹⁵ Fred Norris, “Origen”, in *The Early Christian World*, edited by Philip. F. Esler, Routledge, London, 2000, pp.1005 – 1027, p.1011.

¹¹⁶ Evagrius Ponticus (translated by Ilaria I.E. Ramelli), *Kephalaia Gnostika*, (Atlanta, SBL Press, 2015), pp.lxxviii-lxxvix.

¹¹⁷ <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/101501.htm> - commentary on Gospel of John, book one, paragraph 19. ‘Christ is the arche of those who are made according to the image of God.’

the Trinity confers a divine gift upon the individual. Through the action of the Logos, worldly reality becomes increasingly distinct from the spiritual as the lower realms become integrated with the higher realms. The process is incremental however, with purification and increasing virtue deepening one's relationship with God, restoring it to a rightful state of participation. The Trinity alone has access to self-knowledge,¹¹⁸ which is imparted as the individual progresses towards a deepening understanding of God. All spirits participating in this intellectual light share a oneness through sharing in the rational and spiritual nature of God. Origen correlates this grounding with a sharing in the divine image and likeness (especially in the case of the unfallen angelic hierarchies, and the inner nature of the human), thus sharing in the same substance.¹¹⁹ Reflecting upon the extent of the unification with divinity, Origen writes of this being proportional to passions and sins, which would cause the power of the Word to decrease within that soul.¹²⁰ The illumination realised by the presence of the Word within the body is limited, however, through the corruptible nature of corporeality itself. Hence, Origen engages with 'seeing through a glass darkly' (1 Cor13:12), as a metaphor for the limitation of liberty and knowledge to be attained within earthly life, rather than at the consummation, face to face.¹²¹ The *imago Dei* has nothing to do with physical corporeality, but the soul as the inner working bearing the divine imprint can increasingly become nearer to its first creation.¹²² This is not to suggest that the work of divinisation is an autonomous task, for true goodness can only stem from God and true grace as the work of God. Origen likens Christ's intercession for the disciples in John 17:21-24, as pertaining to the likeness advancing from something of a similitude to oneness, thus sharing in the divine Other as the consummation of God as 'all in all.'¹²³ Thus through the action of the Logos and the Holy Spirit, the individual may deepen in participatory union and come to truly know God, whilst growing in resemblance to God is both a consequence and catalyst through the results of one's will.

Theosis and Hierarchy in Pseudo-Dionysius

¹¹⁸ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Spirit and Fire: A Thematic Anthology of the Writings of Origen*, (London, Bloomsbury, 2018), p.51.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, pp.51-52.

¹²⁰ Ibid, p.58.

¹²¹ Ibid, pp.3555-356.

¹²² Origen proposed that there are two creations of a human being: that of the original divine creation and the ensuing being a type of self-willed creation. 'There are two images in the human being: the one which he received when made by God... and the other he received later when, because of disobedience and sin, he was expelled from paradise after yielding to the ruler of this world'. Ibid, p.55.

¹²³ Origen, *First Principles*, p.322.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the writings of the 6th century Syrian theologian known as ‘Pseudo-Dionysius,’¹²⁴ whose works marked a seminal development in both Latin and Eastern Christian mystical thought. His writings reached the West through Eriugena, who was commissioned by Charles the Bald to translate his literary corpus from Greek to Latin circa 862. It is considered to have been Dionysius who gave the first systematic account of deification, writing that ‘*theosis* is the attaining of likeness to God and union with him so far as possible’. Clearly, there are Platonic influences to be gleaned within his work besides that of the early Church Fathers. Deification is more central to his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* than his *Divine Names*, which latter work is more concerned with the return of Creation to God in unity through purification, illumination and perfection. It may be argued that these themes are informed by *theosis* but in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* he more clearly vouches for the sacraments as a route to union with God.

Dionysius enters into these in his *Mystical Theology* as reflected in Moses’ role as High Priest on Mount Tabor, where within the framework of ascent are purification, illumination and union. He does not ‘hear the many-voiced trumpets’ or move into next level until he has submitted to purification.¹²⁵ However, in the bifurcation of ways of ascent, Dionysius clarifies that there are two modes’ broadly, in approaching the divine. The first level of these modes is to combine apophatic and cataphatic theology in order to manifest the meaning behind a particular symbol. The second phase involves leaving behind the theoretical meaning, through such negations, and through abandoning oneself and all things, to yield towards the divine shadow, that is, ‘union with him who is beyond all being and knowledge’.¹²⁶

Hierarchy reflects the cosmic order within Dionysius’s theology and indeed, the celestial hierarchy of angels mirrors the process of deification.¹²⁷ In spite of the various roles of angelic orders, their close proximity to God enables them to not only express a transcendent joy and proclaim this through their wisdom, but also to bequeath the light of

¹²⁴ He is often referred to as ‘Dionysius the Areopagite’ with whom he is often conflated, although the latter is a New Testament figure who was converted at Athens by St. Paul. Several centuries fall between the two figures. He is also called St Denys or Denys the Areopagite. For the sake of brevity he is often referred to throughout this work simply as Dionysius.

¹²⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology* in *The Complete Works*, (New York, Paulist Press, 1987), pp.136-137.

¹²⁶ Ibid, p.135. (*Mystical Theology*, 997B).

¹²⁷ Eoghan Mac Aogáin, *Eriugena: Medieval Irish Philosopher, Poet and Translator*, p.63.

God through their ranks to those ‘beneath’ these influences. The angelic beings experience intelligible perceptions of God, but Dionysius states that humanity requires participation in sacraments as the media of tradition which are necessary for humans to engage in sacred constituents. Such symbols enable the contemplation of the divine, but it is through baptism and participation in the Eucharist as the highest sacramental rite which draws the divided life into one of unity. The clerical orders are likewise depicted as a reflection of the heavenly hierarchies, with the monastic life declared to be the most exalted rank of all,¹²⁸ having entered the path of contemplative activity and attained to intellectual communion with God.

The return of the human soul is in the initial stages prompted by inward shift in orientation. This is akin to *metanoia*, which is the heart of repentance, prefiguring a metamorphic shift in the individual’s psyche. Through the noetic sphere one may encounter God, but the limitations are still apparent. God is, after all, more easily reached through the heart and Dionysius would state that transcending both heart and noetic sphere is vital. God is not good, but is One and even conceptually this is insufficient. The hierarchies only mediate the divine revelation and its interpretation, but do not in themselves mediate being.¹²⁹ The hierarchies present themselves to the mind ultimately as a means, mediated in the rational perception of the Lapsarian human mind, for these are surpassed in the presence of God.

Willemien Otten writes of negative theology potentially leading to a negative anthropology. The Pseudo-Dionysian focus, in contrast to the post-modernist view of humanity, (which is to show the finitude of humanity due to the ‘death of God’ concept) demonstrates aspiration towards the divine¹³⁰. Rather than embracing its own finitude, Pseudo-Dionysian thinkers wish to protect the sense of individuality from the invasive presence of divine, one which in its vastness and power of its being can not only destabilise the sense of self but fragment it altogether. Otten proposes that Eriugena’s path of ascendance led him away from the path of Dionysius, towards a less divinely subsumed one in a state of divine union, in which the human intelligence is left intact at the expense of full mergence with God. The latter would entail a loss of self, in Otten’s view. Eriugena considered that the human being should show some degree of autonomy; thus in spite of salvatory aspect of the Incarnation, the Great Work of return, participation and even union with God must be actuated at least initially in the work of the individual specifying the importance of free will.

¹²⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* in *The Complete Works*, p. 244 (532 D).

¹²⁹ Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, (London, Continuum, 1989), p.106.

¹³⁰ Willemien Otten, ‘In the Shadow of the Divine: Negative Theology and Negative Anthropology in Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius and Eriugena’, *Heythrop Journal*, Volume 40, Issue 4, October 1999, pp. 438-455, p.439.

Largely Augustine engages with a cataphatic expression and Dionysius with the apophatic, but it is in the latter wherein the negative theology and anthropology is to be found. Otten concludes that Eriugena does not engage in a negative anthropology due to ‘the invasiveness of human sin’,¹³¹ but the very nature of humanity in its fallen state can be used as a means to initiate the return journey to God.

Eriugena is aware, Todorovska notes, that God dwells within an ‘inaccessible light’ which transcends the reaches of intellect, and if He must be discussed, then a blend of the apophatic and cataphatic will speak of divine essence, elucidating that which stems from such, but not nearing the actual Truth.¹³² Both means are deemed as vital expressions, but as Moran stated, Eriugena tends to lend priority to the ‘unarticulated over the articulated’.¹³³ The hiddenness of God’s word can only be made manifest to human perception through the assimilation of metaphor. However, language can obfuscate sometimes more than edify when speaking of that which cannot be processed through the perception of sense, reason or intellect.

From the very opening of his *Homily* Eriugena lays out his synthesis of the apophatic and cataphatic, using this as a tool to delineate the encounter of the inner soul with the true meaning of the prologue as a living experience. There is the sense that if God ceased to speak, then Creation could no longer be. God, as uncreated Creator, continually sustains the individual, with whom the individual participates within the level of what is true. Questions abound concerning what participation in God might be, within Christian theology and outside of such, and to what extent deification is interchangeable with participation. Is it possible, for example, to participate in God and descend once more, and need one become divine to participate in God or is this considered to be a ‘transferred’ effect where deification would be impossible otherwise? It is generally agreed upon in Christian mystical thought that in spite of the preponderate importance of grace, that the mystic must first engage their will and demonstrate their practice accordingly.

¹³¹ Ibid, pp.450-451.

¹³²

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339344052_The_unknowability_and_the_ineffability_of_God_according_to_John_Scott_Eriugena (2019, p.73)

¹³³ Dermot Moran, *Eriugena’s Theory of Language in the Periphyseon – Exploration in the Neoplatonic Tradition*. In Próinseas Ní Chatháin, Michael Richter (edited by), ‘Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Age’, (Klett-Cotta, Four Courts Press, 2002), p.253.

Maximus the Confessor and Theosis

Maximus the Confessor (580-662) considered deification to be the true purpose for which the human being was created. In alignment with Origen, he held that we must acquire likeness to God in order to experience a state of participation. He was highly critical of the movement of his time known as ‘Origenism’ however, which was highly derivative of Origen’s theology and which also in particular adhered to dyothelitism.¹³⁴ His particular qualm with Origenism however was the concept of all the primordial unity of all minds.¹³⁵ Born in the year 580, Maximus had a political career which he left in pursuit of monastic life in Carthage. Having done so, Maximus became embroiled in numerous controversies concerning doctrine concerning the two natures of Christ. For his refusal to recant his dyothelite views, he was exiled, imprisoned, and tortured, dying shortly afterwards in August 662.

Maximus was highly influenced by both pseudo-Dionysius and Gregory of Nazianzus. He utilised the Platonic approach of *exitus-reditus*, but his concepts of actualisation may arise from Aristotle, although the latter was more aligned with self-actualisation and self-directed potential, whereas Maximus is concerned with God’s motion as actualised through grace. Aristotle said of the will that motion is a natural property of the soul but some modes are contrary to its nature.¹³⁶ Motion in the development of thought in Maximus is a simple link between being and fulfilment. Descent and return is less of a concern for Maximus, than an eternal world not co-eternal with God.¹³⁷ His concept of motion is also important for it demonstrates his departure from Origen’s philosophy, even whilst bearing influences of the latter. It is considered that most Hellenic philosophies perceived motion to denote movement away from the Good and therefore a descent. In

¹³⁴ The ‘Chalcedonian’ viewpoint, wherein it is held that Christ had two wills, human and divine, united within his hypostasis. The question of whether Christ’s will was solely divine or not was considered to have numerous theological implications, of particular importance being the affirmation of the power of the human will and its role in reframing its position to meet with divine grace.

¹³⁵ Aidan Nichols O.P. *Byzantine Gospel: Maximus the Confessor in Modern Scholarship*, (Edinburgh, T & Clark, 1993), p.27.

¹³⁶ Joseph P. Farrell, *Free Choice in Maximus the Confessor*, (Pennsylvania, St Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 1989), pp. 101-102.

¹³⁷ I.P. Sheldon-Williams, *The Greek Christian Platonist Tradition from Cappadocians to Maximus and Eriugena*, in (edited by A.H. Armstrong), *The Cambridge History of later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1967), p.493. ‘This provides Maximus with a universal principle which can be applied to Deity without a suggestion of emanationism and to created nature without denying it stability.’

Origen there is to be found a kind of change being effected which incurs movement. Heide argues that Maximus unlike Origen, does not subscribe to a descent away from the good into embodied existence. Humanity initially turned away from the *goal* of dwelling in perfection.¹³⁸ The differences between the gnostic and natural will as taught by Maximus are important, for they demonstrate the choices arising from deliberation. Christ was not subject to the flaws inherent in the gnostic will as his human will was in agreement with the divine will. This might be said to show what a human may reach in terms of potentiality and harmony with God. It has been argued by Heide that Maximus's 'reproof' of Origen is often perceived as a critique but is rather a development of his theology, particularly in the light of Christological discussions taking place over the centuries between the two writers.

It is of note that Maximus seldom referred to Psalm 82:6 or 2Pet 1:4 ('Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.') and his ideas upon deification tend to be dispersed throughout his writings, rather than his constructing a systematic definition of the term. The *telos* of the individual is to unite with God, and in the *Ambiguum*, he presents five modes or divisions of nature which supposedly demonstrate the disparities between God and Creation. The first is that which divides the uncreated nature from all of created nature, which arose through a process of becoming. The second is the noetic and perceptual; thirdly, the perceptual is divided into heaven and earth; fourth, is where earth is divided into paradise and the world and lastly, where humanity is divided into male and female. These divisions may be read also in reverse, but upon the ascent or return, as mirroring events in the life of Christ, where the division of the sexes is 'healed' by the Virgin birth, paradise and the world are unified by the Resurrection; heaven and earth are resolved in the Ascension; the noetic and perceptual is sublimated, represented by Christ's being seated on the right hand of the Father, and the uncreated and created are shown to be unified in Christ's being one with the Father. These stages may also be understood as levels of deification of the individual. Eriugena's four divisions of nature are somewhat different and more fluidly interchangeable, but the symbology of unfoldment and Return are strongly related.

Maximus did not espouse absorption of humanity into the divine, but rather deification ought to restore the individual's original nature. But there must be an element of

¹³⁸ Daniel Heide, 'The Origenism of Maximus the Confessor: Critic or True Exegete?', *St. Vladimir's Theological quarterly*, Volume 63, No. 3, (2019), pp.277-295 (p.283).

the *imitatio*, and something more, where one receives the life of the Logos, for true virtue does not emerge from selfhood, but is enacted and conceived of in the name of Christ. Maximus proposes that deification is imparted in proportion in measure of its proximity or likeness to God.¹³⁹ However, it is God who ultimately decides the extent of this proportional likeness, for a soul cannot attain to the mystical knowledge of God unless and until God stoops down in mercy to grasp it and then lift it up to himself.¹⁴⁰ This is because the human intellect is limited in its power and scope and does not, Maximus believes, have the potency, even on an innate level, to ascend alone to participate in divine illumination. The early fathers tend to focus less on cosmology and origins of the fall, with more focus upon mastery of the self and the passions. However, as Chistyakova notes, deification in Patristics can be seen to symbolise the a priori coherence, the interrelatedness between humanity and the divine, and the sacred and mundane worlds.¹⁴¹ Vitally, Maximus does not espouse identification of essence with God, but he understands created natures and uncreated Divinity to bear a type of imparity between their essence and natures. The gnostic will as *tropos* or way of being becomes increasingly harmonious with God's being. This mode of *theosis* is highly relational, participatory and somewhat reflective, becoming like unto the glory of the Divine Other. Deification is not within our potentiality to bring about naturally, 'since it is not within our power... no Logos of that which transcends nature lies within nature'.¹⁴² The soul is yet the image of God, but once acquiring the divine likeness, becomes suffused with the divine energies, which is a work which continues after the individual's earthly life. The *kenosis* of the Word is followed by the *theosis* of the individual. Perhaps part of the reasoning for Maximus' unyielding espousal of dyothelitism, which ultimately cost him his means of expression and his life, was due to Christ's human will providing the key to understanding the will of God, and which might be manifested through orienting one's own will to reflect Christ's volitional direction in the Incarnation.

Eriugena cites Maximus throughout his *Periphyseon*, most frequently within his Fifth book, which elucidates the Return of all things to God. Kavanagh states that Maximus's

¹³⁹ Luke Steven, *Imitation, Knowledge, and the Task of Christology in Maximus the Confessor*, James Cambridge, Clarke and Co, 2021, pp.85-86.

¹⁴⁰ Maximus the Confessor, (translated by John Anthony McGuckin), *Theoretikos*, in *The Book of Mystical Chapters: Meditations on the Soul's Ascent from the Desert Fathers and Other Early Christian Contemplatives*, Massachusetts, Shambhala Publications, 2002, (verse 68), p.97.

¹⁴¹ Olga Chistyakova, 'Eastern Church Fathers on Being Human – Dichotomy in Essence and Wholeness in Deification', *Religions*, Volume 12, No.575, July 2021, page 8.

¹⁴² Citation from Maximus' *Opusculum* in Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004, p.276.

understanding of the relationship between the positive symbolical theology and negative theology is a vital contribution to Eriugena's thought.¹⁴³ This allows God to indwell the world in His being and yet remain transcendent, unbounded, beyond any linguistic comprehension or category of knowledge, a concept which is central to Eriugena's cosmology and the touchstone for his dialectic of descent and return. This circular motion, of the movement of the soul 'according to the revertive, inductive, and providential return of the many to the One'¹⁴⁴ reflects a fitting image of God for Maximus. Yet it is just as apt for Eriugena, where God, like the divine magnet, draws all things to Himself, even though the soul will not quite traverse in a vertical line, but will move through many causes.

The foregoing theologians were among the prime influences upon Eriugena in terms of his concepts of deification and ascent. The list cannot be said to be comprehensive however, when consideration is brought to some of the lost Celtic influences which writings have yet to be rediscovered or sadly were destroyed in the Norse invasions and plundering of monasteries between the 8th and 10th centuries in Ireland.

¹⁴³ Catherine Kavanagh, 'The Influence of Maximus the Confessor on Eriugena's Treatment of Aristotle's Categories', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, Volume 79, Issue 4, (2005), pp. 567-596, p.572.

¹⁴⁴ 'As if to an all-powerful point of origin, or to the centre of a circle precontaining the beginnings of the radii originating from it', Maximus the Confessor, (edited and translated by Nicholas Constas), *The Ambigua*, (London, Harvard University Press, 2014), (Ambiguum 7), pp.101-102.

Chapter Three

The Two Trees

Eriugena's theocentric anthropology is keenly evidenced through his understanding of the two trees within Paradise. In the fourth book of the *Periphyseon*, Eriugena discusses human nature, which is intrinsic to his philosophy as it discloses how all of creation is held together. He is not unaware of the turbulent and uncharted waters upon which he enters when discussing the intrinsic complexities of human nature. As the fourth book begins with the works of the 'sixth prophetic meditation of the Creation of the Universe,' and will go on to consider the return of all things the Nature which neither creates nor is created. The ramifications of such a journey are from hereon to be filled with 'tortuous digressions... currents of unfamiliar teachings...and dangers of shipwreck'.¹⁴⁵ Eriugena enters into a long discourse voicing his concerns. It may not only have been the difficulty and vastness which confronted him as presented in the subject matter, but also the fourth and fifth books of the *Periphyseon*, dealing with Return and deification, were not subjects which he might freely venture into under the scrutiny of his critics in the Western church. The fourth book begins with the works of the 'sixth prophetic meditation of the Creation of the Universe,'¹⁴⁶ and will go on to consider the return of all things the Nature which neither creates nor is created.

Paradise represents for Eriugena the perfection of human nature as it exists within the mind of God, and the Fall from the state of innocence is understood to be an allegory of human nature and the process of it experiencing its own loss. Partaking of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil creates a 'double phantasy' (Eriugena's *phantasia*),¹⁴⁷ for evil must needs be clothed, having no 'form or beauty or cause.'¹⁴⁸ It also necessarily appeals to the will, for evil does not subsist in the human nature, but is an exterior onslaught, via both

¹⁴⁵ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, pp.382-383.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 743 D.

¹⁴⁷ Eriugena's '(phantasia)' (or Sheldon-Williams's) choice of spelling, perhaps due to the delusional quality of 'phantasy' as opposed to imaginative implications in 'fantasy'. This might also appeal to the modern psychological interpretation of phantasy as arising from the subconscious. This also is suggestive of a lack of regulation however, which in a circular fashion, makes one wonder how the fault in the motion of the will might have truly emerged.

¹⁴⁸ Eriugena, *The Periphyseon*, p.484, 828B.

a ‘bestial intemperance’ and the ‘subtle devising of the ancient enemy.’¹⁴⁹ However, Eriugena accords to the Serpent and other nefarious forces a somewhat minor role in man’s fall.¹⁵⁰

Following from Maximus, Eriugena understood the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil to signify a symbol of Creation. Further to this symbolical approach, Eve represents sensation, a half-rational immersion in the senses. She is a ‘figurative expression of the exterior sense...entranced and deceived by the phantasies of sensible things’,¹⁵¹ whilst Adam signifies the mind separated from divine truth, assenting to its corrupt desires and errors. When prelapsarian humanity abandoned the Creator, it descended into a form of duality in its perception. These forces mutually affected the rational will. It must be admitted that this concept regarding the externalisation of evil is a force arising from outside the human psyche. Eriugena focuses the blame upon self, where all begins with the will, unlike Augustine, who placed pride as the initiator of yielding to temptation, which is the marked refusal to surrender to God.¹⁵² Due to the Fall, man’s capacity for self-determination via the divinely intended process of will was inverted. Eriugena adopts Maximus’s view that the desire to partake of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil produces the compound of pleasure and anxiety. Spiritually this tree has the power of good, but in the corporeal sense produces evil.¹⁵³ In the bodily sense, this may produce destructive passions due to the forgetfulness of divine origins. The Tree of Knowledge is emblematic of duality therefore, but Eriugena also cites Maximus’s belief that God intervened in order to place limitations on humanity’s perception following the Fall. Interestingly, he states that God has shielded humanity from the ability to perceive the extent of how distorted and disagreeable the fallen realm truly is.¹⁵⁴ The decided purpose of this shielding is in order that humanity may not be confounded by the darkness and sin which pervades the fallen world but may instead focus upon its spiritual

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, p.485, 828D.

¹⁵⁰ **A note on gendered terms within this work:** I have attempted to remain true to gender neutral or mixed gender reference, when possible, when referring to humanity more broadly. However, given Eriugena’s use of ‘man’ and its frequent usage particularly when referring to the fall, I use the term ‘man’ in a gender neutral and archetypal fashion to denote humanity or human nature, unless otherwise specified as aligning with theological texts and language of the period. In order to avoid confusion, I have tried to use neutral gender where possible for my own references to humans in general, but on all fronts, ‘he’ or ‘her’ used generally in the context of the Fall, image of God in man (especially when citing an author) refers to all humanity, regardless of gender. Clement of Alexandria, for example, was known for his progressive views for his time towards women, but he tends to, for convenience and conformity, state ‘man’ when referring to humanity. I have decided to be faithful to the original language used but have compromised where necessary.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p.515, 854 D.

¹⁵² Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, trans. John Healey, (London, J.M. Dent & Sons), 1945, p.43, Book XIV, Chapter 13.

¹⁵³ Maximus in ibid, p.501, 842C.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, P.502, 842 D.

ascent to God for the purposes of deification. Thus, the fallen individual is at once limited both in terms both of her higher faculties – through her own fault – and by means of her lower perceptions, through the mercy of divine envelopment. The Tree of Knowledge is indeed a ‘mixed’ tree, as Eriugena interpreted to be Gregory of Nyssa’s thoughts upon the matter.

Maximus described the process of the outworking of the will as occurring in terms of stages, which, in its fallen capacity, begins with wishing, and it is this desire of which Eriugena speaks. Maximus terms this ‘imaginative appetency’ – *orexis phantastike*.¹⁵⁵ The appetite for the fantastical, or the illusory, which could be described as a circumscribed, self-willed imagination, not divinely informed, is reiterated in Eriugena’s insights into illusion or *phantasy*.¹⁵⁶ The perfect example of human will orientated towards the divine is to be found in Christ, in Maximus’s dyothelite thought. Eriugena states that true hunger and thirst is appetite for Christ the Word, and such a delight is to be found in the Eden of God’s planting.¹⁵⁷ The fountain which thus flows through irrigating the garden of human nature is the Word and the rivers which emerge from this are the cardinal virtues of the soul:

Moreover, none of the wise denies that that source in paradise which is divided into the four cardinal rivers, interpreted typologically, signifies the Holy Spirit, from Whom, as from their principle and unique and inexhaustible source flow the four cardinal virtues in the paradise of the rational soul, I mean prudence, temperance, courage and justice, and from these in their turn flow forth all the streams of their virtues.¹⁵⁸

Thus the All-tree, or the Tree of Life, is the Word to be found both within human nature, and post-Lapsarian, incarnate in human nature.¹⁵⁹ In accord with Maximus, Eriugena believes that the will has not been stimulated by plurality of choice invoking desire, but desire wishes for choice, and then focuses the will upon some particular thing.¹⁶⁰ Such is symbolised by the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. It is the problem driven by the gnomic

¹⁵⁵ Aiden Nichol, O.P., *Byzantine Gospel: Maximus the Confessor in Modern Scholarship*, p.175.

¹⁵⁶ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, p.504, 844 C.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.474, 819B.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.214, 603 D.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p.486

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.442, 792 A. ‘The mind is in contact with all parts equally, and consequently operates the motion in accordance with the nature which it is subject to. But there are times when the mind follows the inclinations of nature, as if it were the servant.’

will,¹⁶¹ a will which Christ did not possess. Truth or union with God is the end of all desire rightly oriented, and there are, as Eriugena is keen to state, various levels of union with God and strengths of desire among saints being deified.

The human creates the body through the mind and ‘phantasy’ arises through the mind not truly knowing itself. However, God in a sense creates it also through Divine Protection, especially as understood in the ideas of Maximus and Eriugena. It is a cloaking as wrought by God, and an image of an image as manifested by fallen humanity. The unformed and perfect mind was known to God only and ourselves, but the mind now knows itself only through the senses and memory, which Eriugena calls collectively *phantasiae*. The mind is thus exteriorising itself, unfolding as it enters physicality. Gregory of Nyssa states that the body was added to human nature as a superstructure by God’s prescience on account of future sin.¹⁶² The body is referred to as animal, but no theological rationale is given as to why animals might be created with such forms before a Fall, for indeed they suffer and must be subject to the same vicissitudes due to their form as humans. He is indeed inextricably part of *natura*, and human, animal, plant, and cosmos are part of the indivisible framework of Creation in God. It is true that, admirably, a respect for all Creation is to be discovered in Eriugena.¹⁶³ He also cites Augustine’s belief that animal bodies are added to humanity not as a result of sin but rather a necessity of nature. He expresses his wonderment at Augustine’s ‘loud praises’ as spiritually blessed that that which is termed a corporeal human body could subsist in Paradise.¹⁶⁴ Later, Eriugena refers to Augustine’s initial dual sense of Creation which he later appeared to rescind or at least minimise in favour of a highly literal interpretation of the Creation in Genesis.¹⁶⁵ Certainly Eriugena is in agreement with the Greek Fathers who speak of a more spiritualised paradisaic interpretation. Gregory ‘unhesitatingly asserts that the food and fruit and drink of Paradise is spiritual and

¹⁶¹ Some qualities and ordering of gnostic will are, as following from the wish: seeking, deliberation, judgement, choice, and carrying out of an action. See Luke Steven, *Imitation, Knowledge, and the Task of Christology in Maximus Confessor*, also Maximus the Confessor, *Opusculum 1*.

¹⁶² Gregory of Nyssa, ‘On the Making of Man’, in *Hexaemeron with On the Making of Man*, trans. Rev Blomfield Jackson M.A, (Brookline, MA Paterikon Publications, 2017) p.243... ‘but we are to say that in the power of God’s foreknowledge... all the fulness of human nature had pre-existence...and in the creation of individuals not to place the one element before the other, neither the soul before the body, nor the contrary.’

¹⁶³ See especially *Periphyseon*, p.373, 736 C-736 D. Eriugena affirms the continuation of the soul of the animal upon the death of the body.

¹⁶⁴ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, p.457, 805 B.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, pp.468 – 469.

intelligible.¹⁶⁶ Eriugena subtly warns of the ‘over-simple interpretation’ of Epiphanius, unlike Origen’s understanding of the third heaven, which is the intellectual heaven, the true Mind.¹⁶⁷

Man was placed in the genus of the animals in order that animals according to their substance are created in him (human nature).¹⁶⁸ There seems to be a lack of empathy with non-human animals among certain early church writers, as De Beer noted.¹⁶⁹ Gregory of Nyssa was strikingly less than generous towards animals by equating them with unpleasant and unreasonable emotions whilst attempting to describe human failings, although he does account for self-preservation among these factors.¹⁷⁰ Eriugena is generally more enlightened in his approach to other species. He does however conclude that God created humanity in the genus of the animals, foreseeing his fall into ‘irrational passions’. There are some apparent contradictions presenting here which require unravelling. Firstly, it seems clear that Eriugena does not consider human nature to have ever truly experienced paradise in its fullness, for it has not fully oriented to God nor has it expressed itself in the full array as God intended it to be. Also, the original creation of human nature was of a rarefied, finer form. It had not succumbed to the density of the material, prior to the consumption of the fruit of the Tree of Good and Evil, because its perspective was unaligned with the problematic tendencies within its will:

Therefore, the creature is not evil, nor is the knowledge of it evil, but the perverse motion of the rational soul abandons the contemplation of her Creator and turns herself with lustful and illicit longing to the love of sensible matter.¹⁷¹

The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is described by Gregory of Nyssa as the ‘death-dealing tree.’¹⁷² He enquires how might a tree possessing both good and evil qualities reasonably exist in the garden of Paradise at all? It could arguably be termed a symbol of potentiality, following from Eriugena’s ‘not created and not creating’, but in the inverse

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, p.488, 831 B-831 C.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, P.490.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, p.459, 807A.

¹⁶⁹

https://www.academia.edu/12071849/The_Platonist_Christian_cosmology_of_Origen_Augustine_and_Eriugena_Earlychurch_org_uk

¹⁷⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, p.211. He also terms anything non-human as ‘the irrational creation’ (p.212). It is well-documented that numerous animals do indeed possess reason and engage in rational decision-making activities.

¹⁷¹ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, p.504, 844 D.

¹⁷² Gregory of Nyssa, (translated by Richard. A. Norris Jr), *Homilies on the Song of Songs*, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, 2012, p.369.

sense. He assumes that the will of humanity had taken a turn towards ‘phantasy’. The ‘rootless’ dynamic of the Tree of Knowledge appears in Gregory’s *homily* also, as not planted by God, thus pertaining to death. It is thought to demonstrate the illusory nature of cupidity, and the veil of falsehood cast down in turning away from God, which Gregory plainly states to be the absence of life, which manifests when living beings do not participate in the nobler condition.¹⁷³

Writing in his *Twelfth Homily*, Gregory noted a point of contention within the Genesis narrative, inasmuch as both trees are described as growing ‘in the midst of the garden’, and of course, two trees might not grow in the same precise central point, especially given that their powers oppose one another. Thus life would be situated in the centre as the ‘All-tree’ – πᾶν-δένδρον and the tree dealing death is rootless and unplanted. This corresponds with the ‘mixed’ state of Eriugena’s interpretation, for it is man’s fall into unreality, through the groundlessness of illusory desires, that is, a motion of the will away from the pure goodness, beauty and truth of the divine, and coveting a type of miniature world wherein man rules over his own microcosm. This type of autonomy however can only lead to death for it points away from the true life of the Word which nourishes true human nature as originally created by God. Gregory’s inference of the Tree of Knowledge as pertaining to γνωστός, which means ‘knowable’, or even ‘acquainted’ but is translated by Eriugena as meaning ‘mixed’, because, he states, the term knowable does not adequately express the true meaning of the tree.¹⁷⁴ Thus, the philosopher’s interpretation is subjective, but in my view all the more interesting due to his interpretation being less reliant upon the earlier church fathers, and one of his own devising. Gregory and Eriugena’s interpretation of the Tree of Knowledge leads to differing avenues, for the term “knowable” concerns experience and choice, inexorably bound with the fruit’s effects and the recondite words of Elohim, “the man has now become like one of us”. Eriugena’s interpretation of the variety inherent through experiencing the fruit of the tree, corresponds with Neoplatonic thought and ascending modes of understanding. Whilst Gregory of Nyssa engaged with Platonic texts, it is not known to what extent he was truly influenced by such.¹⁷⁵ Eriugena’s citation uses the term γνωστός regarding the Tree of Knowledge, whereas Carlos Steel defines Gregory’s clarification of the term ‘knowledge’

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, p.478, 823A.

¹⁷⁵ See John Rist, ‘On the Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa’, *Hermathena*, n.169, (Winter, 2000), pp.129-151.

(γνῶσις) to pertain to a type of knowledge indicating disposition of the mind.¹⁷⁶ As Gregory describes this form of knowledge of good and evil to be a concretion, the Tree presents with an amalgamation of the two kinds of knowing, which become permeated and confused with one another. Evidently, he interprets this in a strictly moral sense, which befits the Genesis narrative and associated analogies, but possibly leads away from a more thorough engagement with the Fall and its connotations. An examination of different forms of knowledge within the context of these parameters set out by Gregory could enrich and enliven discussions regarding one of the most seminal Biblical narratives and its attendant mysteries.

One of the most salient points of contention of Eriugena's within this segment of the *Periphyseon* is his interpretation of the origin of the impetus for the Fall. It is not clear what really induced Eve to partake of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, other than for the movement of desire. What cause could possibly provoke such temptation as to cause Eve (or sense) to compromise harmonious, divinely oriented existence, unless there were a fault already in its creation? Perhaps there was not a fault. Curiosity could arguably have preceded desire, unless it is considered a species of wishing. Certainly human nature must be deemed to possess a type of limitation in terms of its knowledge of itself and its trajectory, if following upon a certain route oriented away from the divine or to have lacked prescience within Eriugena's interpretation of the Lapsarian narrative. The Pseudo-Dionysian hierarchy, in terms of knowledge, may be said to be implicitly drawn upon by Eriugena here in his exposition on the ecclesiastical hierarchy, as shown when he writes, 'human minds are admitted into the three celestial hierarchies according to the proportion appropriate to one'.¹⁷⁷

If reason cannot be found for Eve's desire, the motion of her will is apparent, but the serpent's role is less certain, and the entire arena of Paradise is further complicated by the *Nutritor's*¹⁷⁸ suggestion that there may have been two forms of Paradise, and that humanity had already fallen, if not to the present degree, at least partially, prior to the consumption of the fruit of the forbidden tree.

The most problematic analogy is given in order to justify the partial fall before any interference from the devil takes place. Eriugena cites the example of the parable of the Good

¹⁷⁶ Carlos Steel, 'The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil', in *Iohannes Scottus Eriugena: The Bible and Hermeneutics*, edited by Gerd Van Riel, Carlos Steel and James McEvoy, Leuven University Press, Leuven, 1996, pp.244-245.

¹⁷⁷ Paul Rorem, *Eriugena's Commentary on the Dionysian Celestial Hierarchy*, p.223.

¹⁷⁸ The *Nutritor* and the *Alumnus* refer within this work to the teacher and student respectively who carry the dialogue throughout the *Periphyseon*.

Samaritan, where a man ('human nature') from Jerusalem, a well-known symbol of the divine, or God's indwelling, is 'fallen from' on the road to Jericho,¹⁷⁹ which represents 'the world':¹⁸⁰

For if human nature had remained in Jerusalem, that is, Paradise, it would certainly would not have met with thieves, that is, with the Devil and his satellites. Therefore he was already beginning to descend from Paradise under the impulse of his irrational will.¹⁸¹

This is a fair analogy, and such symbols would have been understood by Eriugena's intended readership. Medieval hermeneutics engaged with Augustine's fourfold reading of Scripture and was salient for its diverse commentaries and interpretations during this period. Eriugena's Biblical hermeneutics is highly engaged with the eschatological component, his holistic reasoning encapsulating the heights and breadths of his philosophy.

Eriugena proceeds to describe the Fall into the 'instability of temporal nature'. Man is already scarred by the Fall, and more easily persuaded in the weakness of his will and falls among 'thieves', the latter pertaining to the devil and his satellites. But how, he asks, might such an influence as the devil and his cohorts have tempted human nature in Paradise? Such a sublime state would not be conducive to receiving any type of lower influence. These are differing planes of existence. Thus man was already falling from the sublimity of the Divine Image.¹⁸² Eriugena agrees with Gregory in that there were two creations of man, one a substantial creation in the image of God, and the other widely different and then divided due to sin into male and female. In the 'second creation', man is made a living soul, descended from what he once had subsisted as a life-giving spirit.¹⁸³ There is no mention of clay, earth or living soul Eriugena notes, until the second creation takes place. This creation is written as situated within the Garden in Genesis for the sake of narrative, but Eriugena notes that this must have taken place following the Fall. The soul might therefore be regarded as a component of the Fall, and the Lapsarian body of humanity, notably in particular its division into sexes, could be a self-creation rather than a direct creation from God. However, Eriugena perceived something salvific within the Fall, for the body becomes an instrument in which

¹⁷⁹ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, p.465, 811 C.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, p.465. Also Luke 10:30.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, p.464, 811 B – C.

¹⁸² Ibid, p.465, 811D.

¹⁸³ Ibid, p.497, 833 D.

the return to divine grace might be effected, or at least the beginning of such a journey. The ‘mixed’ nature of the Tree of knowledge of good and evil becomes starkly evident within John Scottus’s trajectory of reasoning in the division of the sexes. Wholeness is lost as the Fall begins with the division of human nature into the sexes, but this also prefigures Christ and the Church in the ascending return.

There is, however, an interpretation within Genesis which Eriugena proposes, which is radical in its uniqueness and diversion from the generally accepted reading of the text. Donald F. Duclow writes of Eriugena’s radical interpretation of Genesis 3:22 ‘*let him not put forth his hand.*’¹⁸⁴ This interpretation will be examined in the following chapter, particularly as it is pertinent to the Return to God detailed in the fifth book of the *Periphyseon*. Rather than being isolated from the Tree of Life, as in Augustine’s interpretation and the general understanding of the verse, which is so commonly understood in this manner it is taken for granted, Eriugena reads the text in a complete reversal of its usual sense. In his remarkable reading, it is an invitation from God, as an expression of hope – ‘*may he not put forth his hand?*’ This is befitting, for it at once recapitulates Maximus’s God putting effects in place in order to guide humanity back to Him, but also, most significantly, marks the entrance of spirit into history.

Eriugena is unequivocal regarding the metaphysical locale of Eden. ‘Paradise is not a localised or particular piece of woodland...but a spiritual garden... [it is] human substance itself created in the image of God.’¹⁸⁵ The Word is the Tree of Life, which stands in the centre of human nature, giving life to all Creation. Thus man has been unrooted, displaced from the centre, and is alienated from himself and God. The motion of the human will has moved the human mind away from the central axis wherein the Tree of Life is to be found and nourishes with the fruit of its being. Hence, *metanoia* is the route which needs to be taken, ensuring that, in the futurity of the human soteriological journey (and by corollary, that of all creation, which is contained within human nature) all is bound to ‘turn around’. Or in other words, the human mind will turn its face towards the Word, whence all life springs. The rightful translation of *metanoia* entails turning around or changing one’s mind. In the Eriugenian sense, it might be termed as radically as transforming one’s illusory perceptions by casting these away and reorienting to the divine. Illusion is an addition to one’s nature, self-created

¹⁸⁴ Donald F. Duclow, ‘Denial or Promise of the Tree of Life? Eriugena, Augustine and Genesis 3:22b’ in *Iohannes Scottus Eriugena: The Bible and Hermeneutics*, edited by Gerd Van Riel, Carlos Steel and James McEvoy, Leuven University Press, Leuven, 1996, pp. 221-238.

¹⁸⁵ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, p.500, 841 B.

although compelled to an extent through the wiles of the serpent, who is perhaps the ultimate example of one given entirely to their own will.

The fig tree which represents the divine law is situated in Paradise also,¹⁸⁶ and a key to the philosopher's view on human autonomy is to be found here, for Eriugena states that those who understand it in the deceitful sense, that is, the lower, inverted sense, will lay the blame upon anything but themselves, including the devil.¹⁸⁷ Whilst the serpent manipulates the divine law, contorting sense (Eve), thereby gaining access to the mind (Adam), Eriugena clarifies his belief that human nature must have already given itself over to illusion and inclined its heart away from God somewhat, in order to attract, perceive and be persuaded by the serpent.¹⁸⁸

Besides its obvious association with the devil, the serpent in Eden is a source of forbidden pleasure.¹⁸⁹ Animals in paradise are considered to be symbolically analogous to human passions, and we are directed to have control over these appetites to maintain equilibrium.¹⁹⁰ The 'double phantasy' of man is perpetuated by his pursuit of beauty mingled with the contrarities of evil and greed, which are salient in a world of duality. This pursuit of illusion attributed to evil being implanted within human nature, but it is impossible to relate what impels the first motion of the will away from the divine, directing its perspective away from the Tree of Life and to accept the luring of the tempter. Eriugena accepts the interpretation of Maximus, in that evil consists of two causes, one from haste, or recklessness may be more befitting, particularly as the former entails *time*, and time cannot be said to exist within a Prelapsarian realm, for it is the fallen mind which perceives reality as divided into aggregates of time, which is in turn peculiar to fallen nature. Interestingly, forgetfulness is the second proposed cause, and Eriugena would attribute it to non-being, for evil is not of God and God does not see evil.¹⁹¹

There is room, it must be admitted, for a gnostic interpretation worthy of the *Apocryphon of John* to be woven into the Irish theologian's discourse, but Eriugena's holistic

¹⁸⁶ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, pp.496-497, 838 C-D.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p.500, 841 B-C.

¹⁸⁸ 'And the fruit of this tree is the mingled knowledge of good and evil, that is, the indiscriminating appetite of evil imagined as good, and love and lust and pleasure, through which in the form of a serpent the ancient enemy of the human genus first urged transgression and then brought death upon the whole of nature: upon the soul which abandoned God, and upon the body which was deserted by the soul.' Ibid, p.483, 827 A.ousia

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, p.486, 829 D.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, p.489.

¹⁹¹ For Eriugena... 'concepts like hell, visions of the damned and the evil will are all forms of nothingness.' Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, p.220.

vision sees the *reditus* as already present in the opening of beginnings. Thus the beginning of sin is also, in a converse way, the entrance into salvation, or marks the beginning of the journey into such. Earlier in Book IV, Eriugena explains the pre-Lapsarian existence of a human ‘animalistic’ form through God’s foreknowledge of man’s impending sin. The body was an addition to human nature, created at the moment of creation, which will not continue after the Return. As a created but uncreating being, he places man within time but before ‘intervals’ of time. Thus the material body, which is added to eternal human nature, is really a mutable and corruptible garment of the true and natural body.

In the fourth book’s extensive presentation of the two trees, the composite nature of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is a mirror of duality, the world into which human nature was to descend as it oriented its mind away from God. In its descent it appropriates reason, its intelligence is veiled, and like the tree becomes confused and mixed, under the guise of good, where the misguided longings of destructive drives still linger.¹⁹² Choice affects the perspective of both the wise and avaricious person,¹⁹³ and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil for Eriugena represented the bifurcation of human nature realised through free will. The Tree of Life had been turned away from, and the central axis, in man’s perception, became the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. In reaching out and partaking of this duality, his back is turned to the Creator and his orientation is confused. The centre for humankind now becomes the individual’s own will as circumference. In being expelled from the garden she is not so much commanded to leave but has no choice, for she has tasted of experience of polarities and cannot see God nor commune with the divine in the same manner as when originally created.

Every form of the good contains the whole,¹⁹⁴ but the end of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil is fragmentation and death. The Tree of Knowledge also may be termed a form of chaos, at least in potentiality, contrary to the natural law given to human nature created in the image of God. The beauty of good and the delight of evil become synonymous with the confused and fallen mind, for evil might be veiled in beauty for senses easily beguiled or rather a motion of the will which is perverse and also impelled by the serpent’s wiles. Eriugena does not say much about the serpent or its history or fall. It would be

¹⁹² ‘Indeed, because of this duality and the subsequent choice that man unavoidably faces, his nature appears to be cleft asunder.’ Sergei N. Sushkov, *Being and Creation in the Theology of John Scottus Eriugena*, (Eugene, Oregon, Pickwick Publications, 2017), p.112.

¹⁹³ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, p.484, 828C.

¹⁹⁴, *Ibid*, p.474, 819 B-C.

interesting to learn how far the serpent's beguiling was considered to contribute to the Fall, but Eriugena does not like to lay blame and does not enlist a chronology of the fallen ones.

A comparison might be made between the two trees as The Tree of Life denoting partaking and participation with the Divine, and the Tree of Knowledge pertaining to acquainting and taking. Their resolution is to be discovered in grace for the *reditus* or return to the divine. The Tree of Life also meant $\pi\alpha\nu\ \gamma\nu\tilde{\omega}\theta\iota$,¹⁹⁵ to know all. There is an eerie similitude between the Greek terms for each tree which Eriugena cites, pointing to different types of knowing, but the subtlety surely directs towards an ever-deepening complexity. When the mind is kept away from inward contemplation, the senses might be engaged improperly, forgetful of the internal awareness of Divine Wisdom which is its true heritage.

If then, the 'whole of our nature was good',¹⁹⁶ what impels the motion of human nature if perfect in itself? Eriugena's understanding is that it is the deifying grace given through the Logos which enables one to live in the manner which God designed the Creation for, and *tropos*, is simply the way one chooses to live. Despite the gift of free will, a perfect nature might not succumb to partaking of the deadly fruit, but Eriugena was confident that humanity did not dwell in Paradise, in the upper boundaries of its nature, for any period, even outside of time. Thus the Fall is the tale of the spirit entering history, experiencing and forgetting, needing the grace of the Word or the All-Tree in order to return to its rightful place in Eden.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, p.475, 820B.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, p.479.

Chapter Four

Alienation or Promise of Return?

*The descent of souls is not complete; their highest part, their Nous, does not come down.*¹⁹⁷

At the beginning of Book V of the *Periphyseon*, Eriugena boldly lays out his interpretation of the verse of Genesis 3:22b: “Now therefore, lest he put forth his hand and take of the Tree of Life, and eat, and live forever.”¹⁹⁸ The verse that supposedly speaks of the barring of the way to the Tree of Life as a prelude to the banishment from the Garden, becomes for Eriugena a ‘prophetic virtue’ and ‘the clearest promise of the Return of human nature to that same bliss which in sinning it had lost’.¹⁹⁹ He interprets the *ne* as an interrogative rather than a prohibitor. It is as though God is contemplating within Himself, enquiring as to ‘*may he not perhaps* put forth his hand and take of the tree of life?’ Eriugena’s gloss appears to be unique, or at the least rare. Duclow states that it has thus far only been sourced in an early text of Augustine,²⁰⁰ where he indicates the possibility of a dual reading of the text. Later, Augustine does not affirm the more positive reading. However the words are to be understood, says John Scottus, they clearly contain the promise of the Return of human nature to its state of perfection, as it was originally designed to prevail by God. Why, he asks, would man live eternal life, through eating of the Tree of Life, when he had already condemned himself through sin?²⁰¹ Surely the Tree of Life lay far outside the bounds of man’s perception and understanding resultant from his error. The *Nutritor* hears within *Nunc ergo* the resonance of the Divine Mercy, full of pity and sighs for the Fall of the Divine Image.²⁰² John’s eschatology bears a sense that man is *destined* to eat of the fruit of the tree and be debarred from the garden of Eden. In this instance, he never became acquainted with his true nature or knew things as they are in themselves within the first principles. God wished for humanity to make the choice freely and in an act of true love, rather than in a mechanical fashion, where God is the divine watchmaker which sets all in motion and simply reflects upon the show

¹⁹⁷ Plotinus cited in *Plotinus* by A.H. Armstrong, (from *The Enneads*, (IV.3. 12-13) (fourth Ennead, third tractate, section 12), (London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1953), p.131.

¹⁹⁸ *Nunc ergo ne forte mittat manum suam, et sumat etiam de ligno uitae, et comedat, et uiuat in aeternum.*

¹⁹⁹ Eriugena, *The Periphyseon*, p.523, 859D.

²⁰⁰ In *De Genesi Contra Manichaeos*, (*Genesis Against the Manicheans*).

²⁰¹ Eriugena, *The Periphyseon*, p.534, 861A – 861B.

²⁰² *Ibid*, p.525, 862B.

whilst Creation does not love of its own accord. Irenaeus, suggests John Hick, poses a different type of theodicy to that of Augustine, wherein the human being exists in perfection initially. The ‘Irenaean theodicy’²⁰³ marks the difference between the *imago dei* and the likeness to God, which is acquired through reaching various means of attaining perfection, becoming more like to God and growing in receptivity to God’s grace. The likeness is a latent state within the human being, a field of potentiality which may be developed until the individual’s life reflects that of the Divine within herself, so that one may authentically state, ‘it is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me.’²⁰⁴

The latency state, more widely known as ‘soul-making’, is a phrase notably expressed by John Keats in a letter from April 1819, wherein he calls the world the ‘vale of soul-making.’²⁰⁵ In this concept, there may be sparks of the divinity or of intelligences in millions – but they are not Souls until they acquire identities. That is, until the person becomes fully individuated. He names the mediums of attaining the soul to be intelligence, the human heart and the world; the latter aspect is also in common with Clement of Alexandria, who proposed that life in the world is a type of school, where the soul may develop through experience. John Hick amalgamates this theory with that of Irenaeus’s. Mark S.M. Scott argues that the theory has more in common with Origen’s theodicy than Irenaeus’s.²⁰⁶ Whilst it is true that Irenaeus did not fully subscribe to a belief in universal salvation, (unlike Origen and Clement) the latter theologians are deeply familiar to Eriugena, whilst there is no direct evidence within his writings of engagement with Irenaeus. Eriugena would likely find agreement with those three mediums, although the world would relate to its theophanic manifestation, and of course, Keats’s profound observation however overlooks what would be the central catalyst for Eriugena: the deifying power of grace through the Word.

Within Augustinian theodicy, the fault lies within the human. Such a search for the roots of the Fall tends to look to the past, to the primordial catastrophe in the Fall of angels and humanity, where it is not often clear as to which party is to be considered more blameworthy. Eriugena’s view certainly contains some seeds of Augustine’s influence, for desire misplaced and vain self-fulfilling ‘actions’ are deemed to take place in the sphere of

²⁰³ The Irenaean theodicy is so-called by Hick in order to mark a pattern where the Greek and Latin fathers diverge in their consideration of the image and likeness of God within humanity. John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, (London, Macmillan Press, 1977), see esp. pp. 214-215.

²⁰⁴ Galatians 2:20

²⁰⁵ John Keats to George and Georgiana Keats, April, 1819, in *Letters of John Keats*, (edited by Robert Gittings), (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992), pp.249-250.

²⁰⁶ Mark S.M. Scott, ‘Suffering and Soul-making: Rethinking John Hick’s Theodicy’, *The Journal of Religion*, volume 9, no. 3, July 2010, pp.313-334.

human nature at some point. Yet there is never utter perfection in human nature's reality, allowing for John Scottus's belief that human nature in its perfection is eternally contained within God. Early Church Fathers such as Clement and Origen did not perceive misery and suffering to be due to fallen angels, but both believed humans to be immature and in need of 'education and discipline in order to develop into angelic images and likenesses of the Logos.'²⁰⁷ Eriugena possibly falls somewhere midway between this concept and that of Augustine's theodicy. There *was* indeed – in potentiality at least – or as God originally intended – a type of perfection extant for human beings, not as being equal with God, but made perfect in his image. Yet, in agreement with the Greek fathers, Eriugena does of course propose a type of perfection to be enjoyed, in differing degrees, in participation with God. Irenaeus, Clement and many Greek fathers perceived humanity as childlike, not blameworthy as Augustine did, sacrificing their perfection for the sake of pride and cupidity, but in ignorance, as being inexperienced, newly formed in soul. Irenaeus considered that humanity, possessed of a beginning and not unoriginated as God is, must necessarily be in need of a form of training, as it is unable to receive mature nourishment of God due to being childish and unprepared.²⁰⁸

Augustine considered the question of whether image and likeness should be more broadly distinguished in his *De Diversis Quaestionibus LXXXIII*, particularly as to whether the intelligence is created unmediated to the image of God whilst some other aspects, including the body, are created to the likeness of God.²⁰⁹ He does not disagree with their being distinguished, but does contend with the implication that some parts of the human being therefore have no correlation to the image of God.²¹⁰ It is a life of virtue which conforms the likeness of the human being to God within Augustine's view, whereas for Eriugena the likeness is cosmological in its potentiality and in the broader consequences of the stages of growing likeness to God. Man as image of God manifests the dialectic of nothingness and creativity in his own symbolic articulations,²¹¹ which are individualised, for the divine can only come to expression once it has manifested through the primordial causes

²⁰⁷ Clement cited in Walter H. Wagner, *After the Apostles: Christianity in the Second Century*, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1994), p.230.

²⁰⁸ Irenaeus of Lyons (translated by John Keble), *Against All Heresies*, (Wisconsin, Nashotah House Press, 2012 [1872]), p.436, Book IV, chapter 38.

²⁰⁹ St. Augustine of Hippo, (translated by David L. Mosher), *Eighty-Three Questions*, Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 1977, Question 51, p.87.

²¹⁰ Ibid, p.88. 'They propose... that the other parts of man are made "in the likeness" because every image of course is a likeness, but every not every likeness can be properly called an image.'

²¹¹ Donald F. Duclow, "Divine Nothingness and Self-Creation in John Scotus Eriugena", *The Journal of Religion*, Vol.57, No.2, April 1977, pp.109-123.

which exist in the Word and radiate into Creation. The entire creature contains the entire image of God even whilst God is within all and transcends all things. In agreement with Augustine, who perceived what excelled in the soul to be termed mind,²¹² he states that human nature is intelligibly made in the image of God. This image is trinitarian in nature as a reflection of the Godhead, but it is the interior sense which bears the true hallmark. These are reflected in the three higher senses of imagination, reason, and intelligence.²¹³

Eriugena firmly believed that all that was ever made was created by God in one moment. Evidently God's precognition of the Fall allowed for this, for all that is immutable is deemed to be proper to the First Creation, and whatever is changeable is a later addition, apart from the body's true nature.²¹⁴ The Fall of human nature as set forth in Genesis is not to be interpreted literally – John Scottus lays the ground clear for this – but if it happened once, were all humans then in a rarefied state of the same will, wherein all the souls fell in a timeless instant, unanimously making the same choice? Whether or not individuality is latent until burgeoning in the process of descent, it is indeed strengthened in its intended likeness when reorientated in the *reditus* through contemplation and divine illumination.

Eriugena underscores the significance of the Cherubim guarding the way to the Tree of Life, enquiring as to why of all angelic orders these might be set before the Paradise of pleasure, which are the spiritual delights of human nature.²¹⁵ The Cherubim are not to be considered in the pseudo-Dionysian sense of hierarchy, where they preside in the third place in the first hierarchy, but as the fullness of knowledge. Only the highest order of knowledge could qualify to be before the face of God, which is the wisdom of the Word. It is emblematic of God's compassion that God does not will for his image in humanity to be destroyed, but rather newly created through the fullness of the Word's wisdom. Christ, the Word and the All-tree of Life, wishes for the individual to regain its knowledge of its true nature, but firstly it must receive purification and enlightenment through a pouring forth of true wisdom.²¹⁶ It is the flaming sword which divides, separates the individual from their sin, for sin and Fall are the source of alienation and estrangement from God, as viewed in their effects. The Word is always accessible, but one cannot come to the Tree of Life or the Life of the Word, without

²¹² St. Augustine of Hippo, (translated by Stephen McKenna), *The Trinity*, (Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 1962), p.465.

²¹³ Eriugena, *The Periphyseon*, Book IV, p.480, 825 A-825B.

²¹⁴ Eriugena, *The Periphyseon*, Book IV, p.452, 801C.

²¹⁵ Ibid, Book V, p.526, 863C.

²¹⁶ John the Scot (translated by Myra L. Uhlfelder), *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, (Eugene, Oregon, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011) (previously published 1976), p. 236. Also, Eriugena, *The Periphyseon*, (Sheldon-Williams translation), pp.527-528.

first encountering both sword and grace. Duclow notes that humanity has no concept of the Tree of Life along with Paradise as a past reality, and therefore it is moved into the future as an eschatological symbol.²¹⁷ In spite of this, humanity possesses a latent intuitive memory of the Tree, of life before the Fall, instinctively known but initially hidden, to the true way which leads to Life in the Word.

Nonetheless, in John Scottus's thought, contradictions prevail in extremes for the purposes of human understanding. As Pépin observes, the 'outer' and 'inner, 'spiritual' and 'animal' natures cannot be divided in spite of their apparent contrariness, for the living soul requires these parts to subsist. Thus the wholeness of the human being must be unified in all its parts.²¹⁸ Definitions are reserved for the present realm, which is the culmination of the descent, where the One becomes the Many. The seven liberal arts correspond with the same recurrent pattern as may be seen in nature. At the end of the motions of nature their beginning is apparent. Eriugena uses examples of the moon cycles, the oceanic tides, and the seasons to demonstrate this pattern.²¹⁹ 'In short, there is no corporeal creature enlivened by the Vital Motion which does not return again from the beginning from which it set forth.'²²⁰ Representations taken from 'sensibles' – pertaining to that which is understood through means of the senses, and 'intelligibles' – that which is grasped through rational cognition or contemplation, demonstrate the manner in which the individual might come to know the analogy of the cyclical nature of all things, that, is, within the fallen realm, and how their *telos* is rooted in the beginning, for all must return to their source. The *Nutritor* cites the example of the seven liberal arts, and how such disciplines as arithmetic may demonstrate metaphysical truths. Arithmetic for example demonstrates, he states, begins from the Monad, descending into a multiplicity of numbers, which upon the resolution of the problem, returns to the same Monad.²²¹ Only two of the liberal arts, grammar and rhetoric, are not concerned with the nature of the universe, but enhance human creations, such as speech. Thus as a point of comparison, there are human creations which in the instance of grammar has its beginning in the letter, or rhetoric, which, possessing a starting hypothesis, must be resolved in its

²¹⁷ Duclow, 'Denial or Promise of the Tree of Life? Eriugena, Augustine and Genesis 3:22b', p.233.

²¹⁸ Jean Pépin in "Saint Augustine and the Indwelling of the Ideas of God" in *Eriugena, Berkeley and the Idealist Tradition*, ed. Stephen Gersh and Dermot Moran, (Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 105-122, (p.113).

²¹⁹ John the Scot, (Uhlfelder), *Periphyseon*, pp.278-279. Also, Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, p.529-531, 866B-867C.

²²⁰ Ibid, p.530, 866 C.

²²¹ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, (trans. Sheldon-Williams), pp.532 – 533, 869A - 869D.

originating principles.²²² Still, in spite of their merit and usefulness, the latter two arts are human contrivances and do not provide the same example as those related to nature. Eriugena provides here more than an implicit sign that what belongs truly to nature carries the imprint of a higher correspondence, whereas those arts created by the faculties in a post-Lapsarian world, until enlightened in the knowledge of the Word, will yield an imperfect illustration of direct correspondence. This is corroborated by Eriugena's belief that since humankind did not obey the Divine Precept, it abandoned not only the Creator but the dignity of its true Image. The interrelation of the arts and knowledge are avenues towards higher thought. The supposition of the *Alumnus* concerns the superiority of knowledge pertaining to things created in the soul in comparison to the nature of the things themselves. He cites Augustine's book *On the Trinity*, wherein Augustine gives the example of speaking of the body through the senses of the body, where an image is replicated in the mind, but he argues that the replica or phantasy of that body is superior because it has a better nature in its vital substance.²²³ *Alumnus* concludes that the intelligible things are not better than the concept of these in the soul. *Quod intelligit melius esse quam quod intelligitur* – 'what he understands is better than that which is understood'.²²⁴ Conversely, the *Nutritor* responds, '*Quod formatum est praestantius est eo quod facit*' - that which is formed is more excellent than that which forms,²²⁵ and he evaluates whether the knowledge of the arts could be formed by the arts themselves. In a Neoplatonic fashion, the *Alumnus* places causes above effect, but the arts, as 'powers of the mind',²²⁶ are shown by the *Nutritor* to be innate to the mind. He goes on to argue that actually the arts, skills and the mind inform one another, creating a trinity in one essence. The circular proclivity within Eriugena's Neoplatonism is subtly demonstrable within this dialogue. Ultimately this proclivity leads to the striking conclusion that 'man is a certain intellectual concept formed eternally in the mind of God.'²²⁷ The *Nutritor* certainly avers that what knows is greater than that which is known, or that which creates is greater than that which is created, for example, but in the context of the arts and the human mind, the interplay of their relationship might be seen on one level to reflect potentiality of knowledge (*reditus*) and knowledge of that which is known (*exitus*).

²²² Ibid, pp.533-534, 870 A-870B.

²²³ <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130109.htm>

²²⁴ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, Book IV, p.410, 766 B.

²²⁵ Ibid, 766C

²²⁶ Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, p.205.

²²⁷ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, p.413, 768B.

Regarding the falling away from the Image, the possibility that the human spirit in its ignorance sought freedom, without realising that true liberty rests in divine participation as a self-realised being, would certainly correspond with the ‘Irenaeus’ (or Clementine) theodicy, which avows the immaturity of the human soul in its incipient, burgeoning stages prior to the Fall. If it had full knowledge of itself, it would have appreciated its freedom in God and seen that desire for self-determination and self-manifestation and division would lead to the often difficult, painful and varied, unsettled reality in which all creation must subsist within in the world. Freedom of will has a range of meanings, according to S.L. Frank,²²⁸ allowing that absolute freedom of choice is argued to be untenable²²⁹ and this is, particularly when taken to its extreme, to be seen to be correct. Eriugena would be in agreement, for submitting to evil or impure intent is a form of spiritual bondage, for it tethers the soul to the lower, outer nature of the human being, and directs its gaze away from its true nature in God, in self-realisation.

John Scottus provides analogies of musical instruments to show that every isolated sound, no matter the form or timbre, retains its own unique quality which no other instrument may precisely reproduce.²³⁰ This still does not solve the mystery of theodicy when examining the collective experience of evil and suffering, or, most saliently for the purpose of examining the effects of the Fall, why all humanity must fall because of a certain choice at one stage. Following Eriugena’s reasoning, it can be proposed that one element fell out of harmony, causing the entire orchestra to sound out of alignment and be unable to source the true harmony, the divine voice. One aspect to consider here would be the relational component. It is not so much the circumstance of one aspect being disharmonious, inasmuch as one falls out of its connection with another part. This still drives the theory of an initiator, but on a deeper level, it also is indicative of a process of descent and deterioration within the individual. Where once harmony with the divine reigned, a form of desire for self-expression arose, but was oriented to itself. Eriugena resolves the issue of collectives, at least at a post-Lapsarian level, by stating that one may deduce from observing the intelligibles and sensibles how there may be a unification of human nature without necessitating the sacrifice of the properties of individual substances.²³¹ The Neoplatonic philosopher Proclus averred that the soul is present in all things by containing sensibles paradigmatically (invisibly) but intelligibles iconically

²²⁸ S.L. Frank, *Reality and Man: An Essay in the Metaphysics of Human Nature*, (London, Faber & Faber, 1965), p.170.

²²⁹ For example, the consideration of goodness becoming inverted to evil, or God choosing to destroy Himself. See also *Ibid*, pp.167-168.

²³⁰ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, p.550, 883 C-D.

²³¹ *Ibid*, 884 A.

(visibly).²³² Here it can be seen that the soul apprehends sensory means through itself, whilst intelligibles, being of a higher order, must be apprehended by the intellect. Eriugena's metaphysical system tends to be more holistic than hierarchical, even though the latter is saliently at work within his system in terms of mirroring and communicating that which is in proximation to itself.

Eriugena refers to God's procession and return to Himself as not involving any alienation or remotion,

For that motion of His is not to be understood as a carrying away, or as an alienation from oneself, or exchanging... not intelligible, not psychic, not physical, but as God's bringing into essence and containing all things.²³³

Moran observed that the human dialectic involves alienation in this life,²³⁴ but once intellect evolves, appreciating its limitations, it perceives such limitations within the context of the Lapsarian realm, and alienation in this manner dissolves. This is not unlike *maya* in Hindu philosophy,²³⁵ or the error of *Sophia* in certain streams of Gnostic thought, such as the *Apocryphon of John*. Such themes are prevalent in mystical theology, and the lifting of the veil of illusion will be explored within the sixth chapter, as part of the awakening in the *reditus* path of ascent. This will demonstrate the richness of Eriugena's contemplative mystical path, which is often underrepresented. Succinctly stated, it is the Incarnation of the Word which redeems all from alienation. In assuming human nature, the Word also assumed every creature that is made in human nature, restoring therefore not only humanity but all creatures. There is, however, the issue of an apparent gulf between the state of alienation and that of grace. Might these possibly be insinuated as coinciding in the same intelligible locale?

Bringing to bear an analogy, the two trees of the previous chapter might not be so acutely arcane in their reasons for occupying the same metaphorical space as those which Maximus contemplated. In Plato's *Timaeus*, *chora*,²³⁶ (χώρα) is a receptacle, the empty space

²³² Proclus (translated by Juan and Maria Balboa) *The Elements of Theology*, (2017) p.238.
<https://archive.org/details/proclus-elements-balboa/page/8/mode/2up>

²³³ Ibid, Book I, pp.121-122, 523B.

²³⁴ Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, p.151.

²³⁵ *Maya* as pertaining to illusion. In the thought of the Vedic philosopher Shankara (circa 8th century CE) *maya* as illusion and spiritual ignorance is caused by superimposition of what is not the self onto the self. As a result all knowledge is distorted through superimposition or projection. Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009) p.241.

²³⁶ Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, (translation by Robin Waterfield), (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.45-46, 52 D-53 C.

of non-being, which may also be interpreted as the connective space between two further limitations. This may be applied to Maximus's analogy of the two trees, but also understood in the light of Eriugena's quest for resolution. In *Timaeus*, Plato writes, 'It is not possible, for only two things to be well combined in the absence of a third thing, for there must be some bond which brings the two together'.²³⁷ Another way of conceiving of this is as a cosmic mirror, which, according to Jelinek, is ungenerous, and the conception of *chora* as space, place and matter all at once,²³⁸ is more faithful to Plato's original intent behind the concept. Maximus's two spaces are reconciled in the concept of *chora* and align with Eriugena's view of differing human perspectives pertaining to divergent perceptions even of sacrosanct phenomena, such as theophanies. However, in *chora* there may be evidence of fallen humanity interacting with the two states represented by the trees upon the path of ascent. These reflect the alienation and the promise of return to God and restoration to the divine state. The tree of knowledge of good and evil signifies a conditioned rather than an innate state of alienation. The Tree of Life signifies the promise of return to grace and true life, manifested through the Word. This dual interaction suggests that whilst alienation is a present reality, the promise of return to God and true life is simultaneously extant.

²³⁷ Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, pp19-20, 31 B-C.

²³⁸ Elizabeth Jelinek, "An Examination of Plato's Chora", *Environment, Space, Place*, 7 (1)(2015), pp.7-27, p.12.

Chapter Five

Creation and Theophany

*Is not precisely this world a fit dwelling for those alienated from the true light?*²³⁹

Following a brief impassioned discussion on the problem of human beings coming into the world, the foregoing passage from Eriugena suggests that there are two possible ways of translating his *Homily on the Prologue of John* concerning alienation, the roots of which seem to be planted in the most fitting place – the world of matter and suffering. At once the soul has turned away from the divine, plunging into a world which, mediated through its fallen perception, reflects temporality, suffering and separation. However, the fact of alienation from the true light indicates a form of will and contains the seeds of reconciliation. Human nature had the inherent ability to know itself perfectly had it not sinned.²⁴⁰ The yearning for the lost state of bliss remains intact so it has not ultimately plunged into ignorance of itself or God. It forsook knowledge of the Creator, who is, regardless of one's original state, unknowable in essence. Still, even in the earliest stages of growing in grace, we may know Him through His Creation. Whilst Eriugena has been associated with a broad panentheism, his thoughts upon nature as Creation actually represent a bifurcation of his view of the matter which meets ultimately as a unified stream in his concept of creation. Upon the one hand, fallen creation can be perceived as alienated through its experience of suffering and apparent separation from God. However, the latter state is but a subjective one, and not a definitive reality. Nature covers the range of his discourse, and even in expressing God's inexpressibility, we are allowing that we know as much about God. Whilst creation and scripture can be viewed as two parallel manifestations of God's hidden nature,²⁴¹ Eriugena conceded the difficulties and apparent inconsistency in placing nature within a category of nature, for he would not place it among the divisions of the universe, which is comprehended

²³⁹ Eriugena, (Christopher Bamford), *Homily on the Prologue*, p.100. Another, more stark translation might be, 'Is this world alienated from the true light?' (*Nunquid mundus ist alienatis a uero lumine conueniens habitio est?*)

²⁴⁰ Eriugena, (Uhlfelder), *Periphyseon*, p.252.

²⁴¹ Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism: From Gregory the Great to the Twelfth Century*, (London, SCM Press, 1995), p.93.

by universal nature, for nature can signify not only the created universe but that which creates it.²⁴²

Eriugena conceives of nature as a datum, which brings that which dwells in non-existence into existence. On the other hand, Grace is a donum, which means that it transposes all existents beyond all other existents into God Himself.²⁴³ Within his third book, dealing with nature and creation as that which is created but does not create, he describes the difference between *dationes* and *donationes* as that which is given by each nature to subsist by, whilst grace, as a *donatio*, is a distribution of grace which adorns all natures.²⁴⁴ For the purpose of examining Eriugena's thoughts upon theophany and its relation to the removal of alienation and the process of ascent, it is necessary to explore firstly his concept of nature, which encompasses Creation. Nature pertains in his thought to *universitas rerum*, which includes all that proceeds from God within its reality and participates in God's being. It is this all-encompassing factor which can obfuscate Eriugena's view upon nature in terms of creation, particularly as definitions of 'nature' and what it pertains to have altered over time. The ancient Greek meaning of *natura* as *physis* (*φύσις*) denotes coming into being, distinguishing this from *ousia* (*οὐσία*) or *being*. It also denotes manifesting, being born – thus there is an inherent sense of light emergent from darkness, and blossoming from a space of potential. The term *physis* encapsulates a far more refined concept of nature than the physical and perhaps psychological embodiment which is prevalent in scientific materialism, although quantum science increasingly entertains a broader perspective, investigating the nature of consciousness and admitting the limitations of a Cartesian view of nature. The root of the word *physis* as becoming, can imply that, once one posits the first principle, then the whole series of beings develops itself.

Moran counters Cappuyn's suggestion in a 1933 study that Eriugena did not develop a system of nature as promised within his *Periphyseon*, stating that it is in his view the most comprehensive, systematic account of the subject in the whole of mediaeval philosophy.²⁴⁵ Eriugena's fluid interpretation however avers a form of interchangeability between *ousia* and *physis*, just as in Latin he states that *natura* and *essentia* may be exchanged, which however preserves individual niceties of meaning. Eriugena's position upon the indwelling of the divine throughout nature, regardless of interpretations of that state is encapsulated in his

²⁴² Eriugena, (Sheldon-Williams), *Periphyseon*, Book III, p.235, 621 A.

²⁴³ Eriugena, (Sheldon-Williams), *Periphyseon*, p.577, 905 A.

²⁴⁴ Ibid, p.248, 631 D.

²⁴⁵ Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, p.243.

expression, *Rerum sensibilibus essentia, quam nomine Naturae nominavit sanctus Augustinus, perpetuo durabit, cum immutabilis fuerit in divina sapientia ultra omnia loca, tempora, et mutabilitatem*. ‘The essence of sensible things, which St. Augustine designated by the term nature, will endure perpetually since it has been made unchangeable in the Divine Wisdom beyond all places, times and changeability.’²⁴⁶ However, Eriugena is swift to add that nature as it manifests throughout fallen life is susceptible to change, temporality and finitude, depending upon intervals predetermined by the Creator. Whilst subsistence comes from God, everything strives innately to flee from non-being,²⁴⁷ even when aware of its loss of likeness, it is implied that unconsciously all seek to return to likeness which is being and life. God cannot be approached in the direct sense, but through grace and Creation, which bears the hallmark of the divine imprint. Thus, whilst panentheism is pertinent to Eriugena’s appreciation of the pervasive energies of God permeating all things, yet the incomprehensible transcendence outside of all nature must also be affirmed. *Ousia* is the eternality of all things, where it cannot be altered or diminished,²⁴⁸ for it signifies the inherent ‘I am’, like an echo of divine exclamation running throughout Creation.

Eriugena’s view of *ousia* as substance suggests the latter dwelling outside of physicality, placing substance as an expression of God, where divine substance is revealed. According to Aristotle, there are seven meanings of *physis*, but these proceed as rays from a single star, and are nuances or aspects. The fullest meaning entails movement.²⁴⁹ This implies that nature is not static and Eriugena adopted and adapted this view also, with the divine manifestation moving through the aspects of Creation. True to his Neoplatonic stance, Eriugena states that the order of things emerges into physical manifestation through a descending process. Theophanies create the appearance of something becoming apparent from ‘nothing’, which is often erroneously perceived as darkness.²⁵⁰ Here he makes plain that the mind is the mediator which transforms the divine ‘nothingness’ into something apparent, as there are different interpretations of theophany peculiar to the individual, according to the depth of their contemplation or the purity of intellectual direction. Sushkov writes that it is vital to understand that the restoration of wholeness occurs only when man evokes within himself the universal motions of his nature.²⁵¹ In order to acclimatise to this, he must

²⁴⁶ John the Scot (Eriugena), (translated by Uhlfelder), *Periphyseon*, Book V, p.279.

²⁴⁷ Ibid, Book V, p280.

²⁴⁸ Eriugena, (translated by Sheldon-Williams), *Periphyseon*, Book V, p.530, 867A-B.

²⁴⁹ R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1945), pp.80-81.

²⁵⁰ Eriugena, (translated by Sheldon-Williams), *Periphyseon*, Book III, pp.307-308, 681A-681B.

²⁵¹ Sergei N. Sushkov, *Being and Creation*, p.115.

transcend his limited perceptions by contemplating the archetypal causes, for example. This motion in turn conforms the soul to the nature of the true reality. The principles of all things, extending back to the divine, can be comprehended in a variety of ways, but the *Nutritor* attests that the primordial causes (which are revealed through theophanies) are constituted within the mind's discernment,²⁵² and this is how they are then expressed, most poetically through the 'devout and pure-minded philosopher.'²⁵³ Participation is key, both as grant and as gift, indicating a form of reciprocity (between the divine and experiencer). Nature has wrongly been channelled into the category of 'other', and has often been divided and distanced, set apart from what pertains to being human, one might argue since the dawn of the Renaissance, and later yet through the influence of Cartesian ego-centred philosophy, but it may be seen that these roots lie much further in the past. These roots may also be seen, to give but a few examples, within Hellenic thought, Hebraic thought in the Genesis account of having dominion over nature, delineating a firm separation, and of course the overarching concern of Augustine with the 'corrupt' natural world, fallen humanity, and its separation from the eternal divine.²⁵⁴ Eriugena mollifies this challenge through unifying all in cosmic participation and an ultimately common *telos*. As part of the nature which is created but does not create, humanity and nature are unified and through attaining a deeper understanding of nature may come to know God.

Thus the divine goodness of God is within all creation, which by a certain ineffable descent into the things that are, is beheld in the mind's eye, and alone is to be found in all things.²⁵⁵ For as the Divine Nature is recreated after a manner, refashioning itself through its expression in the primordial causes, the effects, that is creation, are the set end of the descent and the last trace of the Divine Nature.²⁵⁶ Celestial essences however do not require the works of nature in order to see the truth, for they have never ceased in their contemplations of God. Thus the fallen Creation is like an amelioration, which can be engaged as a means. The question arises as to whether the physical creation occurred with this within the divine mind. The angelic, celestial natures have never abandoned their original condition of eternal bliss,

²⁵² Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, Book III, 624 A – 624 C, p.239.

²⁵³ Ibid, 624 C.

²⁵⁴ These roots may also be seen, to give but a few examples, within Hellenic thought, Hebraic thought in the Genesis account of having dominion over nature, delineating a firm separation, and of course the overarching concern of Augustine with the 'corrupt' natural world, fallen humanity, and its separation from the eternal divine.

²⁵⁵ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, Book III, p.307, 680D.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, p.318, 689C.

for they know nothing other within the universal creature except for God.²⁵⁷ Consonant with Eriugena's teachings upon the Fall and the importance of the whole creature as set out in Book Four, the *Nutritor* avers that there cannot be infamy in the universe of the whole creature.²⁵⁸ He goes on to state that the nature of all things is indeed the Word of God, and that his commands are not to be separated from him.²⁵⁹ This statement is the root of his vision, whereby the Word not only creates but *is* the underlying essence of all Creation. Therefore, it is rooted in wisdom and goodness, and is eternal. This should be acknowledged to be established within the human mind. Thus, not only the animals, but also the things which nature contains besides the animals, flora, the elements, come to subsist in 'the notions of them contained in the soul of the wise.'²⁶⁰

Theophany in Eriugena's thought conveys a form of descent from God and at once His manifestation, which bears comparisons with modes of descent and ascent of the soul as theophany, latency and return. Aogáin likens it to the alignment of Maximus's three motions of the soul, so that everything which is contemplated and understood is an apparition of what is not apparent.²⁶¹ This concept bears some resemblance to the Platonic Forms, where the Primordial Causes bear the true hallmark of Reality within them. Whilst not perhaps illusory, the Lapsarian realm reflects copies of copies to manifest a diluted reality at best. Yet the Creation, as a theophany, bears the primordial causes within itself.

There are dual meanings of theophany, however, within his vision, consonant not only with the appearing of God in creation, but also involving the ascent of the soul to God, as *reditus* or the return of Creation to its divine source. Thus theophany entails a form of re-creation and being made anew. This is analogous to the kenotic outpouring of the divine within the Incarnation, and in its renewal, the resurrection body of the risen Christ. In alignment with Maximus's three motions of the soul – perception, reason and understanding – *theophania* is at once a revelation and ascent where the forms and ordering of the primordial causes are revealed as a theophany to the creature who contemplates them. However, one's understanding must discern illusion. The declaration that everything understood and perceived is but the apparition of what is not apparent,²⁶² does not connote illusion, but rather it is the disordered passions which cloud vision. The coming-into-being of the primordial

²⁵⁷ Ibid, p.311, 683 D.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, 684 B.

²⁵⁹ Ibid, 685 C.

²⁶⁰ Ibid, 769 D.

²⁶¹ Aogáin, 2016, p.150.

²⁶² Ibid, 633 A.

causes as God's archetypal thoughts, and the manifestation of this within physicality, which is all creation, is a form of God's non-being signifying itself in being. The charge of pantheism has been levelled against Eriugena incessantly throughout the centuries but can be attributed to a misunderstanding of Platonism. Gilson stated that Eriugena took directly after Plotinus, as is evidenced through this emphasis upon the non-being of God.²⁶³ Creatures participate in God through *theophania*, revealing the divine nature and demonstrating this to other created natures. As O'Loughlin states, Eriugena perceives the sacramental component of creation, but his own tradition did in fact also appreciate the balance between the recognition of this and ineffability and ultimate mystery of God.²⁶⁴ Whilst this mode of non-being necessarily transcends all created minds, and human nature as a microcosm mediates the spiritual and created realms, other created beings can embody wonderful facets which embodied humans lack. For, asks John Scottus, what human may possess the sharpness of the eagle's vision, or the loyalty of a turtle dove?²⁶⁵ He alludes to the loyal and nurturing natures of certain other creatures, and declares that this demonstrates that they truly are substantial souls.²⁶⁶ It is unfortunate that he does not cite more particular examples of the animal kingdom and their unique ways of expressing the divine as a theophany, but elsewhere, such as his commentary upon Martianus's Capella's *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, his thoughts upon genus are further elaborated. A genus is one unit bearing many forms, beyond which no understanding can ascend and as *ousia*, it contains all of nature. This descends and divides into specific creatures and as *atomos*, being both individual and indivisible.²⁶⁷ During the *reditus*, the process reverses, with the individual resolving into species, into genus and back to deity. However this does not denote that individuality is lost. Rather, the original creation is restored as intended to be and individuality is elevated, and multiplicity brought into unity without being eradicated. This is akin to the process of division within Proclus's *Elements of*

²⁶³ Étienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, (Toronto, Canada, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1952), pp.35-36.

²⁶⁴ Thomas O'Loughlin, *Journeys on the Edges: The Celtic Tradition*, (London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000), p.68.

²⁶⁵ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, Book III, p. 375, 738 B-C.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 739 A.

²⁶⁷ Genus est multarum formarum substantialis unitas. Secundum quosdam sic diffinitur genus: Sursum est generalissimum genus ultra quod nullus intellectus potest ascendere, quod a Grecis dicitur οὐσία, a nobis, essentia. Est enim quaedam essentia quae comprahendit omnem naturam cuius participatione consistit omne quod est, et ideo dicitur generalissimum genus. Descendit autem per divisionem per genera per species usque ad specialissimam speciem quae a Grecis ατομος dicitur, hoc est individuum vel insecabile, ut unus homo vel unus bos. Iohannis Scotti, (edited by Cora E. Lutz), *Annotationes in Marcianum*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, The Medieval Academy of America, 1939), p.93.

Theology, whereby the perfect descends into the imperfect, and upon the return, the individual is converted through as many causes as those through which it proceeds.²⁶⁸

But it is the means which are also of note here, and in a divinely resourceful manner, creation serves one another as the means besides pointing the way back to the divine in a remarkable reorientation. Human nature is *causa sui*, as self-created, and like unto God, but it is only self-created as pertaining to its uncreated sense. God creates by manifesting Himself,²⁶⁹ and to truly be understood creation must be realised in relation to Him. Human nature does not understand itself or know anything true of itself in its fallen state, but is subject to processing its thought through a lens of fantasy and illusion. Therefore, to truly know anything of its true nature, it must perceive that likeness within other aspects of Creation. In its fallen state, without purification, and chiefly, not open to grace, the individual cannot perceive *natura* in its true state. God cannot be approached directly but nears us through grace and His Creation, which bears a type of divine imprint.

In his earlier work, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, Eriugena separated human will and choice. Human will is given by nature (thus, by corollary, a gift) and choice is a divine grant.²⁷⁰ This section might also bear a clue towards resolving the difficulty of Eriugena's distinction between human creatures as rational and non-human creatures as non-rational. Where it may be seen that animals very evidently display rationality, he appears within his system to adhere to compartmentalising for the purpose of explication. His thoughts upon the will demonstrate his classification system being deployed as such a means, where by 'rational' he indicates humans, angels, and God being possessed of a certain form of will, which he does not accord to other parts of creation. He may mean a form of free will which in our contemporary language relates to certain levels of self-awareness, although animals demonstrate this too, in varying degrees. The greater will that Eriugena here describes indicates greater responsibility, to oneself and indeed all Creation, due to his view that all must be raised by human nature in order to reach deification, rather than their meeting with this independently. Part of the problem here is that Eriugena is focusing upon the human manifestation of agency and indeed the expression of its psyche. This omits the interior kingdom of other creatures and aspects of Creation, but all is, for the purpose of systemising his account of *natura*, to be encompassed within the human understanding within the

²⁶⁸ <https://ia601504.us.archive.org/17/items/proclus-elements-balboa/proclus-elements-balboa-2017-04-12.pdf> (p.53).

²⁶⁹ *Periphyseon*, 688 D, p.317.

²⁷⁰ John Scottus Eriugena, (translated by Mary Brennan), *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, (Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), p.51.

framework of his philosophy. As Helen Steward states, the focus upon the human phenomenon tends to undermine the fact that animal powers demonstrate a form of essential underpinning for free will.²⁷¹

It is, for Eriugena, *metanoia* which is instrumental in enabling greater degrees of contemplation within the individual, leading to deepening participation through all the aspects of Creation. Humanity is problematic because it fell away from the angelic way of life. The alchemical transformation of the vices into virtues, so all is made perfect, is not just for human nature alone. In assuming human nature, the Word also assumed every creation that is made in human nature; therefore, in saving and restoring humanity, the Word saved and restored every creature whether visible or invisible.²⁷² Yet it is the human individual who must ‘tread underfoot the world that is below’,²⁷³ in order to contemplate the world above.

Yet God sees Himself within creation, for creation is the beginning of understanding the divine reality. He cannot know himself except within His creations, wherein God creates Himself and may see Himself. Matter is not to be deprecated for Eriugena, nor is it alone a hindrance, but God indwelling in matter is part of His coming into being, ‘matter is for Him and within Him.’²⁷⁴ For Eriugena, hierarchy is a divine order made similar to the divine idea wherein knowledge assimilates itself, ascending in proportion in likeness to God. He also engages with different types of hierarchy, not solely upon the level of being or intellect but also a metaphysical hierarchy of sense, imagination, memory, intuition and reason. It is also a cosmic hierarchy, encompassing God and the angels, filtering down to the world soul and corporeal realities, into genus, species and individuals. Rather than a model of a multitude of dimensions or the more modern concept of the multiverse, Eriugena places all within one framework. The dialectic of transcendence and immanence takes place within the spectrum of Creation, where nature is actively engaged with internally at a deeper level where these dynamics may have resolution in active participation. The contemplative realisation of the observer allows for subjective apprehensions of distinctive manifestations of the primordial causes. It is due to Eriugena’s view that human nature contains all Creation that it can contemplate any given aspect of the primordial causes and perceive their theophanic character with no particular order taking precedence. Humanity in this regard might be

²⁷¹ <https://philosophersmag.com/do-animals-have-free-will/>

²⁷² Eriugena, (Uhlfelder), *Periphyseon*, Book V, pp.312-313.

²⁷³ Eriugena, *Homily on the Prologue to the Gospel of St. John*, p.101.

²⁷⁴ Eriugena, (Sheldon-Williams), *Periphyseon*, Book II, 579 A. Also Book III, 689 B: *natura divina se permittit apparere in theophaniis, volens emergere e secretissimis suae naturae recessibus, in quibus etiam sibi ignoratur.*

considered a microcosm, bearing the cosmos within itself. Otten notes that the term microcosm was something John Scottus wished to avoid due to Gregory's influence,²⁷⁵ but indeed it still describes the operation of humanity. The human individual must exercise volition in order to realise such contemplations, but, as I will demonstrate in the ensuing chapter, there is also the classical mystical way of surrendering one's will to God, for in needs to align with divine wisdom. A form of co-creation is therefore necessary in order to manifest and bring the will of the divine to Earth. Referring to the higher imagination is also to be invoked in theophanic revelation. As belonging to the third division of *natura*, human beings do not create in Eriugenian thought in the sense of pertaining to original archetypes and forms – these belong to the primordial causes – but these may be re-ordered and interpreted in a plethora of ways by the individual. As the ascent of the soul occurs in stages, from *sensibilia* to *intelligibilia*, these may be mediated through the imagination, but sensibles and intelligibles by their nature return to their own principles,²⁷⁶ guiding human nature, which paradoxically, must lead according to its will. These creative measures do not need to be deployed through worded, rational intellectual activity, but can be intuited or shown by signs and symbols. Grenier demonstrates the dual aspects of arts and contemplation,²⁷⁷ and indeed there is a dynamism transcending categories to be experienced, where the mind must engage in a type of undifferentiated consciousness.

The eternal manifestation of God means that His self-creation flows throughout nature where it cannot properly be said to have a beginning. During the Book Three of the *Periphyseon*, the *Nutritor* and *Alumnus* engage in a meticulous discussion regarding the sight of God within creation, wherein they arrive at a twofold concept of creation,²⁷⁸ not dissimilar to that discussed regarding the double creation, one prior to the Fall, and one wherein creatures have in their mind an existence apart from God. It may be enquired, how could God see anything prior to its being created? The metaphysical implication of 'sight' is not literal yet not less than the thoughts of God. The recognition of a double creation holds the key to escape from the alienation, which arises from subsisting in unreality. This awareness awakens knowledge of the innate *telos*, the eschatological vision ultimately pointing to the unification

²⁷⁵ Willemien Otten, "Suspended Between Cosmology and Anthropology: Natura's Bond in Eriugena's *Periphyseon*", in *A Companion to John Scottus Eriugena*, (edited by Adrian Guio), (Leiden, Brill, 2020), pp. 189-212, p.203.

²⁷⁶ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, p.535, 871B – 871 C.

²⁷⁷ Valentin Gerlier, 'Nature Conversing: John Scotus Eriugena's Contemplative Ontological Poetics', *Taylor and Francis Online*, Volume 30, Issue 2, 15 November 2021, pp. 69-84 (pp.72-74).

²⁷⁸ John the Scot (translated by Myra L. Uhlfelder), *Periphyseon*, pp.194-195.

of all Creation through and within Christ the Logos. For what was wrought in God was to be perfected in all, not only in men but in every sensible creature.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁹ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, 912 B (p.585).

Chapter Six

Wisdom, Logos, and Deification: The Contemplative Path in Eriugena's Eschatology

The seemingly eternal seeking of the soul in Eriugena's eschatology, where it is characterised as infinite motion, might appear restless or even a fraught journey at an initial reading, particularly as it is described in his fifth and final book of the *Periphyseon*. However, this journey is an ever-deepening into layers of greater participation, which is brought more keenly into relief when paired with his writings upon the mystical ascent of the beloved disciple in his later *Homily on the Prologue of John*. This trajectory is one which transcends all vision and paradoxically, contemplation even as a higher faculty. Christ as the All-Tree indicates that all shall receive of Him, but not in the same measure.²⁸⁰ The special manner of receiving is reserved for those who would overcome themselves and allow Christ to lead them beyond the third heaven.

Eriugena engages with the three typified mystical stages in his own distinctive way. The successive steps of purgation, illumination and union are apportioned into four stages for Eriugena, where, moving through these three mystical stages, from action as will engaged, natural contemplation which proceeds to unity with God in the grace of divine contemplation. However, as God is unbounded, He is beyond even the highest contemplations. The initial stage of faith and reason, necessitates both scriptural foundation and baptism, *praktike* as asceticism and detachment follows this, next, *physike* and lastly *theologia*, representing union with God, moving beyond intellectual contemplation in unity with Christ the Word. In his *Homily on the Prologue of John*, Peter clearly represents the stage of *praktike*, which even though ultimately outstripped by John, the eagle of higher contemplation, as faith in action enters firstly as the initial stage, preparing the way for John as intellect.²⁸¹ This is prefigured in *Ambo tamen currunt ad monumentum. Monumentum Christi est diuina scriptura, in qua diuinitatis et humanitatis eius misteria densitate litterae ueluti quadam muniuntur petra.*²⁸² (Both however, run to the tomb. The tomb of Christ is the Holy Scripture, in which the

²⁸⁰ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, pp.705-706, 1015.

²⁸¹ Eriugena, *Homily on the Prologue of John*, p.73.

²⁸² John Scot (Eriugena), *L'Homélie sur le Prologue de Jean*, (trans Edouard Jeuneau), p.212.

mysteries of his divinity and humanity are fortified by the weight of the letter as if it were a rock). This bears strong correlation with Maximus's term *incrassatio* to describe the density of the Word, which Otten identifies as being prevalent towards the summation of the *Periphyseon*.²⁸³ As the Word through 'thickening' is an indicator of coming into Being, Eriugena also writes in parallel of the individual coming fully into being through contemplation leading to union with Christ. In a sense, then, the Word becomes more apparent in the world through the Incarnation, and likewise in reverse, the individual becomes less dense, entering the narrow gate into Reality, through embarking on the soteriological journey both to the Word and guided of the Word. He enlists five stages for the *reditus*, of which the first pertains to physical death, where the body enters dissolution, and returns to the four elements of the sensible world. Whilst there are variances in his text on the transmutation of body and soul, Eriugena broadly opines for the division of the subtle from the unrefined, in the activity of *separatio* and *unitas*, whereby the True and the illusory are understood to be what they are, hence must be kept apart. The end of the world is nothing more than its return into its causes and a transmutation into something better. The second stage of the body's Return is its resurrection and re-integration from the four universal elements into which it had been dissipated. At the third the body becomes the soul, or brought into alignment with it, for the soul encompasses the body. When the whole of human nature reverts to the primordial causes which abide always in God, it is the fourth stage, and the penultimate fifth stage sees spirit with its Causes absorbed into God, 'as air is absorbed in light' and then God will be all things within all things.²⁸⁴ Eriugena admits that his personal view has wavered as to what extent any sort of return is operative through grace, or nature or a combination of the two. Some semblance of resurrection is possible through nature, as something of an innate virtue,²⁸⁵ but of the Judgement Eriugena is clear that it will not occur within a definable physical locale with divinity and angelic descent from upper limits of sensible nature but rather charity and knowledge and wisdom are the 'clouds' which carry the mystic to Christ.²⁸⁶

²⁸³ Willemien Otten, "Creation and Epiphanic Incarnation: Reflections on the Future of Natural Theology from an Eriugenian-Emersonian Perspective", in *On Religion and Memory*, edited by Babette Hellemans, Willemien Otten and Burcht Pranger, (New York, Fordham University Press, 2013), pp.64-88 (p.79).

²⁸⁴ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, p.541, 876 A-B.

²⁸⁵ Eriugena altered his view upon reading the *Homily on Faith* by Epiphanius and Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Image*. Ibid, p.570, 899c.

²⁸⁶ *Periphyseon*, 996 A -997B, also 998 D.

There is a general destiny or return to be effected within all created things, to return to the Causes which dwell in God, but it is the property of the intelligible and rational substance which through contemplation becomes one with God, and boldly Eriugena adds, through grace to become God Himself.²⁸⁷ Whilst Eriugena's eschatology may be looked upon as vertical, in spite of his Neoplatonic modes of descent and ascent, it is indeed circular, that is horizontal and encompassing in its reconfiguration of all creation. Nothing truly perishes but is transmuted into something better.²⁸⁸ All things unfold into their proper nature rather than emerge from a present nature into something else entirely, to a former condition forsaken by human transgression. The stages of contemplation reflect a progression from action to resting in God. He uses the metaphor of the cloud here as the amorphous veils through which theophanies may manifest, wherein each saint would have his own cloud, that is, the unique virtue of his own contemplation.²⁸⁹ Such clouds reflect Eriugena's polysemic use of symbols, for the transfiguration indicates the height and splendour of the pure mind. Thus in this instance clouds represent an apophatic way as the only means of experiencing a theophany of the unseen God. God knows not what He is but that He is and knows Himself by extension, through His creatures invisible and visible. This extreme apophatic sense runs through all Creation, where human nature cannot know itself but through theophany, even in its knowledge of its own existence.

In his *Homily* Eriugena enunciates the spiritual ascendancy of John over Peter and Paul's disparate movements towards God. The latter are not to be discarded, but even the third heaven is almost on a par with a super-rational manner of seeing, in which the self is not fully divested of its lower perceptions. Whilst Eriugena names five stages of the *reditus* in the *Periphyseon*, pertaining more broadly to his general eschatology, his later *Homily* depicts three levels of being. The first world is filled with invisible powers, pertaining to the angelic hierarchies. In direct opposition to the first, the world of physicality, subject to temporal shifts and limitations, nonetheless has the Word living within. As a route to contemplation via sensible things, the world contemplated as created by the Word may yet draw the soul towards the realm of the invisible. Humanity inhabits the third world for Eriugena, mediating between the two worlds as forces, binding the body and soul together.²⁹⁰ Therefore humanity constitutes a single cosmos. Eriugena deftly describes all creatures here as pertaining to

²⁸⁷ Ibid, pp.568-569, 898C.

²⁸⁸ Ibid, p.541, 876B.

²⁸⁹ Ibid, pp.685-686, 998C- 999B.

²⁹⁰ Eriugena, *Homily*, chapter xix, pp.104-105.

dwelling in humanity as if formed within its crucible. Humanity in its fallen ignorance, had not known its Creator in that mediating realm, and did not unite the diverse forces within itself. The Word as the receptive agent of the Trinity is the catalyst besides the redeemer, bringing into force the healing gifts from the Holy Spirit. Thus the Word not only carries the primordial causes from the Father, but is instrumental in bearing man back to its heavenly home. The three forms of contemplation – Elijah as contemplation experienced whilst yet embodied, Moses, a state of contemplation released from the body, and that of Christ at the Transfiguration representing those contemplations we might experience in the resurrected form. Most contemplative states within physical life are experienced in an embodied form, but Eriugena writes that heightened states such as Paul’s rapture within the third heaven may be attained to and such is represented by Moses in the clouds at Mount Tabor. The hidden words which Paul hears were indeed the immutable reasons of things wherein all things visible and invisible were created.²⁹¹

Eriugena’s mysticism is oftentimes underrepresented, and the unadorned dialogue of the *Periphyseon* has a role in this view. In contrast to the mystical Eros love-language of Pseudo-Dionysius, Eriugena is pragmatic, his fervour for God masked in cadences of exegetical interpretations, agreements and divergences or is lost in the point which he always endeavours to hone and reiterate if necessary. The pattern of his mystical steps however do not differ from the traditional threefold trajectory. For such as Pseudo-Dionysius, the act of contemplation turns towards God, and then enters into a form of unknowing the darkness beyond all dualism. This might also be interpreted where both procession and return and the intermediate stages are synonymous, grounded in the same Divine Reality. Otten suggests that Eriugena forcefully remodels the procession into return.²⁹² It is not however a correction of the exitus, but a completion and a restitution, and in the immediate earthly present, a transitus. Maximus also however wrote of such a passage for the soul, wherein when one receives from God, becoming more akin to God, through developing the virtues, adds to the likeness, and grows towards deification.²⁹³ The *reditus* is hereby depicted as *supernally organic*, as an outcome stemming from developing likeness to the Source of all goodness.

Eriugena also places Christ not only in the eschatological centre as the Power of the Trinity, and Logos who breathes life and sustains all, but also as *Sophia*, that is, the Divine

²⁹¹ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, p.555, 887 D.

²⁹² Willemien Otten, *Thinking Nature and the Nature of Thinking: From Eriugena to Emerson*, (Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 2020), p.37.

²⁹³ Maximus the Confessor, *The Ambigua*, (Ambigua 7, p.105).

Wisdom, in whom all things have subsistence and to whom all must return as the greater Reality. The Word provides the signature of creation but is also the channel through which all creation may ascend. Hence Christ fulfils a double role, which is reflected within humanity's journey in regard to the double Creation, but Christ's dual role as Logos, as sustaining, creative and transformative, reinforces his role as Wisdom, through whom all things are drawn back, as a form of counterpoint to the Fall, into the divine order. I have termed this culmination of roles fulfilled in Eriugenian thought in Christ as *logosophiacal*. The Christ spirit guides the contemplative soul past the intellect, as effected through grace, and demonstrated in the beloved disciple's rising beyond any intellectually known heaven. Eriugena's mystical fourfold ascent, in all its stages, may thus each reflect a type of movement, recalling that the soul may be thought of as movement also,²⁹⁴ through the action of divine wisdom leading to deepening unity. This developing knowledge of Christ sees alienation resolved through the contemplation as a dialectic in wisdom entailing a *logosophiacal* understanding of the divine and by corollary of its extending into all Creation. Creation is ordered and sustained through the receptivity and activity of the *Logos*, which contains the origin and *telos* of all within itself. The growing realisation of the divine wisdom within the contemplative runs through rather like the cosmic relaying of theopoetics, with God flowing between nothing and something,²⁹⁵ from transcendent non-being, through the creative *potentia* of the Word into created being. This is akin to God as uncreated, but also in the final stage, the potential, the stage which is uncreated and uncreating. All of Creation runs between these as does the work of the Word within the individual, manifesting through contemplative activities, of which the arts are a worthwhile expression. There are so many states and shades of what may be considered a contemplative or mystical experience, and taking the subjectivity of such into account, unless one recounts a specific vision or attempts to describe such states, one is still faced with the dilemma that where the state of being begins language commonly fails. Eriugena does not attempt to describe a contemplation in the particular, and language however may add to ambiguity, as his grounding in Pseudo-Dionysian apophatic theology would have taught him. Where a numinous experience, is often considered perfectly viable as pertaining to a particular mystical, transcendent experience, it has also been suggested that a 'harmony with nature' is 'numinous' and therefore equates to a 'lesser' and

²⁹⁴ See also Catherine Kavanagh, "The Nature of the Soul According to Eriugena", in *The Afterlife of the Platonic Soul: Reflections of Platonic Philosophy in the Monotheistic Religions*, edited by Maha Elkaisy-Friemuth, and John M. Dillon, (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp.77-94.

²⁹⁵ Richard Kearney, 'My Way to Theopoetics Through Eriugena', *Literature and Theology*, Vol.33, No.3, September 2019, pp.233-240, (p.238).

not-quite mystical event.²⁹⁶ I personally disagree with this finding, for where might numinosity begin and end in a superseding level, and why cannot a profound oneness with creation, beyond an ephemeral feeling, not be on a par with a ‘higher’ experience? Smart’s analysis here does however make eloquent the mystical dilemma where words fail and where categories of the transcendent are problematic, which Eriugena might have had recourse to name as disjunctive.

Within human nature is the field of potential wherein knowledge and wisdom may be united. This is one of many aspects of Eriugena’s process which embodies the overcoming of a dialectic. In this sense the soul resolves contemplative vision through the union of knowledge as acquired and wisdom as a gift, pertaining to grace. The resolution of these is an understanding where the soul rests in the Word beyond categories of knowledge. Even within sapiential participation, reason is pivotal for Eriugena, for it allows human beings to ascend to the divine through theophany and knowledge combined. Humanity likewise, as stated in the *Homily*, mediate between the invisible and visible realms, and also between wisdom and knowledge. As being an ontological vessel of all creation, there may be borne the seed of understanding the apparently collective nature of the Fall. The pursuit of illusion and the ‘grasping’ nature pertains to misdirected longings for the things of heaven and channelling it into phantasy. *Praktike* as fulfilling ascetical practice seeks to undo the distraction of the will and purify this, but alone this is not sufficient, as he sets forth in his *Carmina*:

Thus *praktike* shines as the bright teacher of morals,
The vigilant and worthy guardian of virtues.
Thus *physike* examines the hidden cause of things,
And simultaneously separates and unites what it finds.
Thus *theologia* – the most beautiful of all, she bears the palm! –
Denies simultaneously what is and what is not.²⁹⁷

Firstly, the inward and outward person must enter into conformity with one another, that is, the spiritual nature and the self operating in the world, with all its attendant

²⁹⁶ Ninian Smart, “Understanding Religious Experience”, in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, edited by Steven T. Katz, (London, Sheldon Press, 1978), p.13.

²⁹⁷ John F. Gavin, “John Scottus Eriugena’s Christological Ascent,” in *A Companion to John Scottus Eriugena*, (edited by Adrian Guio), (Boston: Brill, 2020), pp.134-153, (p.141), citing John Scottus Eriugena, *Carmina*, edited and translated by Michael Herren, (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1993), (24, 114, 13-8, though the latter line numbering appears to be a typographical error).

perceptions and conditioning. This is a process, where the Word, informing the soul, acts as bridge between human frailty and divine likeness. Sin, writes Eriugena, is equated to a lack of resemblance to God and hence the loss of true human nature. This deficiency requires *praktike* as a sort of remedy, wherein faith growing in likeness brings it nearer to God. Eriugena states that the medicine of divine grace is a requisite cure for human nature in a postlapsarian state, wherewith to cure it and restore it to its former beauty.²⁹⁸ The affections of the mind must be reformed, in this sense Eriugena cognises the very human tendency to self-sabotage and must begin to see itself as a vessel receptive to grace, so its higher faculties becomes as the air absorbed in the light. This is comparable to Plotinus's perception of beauty, which subsists in the *nous*, wherein the mind might be misplaced in the material realm as one might fall into water, trapped by illusion in pursuit of sensible things.²⁹⁹ Without the initial deflection of illusion from the will, a task which must be championed by faith, then the will is inclined to inertia or distraction. Whilst the will holds significance for Eriugena, it does not assume as centrally defined a role as in Maximus's thought in leading to deification. Knowledge and contemplation are the requisite tools which lead into divine union. In *physike*, there prevails the sense that the student of contemplation does not yet perceive things as standing in the light of truth, or emanating their true natures, until the lower aspects are tempered with the effects of catharsis. Whilst Eriugena does not explicitly write of *praktike* or any of the stages as contemplation as corresponding to modes of being, there is an interpretive parallel to be drawn. If *praktike* bears correlation to the third mode of being, it may elucidate how creation - or the 'book of nature' - functions within Eriugena's unfoldment of creation and process of *reditus*. In this view, as creation enters processes of change and hence, matter and temporality in a limited sense, but without fully being immersed in corruption or generation. Thus, *physike*, as reflecting the early steps of the metaphysical ascent, stands as a dialectical counterpoint to limitation and the minds 'turning away' from the divine, bearing this opposing impulse, which is manifested in action and faith. Meanwhile, *physike* appears to correspond to the third and fourth modes in differing ways. Eriugena states that true knowledge of all of creation in its innumerable qualities is implanted in human nature although it is concealed from her knowledge of possessing such until she is restored to her pristine condition.³⁰⁰ It is not knowledge in itself which is absent,

²⁹⁸ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, p.536, 872A.

²⁹⁹ Plotinus, (edited by Lloyd Gerson), *The Enneads*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018), 1.6.9, p.101.

³⁰⁰ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, p.415, 769B.

but rather human nature's fallen state clouds her awareness. *Physike* begins to reveal the hidden and apparently separated and begins to build the process of the restoration of the divine image, which ontologically was never truly lost. Eriugena's thought bears the difficulty of ascertaining whether the mind's mode of contemplation or the divisions themselves regulate what is perceived once the veil is lifted. The Lapsarian 'curse' upon Eve is bound by her perceptions, requiring logical discourse in order to counteract the deficiency of being unable to contemplate natures and principles of all things.³⁰¹ Some of John Scottus's earliest influences continued the association of fallen nature with the dissolatory components of the cyclic physical process. By the time of Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa, the forces of procreation and nutrition, often formerly perceived as descriptors of renewal, were increasingly assimilated to putrefaction and death.³⁰² Eriugena however uptakes this fragmentation and allows it to be what it is. He sharply steers away from the trap of unwittingly falling into preoccupations with physical mortality and even worldly conduct – even though, as goodness is placed at the pinnacle of the primordial causes for Eriugena, the ethical dimension is certainly important to him, but can often become lost within the flow of his dialectical process. The fourth mode bridges *physike* and *theologia*, refining the comprehension of nature appearing in any potential manner of *theoriae*, transiting from knowledge informed by the mutable, objective perception of temporal reality. Being in the fourth mode must pertain to realisation of what transcends multiplicity, to apprehend these even as theophanies outside of their temporal status. *Theologia* moves between the fourth and fifth mode in this analogy, ultimately transcending the dialectic through being restored through the grace of Jesus Christ and moved to its true place in God where all Creation belongs.

In the tenth chapter of the *Homily*, the multiplicity inherent within the seed is considered, inviting the reader to consider the examples within created nature. The life principle, in the Word, like the seed, contains all the potentiality of that which it musters. The passage carries a rare sense of spiritual instruction from Eriugena in a pragmatic sense to 'contemplate with your inner eye how in a master the many laws of an art or science are one; how they live in the spirit that disposes them'.³⁰³ The seed is an eternal idea in the mind of God, yet must die in order to come to life.³⁰⁴ The soul's fraught passage through materiality,

³⁰¹ Ibid, p.516, 855A.

³⁰² Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200 – 1336*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1995), p.112.

³⁰³ Eriugena, *Homily upon the Prologue of St. John*, pp. 86-87.

³⁰⁴ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, p.708, 1016 D, citing 1 Corinthians 15:36.

desire and destructive impulses is comparable to the escape of the Israelites through Egypt in the miraculous parting of the Red Sea, as Eriugena echoes in his *Carmina*.

In the meantime we are staying on the middle road of virtue,
With the towering waterfalls of illusion and evil on either side.
Getting past these, the joyful soul arrives on the sandy shore
And sees afar its sins, overpowered and submerged.
Then it sings a hymn of thanksgiving, triumphant and overjoyed.
And joins in the chorus of praise to the glory of God.
Then, travelling by the shores of virtue it reaches the wilderness
Where all love of this contemptible world lapses into silence,
Where the unclean spirit will always fail to find peace
But is forced to return to the place from whence it came.³⁰⁵

Once the ground of the soul is purified, it must keep to the stability of the path of virtue, transitioning from roads to shores, at every stage of *theoria* which arises. To know oneself is to know something of God, not in His more-than-being but in what may be apprehended. The more rarefied the soul becomes in its movements and directed by grace, then the greater access it may possess of an unmitigated understanding of itself as borne in God. All things by their natural motion seek their principle and will have no peace provided as long as they are separated from it.³⁰⁶

The Incarnation of the Word, the Divine Wisdom, entering history, is the culminative juncture wherein humanity's ascent begins to be actualised. Christ's Incarnation serves as an axis, akin to the centre of the Cross, wherein the vertical Life of Spirit actively operates enfleshed in the horizontal realm of material embodiment. Eriugena emphasises the importance of Christ's taking on of the flesh, where all is taken into the unity of his substance.³⁰⁷ In the Resurrection, that which belongs to sin and illusion is transmuted in order to prepare for the encounter with the Real. Faith and engagement with the Christ Mystery through the sacraments provide the initial catalyst which foments a confrontation with sublimated realities, dismantling the sense-bound

³⁰⁵ Aogáin, *Eriugena: Medieval Irish Philosopher, Poet and Translator*, p.113, citing John Scottus Eriugena, *Carmina*, edited and translated by Michael Herren, (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1993), *Carmina*, No.2.

³⁰⁶ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, p.632, 952C.

³⁰⁷ Ibid, p.384, 744 D – 745 A.

self. Postlapsarian perception does not inhabit the same metaphysical space, operating from lower operations below reason but informed by sense. Christ is omnipresent in both His natures and one in His substance and recapitulates all within Himself. Here, Eriugena echoes Maximus's thought on, 'whatever the intellect shall have been able to comprehend, that it itself becomes,'³⁰⁸ where a form of ontological mirroring takes place. Eriugena also corroborates this in his *Homily*, stating that John could not ascend into God had he not himself first become God.³⁰⁹ Peter, as the agent of faith and action, recognises Christ – but in temporality, perceiving the divine *and* the human within his subjective field.³¹⁰ John however, knows Christ as from before time, outside of the *second creation*, in his sublimated state which subsists as true human nature in the Word and therefore greeting with the Unbounded Father.

As the All-Tree, Christ the Word repairs divisions. To return to the concept of chora as receptacle, human nature becomes this vessel, wherein Eriugena states that the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil reside. Whilst he describes the latter as 'pernicious' and leading to sin, it was chiefly on account of the descent into illusion fomented through turning away from the Reality of God both within and encompassing human nature. Such a turning away signifies the errors in will and perception which culminated in partaking of the fruit. Ignorance thus becomes the root of the insignia which human nature bears in its fallen state. The Lapsarian manifestation of human nature can indeed serve as a mirror, containing the two trees within itself,³¹¹ yet humanity has been granted a form of intercessory role, as the 'vessel' which contains all creation within itself, and mediating between the fallen and supernal realms. In a sense, then, human nature becomes mediator of the fallen and the supernal realms, carrying the responsibility of its turning away, whilst bearing a vital role in the ascent of all Creation and its divine restoration. Whilst reason attends to both the exterior and interior sense, the creative wisdom of the Logos, descending through grace, heals and informs the mind. Eriugena's *logosophiacal* Christology entails that the dialectic of human nature, suspended between the Fall and the Divine, is resolved as Christ bears this 'burden' for all Creation through His double incarnation. Here, the experiential knowledge which humanity obtained through the Fall is surrendered in the light of the

³⁰⁸ Ibid, p35, 450 A.

³⁰⁹ Eriugena, *Homily on the Prologue of John*, p.76.

³¹⁰ Ibid, p.73.

³¹¹ Ibid, p. 481, 825 D.

Word's deifying wisdom. Although the Fall fomented humanity's state of alienation, it did not lose its dignity entirely, but indeed in its truth and potential retains it.³¹² Christ becomes the field of Paradise wherein the whole of human nature is restored,³¹³ for ignorance is the root, so will the union of human knowledge and divine wisdom serve as the remedy. The Return process is ever directing to a supernal Reality, which is always sustaining and leading, requiring only the willingness to synchronise in the Present.

³¹² Quibus verbis sanctissimi patris datur intelligi humanam naturam etiam post prevaricationem dignitatem suam non penitus perdidisse sed adhuc obtinere. Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, p.131, 531 B.

³¹³ Ibid, p.583-584, 911 B-C.

Conclusion

One of the chief areas of investigation in this thesis is Eriugena's interpretation of the two trees in the Garden of Eden, and their relationship to the Fall and attendant alienation. Emblematic of Eriugena's intricate symbolical exegesis, he engages with manifold layers in his reading of the Fall. This has the effect of inviting the reader to embark upon a deepening understanding of Scripture which may serve as contemplative exercise. The Trees may be related to the Word, to human nature, to a metaphysical hiatus which marks the breaking away, perceptually at least, of human understanding into duality. It thus also charts the beginning of the *reditus* as Creation's *telos*.

The locus of the two trees is to be found within the individual as part of their nature, as Eriugena stated, where the dialectic meets. The juxtaposition of these, as pertaining to that which is created in God's image and that which is additional upon the account of sin, produces not only choice and potentiality but further disruption in illusory, ignorant perceptions. The Tree of Knowledge is a composite, producing a 'confused and mixed kind of fruit,'³¹⁴ with the result that human nature indwells and perceives through a sixfold division, in a triad of upper and lower parts. The limitations set therein on one side of the individual's perception as a consequence of the Fall, are counterbalanced even within its components through divine mercy. Such limitations are seemingly in stasis where the dialectic of the Lapsarian state and the potential for not only return to true human nature, but union with God, exists. Humanity bears the brunt and shadow of its onus; all Creation suffers due to a lack of percipience on mankind's part. The mind is akin to *chora* – in fact the whole being can be seen to relate to this – where these two seemingly disparate parts – wisdom and the light of experiential knowledge, would be combined. Christ the Word is the agent of the resolution and resolves the dialectic. As the All-tree, it is not 'mixed' but pure goodness, and His wisdom leads to participation in the Unbounded who is more-than-goodness. The *logosophiacal* dimension of Eriugena's thought describes the descent of the Word, wherein the disjointedness innate within the Lapsarian condition, is remedied through the unifying action of the Word manifest as wisdom. The *Logos* doubly incarnates His wisdom both in history and guiding Creation through theophanic revelation and grace.

³¹⁴ Ibid, p.474, 820 A.

It is perhaps fitting that, in Eriugena's anthropology, the trajectory of humanity, whether concerned with its nascence or its journey of ascendance, so often leads to the Garden of Eden. This is apposite, as Eden is the original, joyful condition in which Paradise, pertaining to human nature as fashioned in the mind of God, was created.³¹⁵ One of the most perplexing aspects of Eriugena's interpretation of Genesis 1-3, is the apparent 'gap' that the mind feels it ought to fill between the first and second Creation. There is a recondite pause, it seems, and suddenly the familiar structure of temporal seasons, passages of birth and death, are present. Eriugena's eschatological imagination strives within its premises to allow for the fact that language cannot even approach engagement with what the first Creation might mean outside of time and space. Within his thought, God in His infinite wisdom knows this and acts accordingly. Theophany is the signal of God, resonating through all His creatures, but the theophany of the Incarnation crowns all as a 'theophany of theophanies' which unites and raises all Creation.

In the second chapter of this thesis, modes of deification are explored among certain of Eriugena's influences, both whom he engaged with in the immediate sense and also indirect intellectual forebears. The centrality of deification is evident due to its expression in its continuity to numerous theological frameworks within Hellenic philosophy and among the Church Fathers. The latter in particular emphasise that deification as participation and union with God is not to be confused with becoming God. This is important to Eriugena's differentiation also, wherein God is beyond all categories of being even whilst Creation unfolds through the activity of the Word. Clement's emphasis upon grace and effort bear comparison with Eriugena's contemplative path of knowledge, as does the trajectory of ascent and imitation of Christ, although Eriugena places less prominence upon the *imitatio*, inviting the cosmic Word to grant grace therein. Likeness to God is proportional in Maximus the Confessor's consideration, a notion less prevalent for Eriugena, who in spite of teaching of degrees of participation, in his more cosmological view, states that all Creation is continuously carried forward towards its *telos*.

In Chapter Three it was demonstrated that Eriugena's exegesis of the two trees of Eden is central to his interpretation of the Fall and the double creation and not only this but is instrumental to his understanding of how Creation coheres within human nature. The results of eating of the Tree of Knowledge can only be temporal. The effects cannot last, for in spite of consequence of choice, the culmination of all things is bound to occur in his eschatology.

³¹⁵ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, p.486, 829 B.

The dialectic of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil has the potential for good, but its end is realised in the descent into the corporeal and cannot but close with fragmentation, as everything becomes increasingly divided moving away from divine simplicity. The individual bearing the dialectic of the two trees is seemingly placed between these points of reference, and as noted, embroiled in the mystery that they possibly occupy the same metaphysical space. However ontologically it cannot be so, thus these are also frames of reference, awaiting the grace of the Word.

In the fourth chapter, it was seen that alienation is rooted in abandoning the perfect integrity of the divine image. The promise of return in God's enquiring implies, in Eriugena's unique and bold interpretation, that the Fall may have been preordained, or rather God foreseeing man's choice, initiates the second Creation, with the seed of the *reditus* affirming for the greater glory, that is, union with God. Where the problem of theodicy was explored, Clement's thought, similar to Eriugena, entails a lack of reason contributes to the Fall, but due to Augustinian influence intervening between the two theologians, Eriugena's theodicy is slightly at variance, and direction of the will, even if promulgated by unawareness, is still directed towards self and seeking liberty within inverted areas. The fruit borne by the Tree of Knowledge is not natural and therefore being not innate, pertains to illusion. The Wisdom of the Word is the highest order of knowledge, and sanctified beyond all other forms of such and the Fall allows humanity the opportunity to be newly created in the Wisdom of Christ the Word. Thus the individual must find a way to reorient, such as an act or process of *metanoia*.

Chapter five delineated the interrelation of theophany with Creation, how Creation indeed pertains to God's self-manifestation and serves as a route to know Him. Creation is dynamic and 'becoming', reflecting action of God. However, even in its Lapsarian state, it flees, if at times subconsciously, from non-being and yearns innately for relationship with the divine, which would be to return to being and life. Theophany unifies Creation in a common shared holy existence, and raises all. God sees Himself in Creation and we see it as truly intended or created when as a mirror reflected back to God, but any given theophany is of a subjective nature.

The Sixth Chapter investigates the seeking of the soul, and its practical fulfilment in stages of contemplation. Whilst three stages, that of purification, illumination and union, corresponds to Eriugena's *praktike*, *physike* and *theologia*, four are named as a possibility, as the foundation for him is rooted in Scripture and baptism. Christ the Word configured as the All-Tree can lead the contemplative through grace beyond all theophanies to the highest of

contemplations. This effects transformation within the individual, which in turn helps to steer all Creation towards restoration in the Unbounded Godhead, which will be all in all.

The implications of my research lend some new light upon Eriugena's eschatological imagination particularly through examining the relationship between the two trees of the Garden of Eden and their mirroring within human nature and how the Word manifests throughout Creation and leads to the Tree of Life. I would be keen to see new findings on Eriugena's Celtic intellectual and mystical heritage as a rare surviving voice from his milieu, particularly with a view as to how this heritage is related to his understanding of nature and his Christology. His thought remains strikingly relevant to both mystical Christology and eco-theological discourse. Among the questions explored, it is my hope that in some small way this thesis is an affirmation for Eriugena's place within the Christian mystical tradition. Evelyn Underhill describes three temperaments or cravings of the soul which only the mystical quest for the Absolute may satisfy. These are the restless searching of the pilgrim for Destination; the heart's longing for perfect love, and thirdly the craving for inward purity and sanctity.³¹⁶ What type of mystic, with reference to this, could Eriugena be called? There are many temperaments and inclinations which give rise to a chosen field of mysticism besides that of faith and ideology, not unlike the four yogic paths in Hindu mystical thought and practice. Eriugena strikingly befits the role of the Pilgrim, but examining beyond the *Periphyseon* he fulfils and circumscribes all three of these. The devotional nature of his thought, with the Word, whose wisdom and love are indivisible, as the lodestar effecting the ascent and divinisation of Creation, is particularly salient in his *Homily*, but is interwoven throughout the *Periphyseon*, in the very narrative of divine unfoldment and Return. The quest for sanctity is for Eriugena the most rational fulfilment and the true directive of the innate *telos*. But as the Pilgrim, the soul knows not where it ought to move, for in seeking the divine image, its quest is unending, yet by some 'miraculous means, it finds what it is seeking.'³¹⁷ Then it truly moves within the One, distinct in itself, but at Rest.

³¹⁶ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, (New York, E.P. Dutton, 1910), pp.126-127.

³¹⁷ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, p.593, 919 C.

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³¹⁸ The text of the Carmina was difficult to obtain. Therefore, all citations are drawn from secondary sources.

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