

tiones ad Thalassium, 54, Scholion 18 in *Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca* [CCSG], vol. 7, pp. 474-475.

- (14) É. Jeuneau, "Nisifortinus: le disciple qui corrige le maître," in *Poetry and Philosophy in the Middle Ages. A Festschrift for Peter Dronke*, edited by John Marenbon, Leiden, Brill, 2001, pp. 113-129. Concerning the role played by Nisifortinus, see P.E. Dutton, "Eriugena's Workshop: The Making of the *Periphyseon* in Rheims 875," *History and Eschatology in John Scottus Eriugena and His Time*, ed. J. McEvoy and M. Dunne, Leuven, 2002, pp. 141-167.
- (15) *Periphyseon*, II, 543B (CCCM, 162, pp. 25 et 204).
- (16) J. Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, translated by Arthur Goldhammer, Chicago, 1984.
- (17) Origen, *Periarchon*, III, vi, 5 (GCS, 22, pp. 286-287). See *Origen on First Principles*. Translated into English by G.W. Butterworth. New York, 1966, pp. 250-251.
- (18) The word *diabolus* (the devil), which is placed in apposition to *nouissimus inimicus* (the last enemy), has been excluded from recent editions of the *Periarchon*. It must be reintroduced: "Death" is one of the names used for the devil. See my *Études érigéniennes*, p. 388, n. 129.
- (19) Origen, *Periarchon*, III, vi, 5 (GCS 22, pp. 286-287).

- proceeding, and abiding, and returning" (*On Divine Names*, IV, 14; ed. B.R. Suchla, p. 160, 12–15; *Patrologia Graeca* [henceforth cited as PG] 3, 712D-713A).
- (4) Numerous scholars have argued credibly that the general plan of the *Summa Theologiae* of Saint Thomas Aquinas follows the Neoplatonic themes of "Procession" and "Return." Cf. M. D. Chenu, *Introduction à l'étude de Saint Thomas d'Aquin*, Paris, 1954, pp. 260. J. P. Torrell, *Initiation à Saint Thomas d'Aquin, sa personne et son oeuvre*, Paris, 1993, pp. 219-228.
- (5) *Periphyseon*, II, 529A. In what follows the references to the *Periphyseon* will be given according to the columns of the volume 122 of the *Patrologia Latina* of Migne [PL]. Thanks to these references, the reader can easily find the Latin text in the critical edition (*Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis* [henceforth cited as CCCM], vol. 161-165). The English rendering of the quotations is largely indebted to the translations of I.P. Sheldon-Williams. *Iohannis Scotti Eriugena Periphyseon*, "Scriptores Latini Hiberniae," vol. 7,9,11,13, Dublin, 1968-1995, and *Eriugena, Periphyseon*. Translation by I.P. Sheldon-Williams, revised by John J. O'Meara, Éditions Bellarmin, Montréal, 1987.
- (6) See CCCM, 161, pp. v-xi, 114-117.
- (7) I. P. Sheldon-Williams, "The Title of Eriugena's *Periphyseon*," *Studia patristica*, III, 1 [TU 78], 1961, pp. 297-302.
- (8) "The Neoplatonic Themes of Processio and Reditus in Eriugena," *Dionysius*, XV (1991), pp. 3-29.
- (9) É. Jeuneau, *Études érigéniennes*, Paris, 1987, pp. 341-364.
- (10) H. Keil, *Grammatici Latini*, I, p. 189, 1-2, p. 228, 7-21, p. 394, 12-25, p. 404, 16-18; III, p. 479, 21-23; VII, p. 421, 8-10.
- (11) G. Reale, *A History of Ancient Philosophy. IV. The Schools of the Imperial Age*, New York, 1990, p. 312.
- (12) Epiphanius of Salamis, *Ancoratus*, 83-84 in *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte* [henceforth cited as GCS], vol. 25, pp. 103-105; PG 43, 172C-173C.
- (13) This distinction originated in Maximus the Confessor, *Quaes-*

salvation of the devil:

Let us, for the time being, be content to be assured of this: That the demonic nature itself is not punished nor ever shall be punished, but that the glory of its primeval state before it waxed proud and seduced mankind, abides in it eternally and immutably without any diminution and shall ever so abide; while the wickedness which it contracted through pride shall be totally destroyed lest it should be coeternal with the goodness of God. But concerning its salvation and its conversion (*reditus*) into its proper Cause we presume to say nothing, for this reason: that we have no certain knowledge of it from Sacred Scriptures or from the Holy Fathers who have dealt with this matter, and therefore we prefer to honour its obscurity with silence, lest in searching into matters which are beyond us we would rather fall into error than ascend into the truth. (941AB)

Earlier it was stated that the *Periphyseon* is a patchwork. In fact, that is the impression we receive of it at first glance. However, if we take the time to examine attentively its textual fabric, we discover in it a plan, a structure, the themes of Procession and Return which are the warp and woof of this variegated tapestry. Above all, we find that the author is animated by a clear purpose: to reconcile, as much as it is possible, faith and reason, Christian tenets and secular wisdom.

NOTES

- (1) I would like to thank my colleague Claude P. Desmarais, who generously helped me improve both my English style and my thought.
- (2) Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, 35; ed. Dodds, p. 38.
- (3) Read, for instance, the lines in which Dionysius shows how the divine Eros is like an everlasting circle [...], always

that is, after its dissolution and its return into the four cosmic elements from which it was gathered up and composed, until the end of the world and the resurrection of bodies and the day of judgment. (858AB)

This passage could enrich scholarship's discussion of the "prehistory of Purgatory."⁽¹⁶⁾

If humanity is restored at the end of time, why not the fallen angels too? Why should the aforementioned principle, i.e. that wretchedness cannot be coeternal with blessedness, apply to the human race only and not to angelic nature as well? No doubt Eriugena applied the principle of universal salvation to the fallen angels and to their master, the devil. In Book V of the *Periphyseon* (930CD) Eriugena quotes a passage of the *Periarchon*, in which Origen includes the devil in the general restoration (*apocatastasis*) of all creation:⁽¹⁷⁾

Even the last enemy (I Cor 15, 26), the devil,⁽¹⁸⁾ who is called death, is said to be destroyed: so that there is no sorrow any more, for there is no more death, no more diversity, for there is no enemy. The destruction of the last enemy, indeed, is to be understood, not as if its substance, which was made by God, shall perish, but because its design and hostile will, which proceeded not from God, but from itself, will cease to exist. It will be destroyed, therefore, not in the sense of ceasing to exist, but of being no longer an enemy and no longer death. For nothing is impossible to the Almighty, nor is anything irreparable to its Creator: He made all things that they might exist, and those things which were made in order to exist cannot cease to exist.⁽¹⁹⁾

Although Eriugena does not show the least sign of disagreement with "the great Origen, that most diligent enquirer into the nature of things" (929A), he does express some reserve concerning the

Against them, it seems, are these words of the Gospel (Mt 25, 41): Go, ye accursed, into everlasting fire.⁽¹⁵⁾ Yet, among the "many" who share in this opinion is the very author of the *Periphyseon*. Eriugena thought that evil cannot be coeternal with divine Goodness, nor death and damnation with life and blessedness, impiety with divine worship, falsehood with truth (927B, 935AB, 960B, 963D). Contrary to *Nisifortinus*, Eriugena did not think that the words of the Gospel quoted above oblige us to believe that wretchedness will be coeternal with blessedness. He maintained this view in light of other Biblical texts. For instance: "The Lord rejoices in His works, when the sinners and evildoers should fade from the earth as though they had not been" (Ps 103, 3435); "The impious shall not rise on the day of judgement" (Ps 1, 5). For how could we speak of sinners, when all sins have been destroyed? Or of evildoers, when evil is done away with? "When humanity is restored in the resurrection, it shall be purged of all impiety and damnation and death. Therefore there shall be no resurrection of the evil and the wicked: for only nature shall rise again; evil and wickedness shall perish in eternal damnation" (935B). Moreover, Eriugena thinks that human souls, after they have been separated from their bodies, may still better themselves. Commenting on the words of God to Adam after his sin — "Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life" (Gen 3, 17) — Eriugena applies them allegorically to the human mind:

I think that the days of the life of the mind, in which it toils purging the earth of its heart, signify not only those days through which the seasons of the present life pass and in which the body is sustained by the soul, but also that temporal interval in which the souls, relinquishing the control of their bodies, abide in another life until they take back their bodies. For we believe that souls can be purged both in this present life, which soul and body spend together, and in the other life after the death of the body,

does not eliminate the chief difficulty here: With fire or without, the privation of the supreme good, if eternal, is definitely a failure of Return. Moreover, when the Christian exegete interprets the Bible, he does not enjoy the same freedom as did an ancient philosopher interpreting Greek mythology. For instance, Eriugena could not simply explain away as mere allegories these words of the Gospel (Mt 25, 41): "Depart from me, ye accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Conscious of the paradoxical situation of the Christian exegete, Eriugena writes: "In this battle, pierced as it were by weapons from either side, not knowing which way to turn nor which path I had better follow, I stand still, in a state of anxiety. For the choice is not easy between the two alternatives: either to eliminate the eternal punishment of wicked angels and wicked men, or to conclude that Divine Goodness and Blessedness will not reign everywhere in every creature, and that every evilness and every wretchedness will not be destroyed" (924C). Once more Eriugena finds a way to escape from such a dilemma. He does so by creating a distinction between two kinds of Return: a general return (*reditus generalis*) common to all, good or evil; and a special one (*reditus specialis*) reserved exclusively for the elect. Such a distinction⁽¹³⁾ allows Eriugena to reconcile, after a fashion, Christian tenets with both the Neoplatonic theme of Return and another point of Christian doctrine, namely, God's will to save all (I Tim 2,4). Thanks to the general return, all human beings will recover the primeval condition in which they were created. Thanks to the special return, some of them, the elect, will be elevated beyond and above all nature to enjoy the grace of deification.

This solution may seem timid to us. Certainly, some of Eriugena's contemporaries found it to be too bold. One of his disciples, in fact, his first editor *Nisifortinus*,⁽¹⁴⁾ objected directly to the opinion of his master. Moreover, he did so in a manuscript of the *Periphyseon* which we have good reasons to consider as being Eriugena's working copy: "Many think that it is incongruous to believe that wretchedness should be coeternal with blessedness.

were convinced by these arguments. That is not our concern. What matters here is that, in order to integrate the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the dead with the Neoplatonic theme of Return, Eriugena felt compelled to establish that the resurrection of the body is not the effect of divine grace alone, but also that of nature: "If the general resurrection of the dead (of which we have the supreme example in Christ) is the very miracle of miracles [...], would we be wrong in thinking that the resurrection will be brought about by the effective power (subject to the Divine Will) of natural causes?" (902CD) The answer, of course, is no. Thus, the resurrection of the dead may find its place within the framework of Return. However, resurrection is not the final stage of Return, but just a step towards it. In his *Periphyseon* Eriugena distinguishes between five steps of Return, of which resurrection of the body is only the second. The third step follows when the body is changed into spirit; the fourth when spirit, and in fact the whole of human nature, reverts to its primordial causes; and the fifth when nature itself with its causes is transformed into God, as air is transformed into light (876AB).

The Christian tenet most difficult to reconcile with the Neoplatonic theme of Return is probably that of eternal punishment. Greek mythology also knew of endless chastisements in the underworld. But one should keep in mind that these were narrated as myths, and that philosophers experienced no difficulty interpreting them allegorically. Eriugena seems to have taken notice of at least some of these allegorical interpretations. For he writes: "The Greeks, as usual, examining things more sharply and expressing their thoughts more accurately, called the infernal regions Hades, that is to say sadness" (955A). The place for the torments of the damned, therefore, is nothing other than the privation of those things which they immoderately desired. Hell is not a place, but a privation, the privation of the supreme good, which is the contemplation of the Truth: "For it is the presence of the Truth that makes someone blessed, and its absence which makes him wretched" (988B). But to interpretate the fire of Hell allegorically

If the Word of God had not taken human nature upon Him and had not risen therein from the dead, nobody at all would have received the grace of resurrection, but the bodies of men like the carcasses of the other animals would lie forever in the dust of the earth. (899B)

But if the resurrection of the dead is the effect of divine grace alone, without any participation of nature, it is a miracle which, as such, escapes human understanding. There is no room for this miracle in the Neoplatonic triad (Immanence, Procession, Return), which forms the dialectical framework for the whole of the *Periphyseon*. Caught in such a quandary, human reason, which Eriugena praises so highly, has but one thing to do: to give up the struggle. This amounts to an annihilation of Eriugena's project, which sought to trace the path from faith to an understanding of faith, from the realm of belief (*credere*) to that of intelligibility (*intelligere*). To be intelligible, the resurrection of the dead must be the work not solely of divine grace, but also of nature. Here too Eriugena manages to find a solution. Coming to his aid this time are not Latin grammarians, but a Greek theologian, Epiphanius of Salamis (899C-900C). Addressing the pagans — he calls them "Greeks" —, who refuse to believe in the resurrection of the dead, Epiphanius enumerates several natural phenomena, ranging from the everyday to the fantastical, which he considers to be "signs of the resurrection": Hair and nails which, cut every day, always grow again; doves, dung-beetles, even the mythical Phoenix of Arabia, all of which die and rise up again.⁽¹²⁾ Hence, Eriugena concludes: "If then there is a natural power which effects these restorations in nature and renews the parts of the human body and brings irrational animals to life again, as our author shows by his examples, we should not be surprised to find that there is a vital and innate virtue which never abandons the human body and is capable of restoring the body itself to life and to the fulness of its human nature" (900C). It is not certain that either the "Greeks" whom Epiphanius addressed, or the readers of the *Periphyseon*

that he will put forth his hand, that is, stretch his zeal for good conduct by practising the virtues, so that he may take of the fruit of the Tree of Life. (862D)

Similarly, the Cherubim and the flaming sword placed at the door of the paradise "to guard the path of the Tree of Life" are not put there to prevent us from returning to our primeval dignity. On the contrary, their function is to allow us to "have before the eyes of our hearts the memory of that Tree and the way which leads towards it" (865A).

Another objection to the theme of Return can be found in these words of Christ: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Mk 13, 31). The Master asks: "Into what shall heaven and earth pass away? Into nothing?" (887B) If so, this constitutes a failure of Return. Once again, an ingenious exegesis allows Eriugena to avoid such a conclusion. Heaven and earth will not pass away into nothing: "God forbid," says the Disciple in the *Periphyseon*. They will pass away into the principles whence they sprang, i. e. the primordial Causes (887BC).

These objections arising from Biblical texts resolved, other difficulties come to the fore. First, the universe of Plotinus and Proclus ignores the doctrine of supernatural grace.⁽¹¹⁾ Yet, according to Christian faith, one of the stages of the Return of the human race to its principles is the resurrection of the body, a doctrine which Saint Paul once preached in Athens before the Areopagus; albeit without great success (The Acts, 17, 32). Eriugena had long thought that the resurrection of the body was the effect of divine grace alone (899AB). Had not the Word of God become flesh, he thought, had He not lived among men, had He not assumed the whole of human nature, there would be no resurrection of the dead at all. Eriugena drew this conclusion from the words of Christ: "I am the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11, 25). Eriugena summarizes his former opinion concerning the resurrection of the dead as follows:

said: Behold, Adam has become like one of us." The text which follows immediately is (Gen 3, 22-24): "Now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the Tree of Life, and eat, and live forever. And He cast Adam out, and set Cherubim before the Paradise of pleasure, and a flaming sword turning every way to guard the path to the Tree of Life." Eriugena remarks that the Latin text alone does not allow us to decide whether the words "Now, lest he put forth his hand, etc." are God's words or Moses's words. But the Greek text, the Septuagint, leaves no room for doubt: These are indeed God's words. Yet, another question arises here. Does the Latin text *Nunc ergo, ne forte mittat manum suam, etc.* really mean: "Now, lest he put forth his hand, etc."? If so, are we to understand that God, having expelled Adam from paradise, took all the necessary measures to prevent him from returning and eating the fruit of the Tree of Life? In that case, it is more than difficult to reconcile the Bible with the theme of the Return. It is absolutely impossible.

Fortunately, there is an escape route, not one based on philosophy or theology, but on grammar, as all the difficulty lies in the interpretation of the conjunction *ne*. Eriugena surmises that this conjunction must not be understood in its negative sense, but rather interrogatively. In this he is quite correct: Latin grammarians acknowledge that the particle *ne* has not only negative, but also interrogative or dubitative values.⁽¹⁰⁾ Is Eriugena correct in his assessment of the interrogative function or value of the particle *ne* in the passage in question (Gen. 3, 22)? It is not my intention to discuss this point here. It suffices to observe that thanks to this grammatical explanation the verses of Genesis (3, 22-24), which at a first glance seemed to be irreconcilable with the theme of Return, in fact foretell this Return (859D-826D). God does not fear man's return to paradise. On the contrary, the meaning of the speech which He addresses to the angels after man's sin is:

We must not mourn unduly the death of man, nor weep so profusely for his fall from Paradise; for hope of the Return is not entirely taken away from him. It may be

De diuisione naturae, any great literary masterpiece, the *Iliad*, the *Eneid*, the *Divina comedia*, if preceded in some manuscript by a table of contents, could be called "table of contents!" It is hard to believe that after this point has been firmly established,⁽⁷⁾ scholars continue to speak of the *De diuisione naturae*, and that editors or translators of the *Periphyseon* feel obliged to couple the authentic title given by Eriugena, i.e. *Periphyseon*, with the inept subtitle of "On the division of Nature." The phrase "On the Division of Nature," used as a title or subtitle for the Eriugenian dialogue, should be once and for all banished from any work with scholarly pretensions.

Having spoken elsewhere of the themes of Procession and Return,⁽⁸⁾ I would like, with the risk of repeating what I have already said elsewhere, to take up the matter of the Return again here. In so doing, I follow an invitation addressed by the Disciple to his Master in *Periphyseon* (1001A): "Redi, quaeso, ad reditum" (Return, I pray, to the Return). Yet, it is not my purpose to give a complete account of this treatment. Rather, I would like to single out some of its more salient aspects.

Reading Book V of the *Periphyseon* is particularly interesting because we can perceive therein, more clearly perhaps than in the other books, the efforts made by Eriugena to surmount the inescapable conflict between Neoplatonic *Weltanschauung* and the tenets of Christian faith. In Books III and IV, it does not seem that Eriugena experienced any difficulty harmonizing the historical narrative of creation in Genesis with the timeless theme of Procession. Even original sin finds its place and its role within the Neoplatonic framework. Following in the steps of Gregory of Nyssa, Eriugena sees the division of the human race into two sexes as the result of original sin.⁽⁹⁾

Things change when we approach the theme of the Return, and that, right at the outset of Book V (859D). This book resumes the Biblical narrative of creation at the very point where Book IV had left off (Gen 3, 2122): "The Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skin, and clothed them. Then the Lord God

“tapestry,” but it would be more accurate, perhaps, to say “patchwork.” However, the themes of Procession and Return are so tightly interwoven in this dialogue that “it is impossible for anyone to give any worthy and valid account of either by itself without introducing the other, that is to say, of the Procession without the Return and collection, and vice versa.”⁽⁵⁾ It is for this reason that the title *De diuisione naturae* (*On the Division of Nature*) commonly given to the Eriugenian masterpiece since 1681 is particularly inadequate, if not frankly misleading. The purpose of Eriugena is not to divide nature — if that were the case, the *Periphyseon* would be nothing more than a catalogue —, but to make it intelligible. And in order to make nature intelligible, it is not enough to show its divisions, one must also treat of its unification (or Return). The title given by Eriugena to his work, *Periphyseon*, mentions neither division nor unification. Instead, it is a treatise *On Nature*, or, more precisely *On the Natures*, since in Greek *physeon* is plural. In fact, the Latin title given to the *Periphyseon* in some medieval catalogues is: *De naturis*, never *De diuisione naturae*.

As is customary for didactic literature, the author begins his work with a short paragraph in which he enumerates the main divisions of his treatise. The subject being Nature, he enumerates the various forms or species of Nature. These are, as stated above: 1. Nature which creates and is not created; 2. Nature which is created and also creates; 3. Nature which is created and does not create; 4. Nature which neither creates nor is created (441D). In his working copy, Eriugena wrote in Greek the title of this first paragraph: *Periphyseos merismou* (ΠΕΡΙ ΦΥΣΕΩΣ ΜΕΡΙΣΜΟΥ), which his copyists transcribed into Latin as *De diuisione naturae*.⁽⁶⁾ Thus, *De diuisione naturae* is the title of the first section of the *Periphyseon*, not that of the whole work. Nature being the subject of the whole work, the *Diuisio Naturae* is also a *Diuisio operis* (table of contents). It follows that the title given since 1681 to the *Periphyseon*, namely “On the division of Nature,” is tantamount to calling the work “table of contents.” If the *Periphyseon* could be rightly called

into Latin, first by Hilduin in the second quarter of the ninth century, then by John Scottus Eriugena in the third quarter of the same century, the works of Dionysius the Areopagite were increasingly made available to Latin readers through the centuries. Certainly, important elements of Neoplatonic philosophy borrowed by the Latin Fathers, notably by Saint Augustine, had already entered the Latin world. However, thanks to Eriugena's Latin rendering of the works of Dionysius, a new stream of Neoplatonic philosophy penetrated the Western part of the Christian world. While the Augustinian stream was mostly indebted to Plotinus and Porphyry, the Dionysian one owed much to Proclus.

Yet Eriugena's importance is not exhausted by his role as translator from Greek to Latin. The inventive nature of his thought created, for the first time in history, an original synthesis of the two main streams of Neoplatonism, the one originating in Plotinus and the other in Proclus. The work in which this synthesis is presented is a philosophical dialogue between a Master and his Disciple, which the author entitled *Periphyseon*. The general framework of this dialogue is the famous triad of which we spoke above, or, more precisely, the last two parts of it: Procession (*processio*) and Return (*reditus, reuersio*). The Procession, which is also multiplication (*multiplicatio*) and division (*diuisio*), is the movement by which all things descend from Divine Goodness. The Return, which is also unification (*congregatio, adunatio*), is the movement by which all things return to the supreme unity, God. The plan itself of the *Periphyseon* faithfully follows this twofold movement. Books I, II, III and IV correspond to the movement of Procession: From "Nature which creates and is not created" (Book I), we descend to "Nature which is created and also creates" (Book II), and then to "Nature which is created and does not create" (Books III and IV). Book V is entirely dedicated to the movement of return, a return whose end is "Nature which neither creates nor is created."⁽⁴⁾

Procession and Return are the warp and the woof from which this marvellous tapestry, the *Periphyseon*, is woven. I use the term

The Neoplatonic Theme of Return in Eriugena⁽¹⁾

by

Édouard Jauneau

Among the many triads dear to Neoplatonists, one of the best known is probably that which they use to explain how the universe is regulated by harmonious relations between the cause and its effects. These relations are formulated by Proclus (d. 485) in proposition 35 of his *Elements of Theology*: "Every effect remains in its cause, proceeds from it, and reverts upon it."⁽²⁾ Hence, in Greek the three parts of the triad are: *monê* (immanence in the cause, rest), *proodos* (procession from the cause), *epistrophê* (return to the cause, conversion). This famous triad, with many other Neoplatonic teachings, found its way into Christian thought,⁽³⁾ thanks to a skillful writer who claimed to be Dionysius the Areopagite. But the man in question could not have been the same one who had converted to Christianity upon hearing the discourse of Saint Paul before the Areopagus of Athens in the year 51 A.D. In fact, an analysis of writing style and vocabulary demonstrates that the text attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite could not have been written before the end of the fifth century. The "forgery," however, was clever, for to attribute writings strongly and deeply influenced by the "pagan" philosophy of Proclus to Dionysius the Areopagite, the first bishop of Athens, was the surest way to protect them against any suspicion of heresy. Who could contradict the convert of Paul, depositary of an esoteric teaching which complemented the exoteric teaching delivered by the Apostle to the Gentiles in his Epistles? Translated from Greek