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John Scottus Eriugena's *Periphyseon*:
ex nihilo ad nihilum

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Abstract

This thesis examines how John Scottus Eriugena understands creation and return in his *Periphyseon*, with a focus on the idea of *creatio ex nihilo ad nihilum*—creation from nothing and return to nothing. I argue that for Eriugena, this “nothing” isn’t a void or absence, but rather a way of speaking about God’s incomprehensibility. The meaning of this “nothing” may differ from different perspectives. I will show how Eriugena time to time jumps from “nothing” to “something”, by shifting through the modes of *beings* and *non-beings*. Creation begins in God, moves outward into multiplicity, and ultimately returns to God, who is beyond being and knowing. One of the central questions I explore is how Eriugena combines Christian theology with Neoplatonic ideas, especially the structure of procession (*πρόοδος*) and return (*ἐπιστροφή*). By blending influences from Maximus the Confessor, Pseudo-Dionysius, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory the Theologian—whom he treats as a single authority—Eriugena develops a view where all things originate in divine unity and are destined to return to it. This return isn’t perishing but transformation of all things into their causes and reasons. Throughout the thesis, I look closely at how Eriugena uses language to explain this movement. I also consider parallel (conceptual, not historical) with John Philoponus, especially in how Eriugena frames motion and rest as theological concepts. I use Philoponus’s impetus theory as a conceptual framework for understanding Eriugena’s notion of transcendent and immanent motions. In the end, I suggest that Eriugena’s vision of the world is dynamic and circular, but not perpetual: everything flows from God and ultimately returns—not into destruction, but into divine unity.

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INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I will follow John Scottus Eriugena's ideas concerning *creatio ex nihilo* and resurrection through his main work the *Periphyseon* and try to emphasize the inseparable connection between these two very important theological topics. Also, to find out the originality of Eriugena's thoughts, where possible, and highlight the influence of his predecessors where it is visible. My research will primarily focus on the human body's creation and its resurrection or return. I will highlight the influence of Gregory of Nyssa on Eriugena's thought corresponding to the return. I will show that Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory the Nazianzen in *Periphyseon* do not play separate roles in forming Eriugena's ideas, and due to his confusion of these two persons by mistake, we must read the text keeping in mind that for Eriugena, they were one and the same. Thus, if they differ in anything, Eriugena has to improvise to reconcile them and, by doing that, originate some new ideas.

For the Latin text of *Periphyseon*, I will use Édouard Jeuneau's critical edition of all five books published in the *Corpus Christianorum* collection.¹ For the English translation, I will refer to an edition released in the *Cahiers d'Études Médiévales* series, which includes I.P. Sheldon-Williams' translations of the first three books.² In contrast, the last two books feature draft translations by I.P. Sheldon-Williams that were revised by Dominic O'Meara. To quote the relevant parts from the text, I will use the column numbers from the *Patrologia Latina* series published by J.-P. Migne.

For the Greek and English versions of Maximus the Confessor's *Ambigua ad Johannem*, I will utilize the edition from the *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library*, edited and translated by

¹ John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, vol. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, ed. Édouard Jeuneau, Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis 161, 162, 163, 164, 165 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2003).

² John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: The Division of Nature*, trans. I. P. Sheldon-Williams, rev. John J. O'Meara (Montréal: Éditions Bellarmin; Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1987).

Nicholas Constatas.³ Eriugena's translation of *Ambigua*, edited by Édouard Jeuneau and published in the *Corpus Christianorum* collections, will serve as another primary source for analyzing Eriugena's language.⁴ I will refer to the newly published critical edition of Gregory of Nyssa's *De Opificio Hominis*, edited and translated by John Behr and published by *Oxford Early Christian Texts*.⁵ Additionally, for Eriugena's Latin translation of it, I will reference the critical edition of *De Imagine* edited by Michael W. Herren and Giovanni Mandolino, published in the *Corpus Christianorum* collection.⁶

1. John Scottus Eriugena

We know relatively little about John Scottus Eriugena's life. He must have emigrated from Ireland to France around 847. He first appeared on the theological scene in 851, when he was asked by Hincmar of Reims and Charles the Bald himself to participate in the debate against the monk Gottschalk of Orbais, who was defending the idea of 'double predestination'.⁷ John wrote a nineteen-chapter-long treatise, *De Predestinatione*, in response to "lover-of-the-putrid Gottschalk", as he phrases so eloquently.⁸ However, Eriugena went so far as to defend human free will against the doctrine of double predestination that, after Gottschalk, it was his time to get condemned first at the Council of Valence in 855 and second at Langres in 859 by the

³ Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, trans. Nicholas Constatas, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library, vol. 1 and vol.2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

⁴ Maximus Confessor, *Ambigua ad Iohannem iuxta Iohannis Scoti Eriugenae latinam interpretationem*, ed. Édouard Jeuneau (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 1988).

⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Human Image of God*, ed. and trans. John Behr, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

⁶ Jean Scot Érigène, *Iohannis Scoti Eriugenae Carmina, De Imagine*, ed. Michael W. Herren and Giovanni Mandolino, *Opere fere omnia* 167 (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2020).

⁷ Michael W. Herren, "Introduction," in *Carmina. De imagine*, by Johannes Scotus Eriugena, ed. Chiara Ombretta Tommasi and Giovanni Mandolino, *Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis* 167 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), x.

⁸ John Scottus Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, trans. Mary Brennan, with an introduction by Avital Wohlman, *Notre Dame Texts in Medieval Culture*, vol. 5 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 8

efforts of the same Hincmar, who initially asked him to write the treatise.⁹ It is unknown whether he suffered any punishment, but it is apparent that he continued working at the court of Charles the Bald. The King himself commissioned him to translate the Greek works of pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor.¹⁰ After translating the Dionysian corpus, Maximus' *Ambigua ad Johannem* and later his *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, he turned to Gregory of Nyssa's anthropological work *De opificio hominis* (which in his translation would be called *De imagine*).¹¹

The affectionate love towards Greeks and the Greek language distinguishes Eriugena from most of his contemporaries. Eriugena admits the superiority of the Greek language; he calls it the nectar of the Greeks.¹² Even urges his patron Charles the Bald to learn this elevated language.¹³ In the introduction of Eriugena's *Carmina*, Michael W. Herren addresses his use of the Greek language and says that – “John used a fair amount of Greek: individual words, short phrases, whole lines, consecutive lines, even whole poems. John loved Greek and believed that the Greek language had greater authority than Latin”.¹⁴

It is very often that Eriugena follows the ideas of the Greeks while discussing some crucial topics of theology. For example, concerning the proper understanding of the punishment in the afterlife, he presents Latin and Greek terms in parallel. He claims that “Greeks, displaying as usual a greater intelligence and a subtler accuracy” [955A] in their choice of terminology.¹⁵ In one of the passages of *Periphyseon* where Eriugena presents human resurrection and his

⁹ Herren, “Introduction”, in *Carmina*, xi.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ I. P. Sheldon-Williams, “Introduction,” in *Iohannis Scotti Eriugenae Periphyseon*, vol. 1, ed. I. P. Sheldon-Williams and Ludwig Bieler (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1968), 4.

¹² Édouard Jeuneau, “Jean Scot Erigène et le grec,” *Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi* 41, no. 1 (1977): 6, <https://doi.org/10.3406/alma.1977.1553>.

¹³ Herren, “Introduction”, in *Carmina*, lxv.

¹⁴ Ibid., xxiv.

¹⁵ Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena: A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge New York Melbourne: Cambridge university press, 1989), 75.

unification with God he explicitly chooses to side with the Greek authorities rather than with Augustine or Boethius: “I am simply taking as my guides through this discourse on the return of nature Gregory the Theologian and his commentator Maximus, as well as St. Ambrose” [876C]. St. Ambrose of course is Latin, but it is very clear from the text itself that Eriugena quotes him only to avoid any suspicions towards his ideas, meaning to cover his intellectual ‘alliance’ with the Greeks - “you add the opinion of the Blessed Ambrose on the unification or return to the One of human nature so as not to give the appearance that you were following the authority of the Greek writers only without corroboration from the Latins. . .” [880C] – tells the student to his master.

2. *Periphyseon*

Eriugena’s most extensive work remains the *Periphyseon*. The *Periphyseon* is a dialectical text dealing with nature as a whole - *that is* and *that is not*. It is written as a dialogue between Nutritor (a teacher) and Alumnus (a disciple). Eriugena divides nature into four species: 1) that which is not created but creates, that is God; 2) that which is created and creates, named as Primordial Causes, equal to Platonic Forms or Ideas; 3) that which is created but does not create, that is the material world; 4) that which is not created and does not create, that is also God.

By calling *Periphyseon* a dialectical work, I aligned myself with scholars who reject the view that it follows the structure of a *Hexaemeron*. While Allard, for example, in his ‘*La structure littéraire de la composition du De divisione naturae*’ supposes that all five books of *Periphyseon* may be an articulation of the first three chapters of Genesis and challenges I.P.

Sheldon-Williams' idea of quadripartite division of the books,¹⁶ Sheldon-Williams, whom I agree with in this debate, claims that the content of the books corresponds to the dialectical fourfold division of nature, mentioned in the paragraph above.¹⁷ Eriugena follows the fourfold division of dialectics. He defines philosophy in *De predestinatione* as follows:

These the Greeks have been pleased to name ΔΙΑΠΕΤΙΚΗ, ΟΡΙΣΤΙΚΗ, ΑΠΟΔΙΚΤΙΚΗ, ΑΝΑΛΙΤΙΚΗ, and in Latin we can call these *diuisoria* (divisory), *diffinitiva* (defining), *demonstrativa* (demonstrative), and *resolutiva* (resolutionary). Of these, the first by dividing one into many, separates; the second, by determining one from among many, concludes; the third, by indicating what is hidden through what is manifest, reveals; the fourth, by separating compound into simple, resolves.¹⁸

One can observe that the whole nature *that is* and *that is not* for Eriugena follows the same framework of dialectics—the One/God – which is not created and creates, thus, the division of the One. Primordial Causes – which is created and creates, defines the reasons of all the created things. Material world – which is created and does not create, through which the procession from the One is manifested. And finally, again, the One/God, where all things should resolve and rest. Eriugena indeed sees dialectics as the basis of nature and assumes that it is later discovered by reasoning about nature:

From this we may see that art which concerns itself with the division of genera into species and the resolution of species into genera, which is called *διαλεκτική* did not arise from human contrivances, but was first implanted in nature by the originator of all the arts that are properly so called, and was later discovered therein by the sages who make use of it in their subtle investigations of reality. [749A]

¹⁶ Guy-H. Allard, “La structure littéraire de la composition du *De divisione naturae*,” in *The Mind of Eriugena*, ed. John J. O’Meara and Ludwig Bieler (Dublin: Irish University Press, 1973), 147.

¹⁷ Sheldon-Williams, “Introduction,” 6; see also I. P. Sheldon-Williams, “The Greek Christian Platonist Tradition from the Cappadocians to Maximus and Eriugena,” in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 519–524.

¹⁸ Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, 8.

Gersh, along with Sheldon-Williams, parallels Eriugena's fourfold division framework not only to Aristotelian logic but also to Pythagorean numerology.¹⁹ That is the Monad, which begets but is not begotten; the Tetrad, which begets and is begotten; the Ogdoad, which is begotten but does not beget, that is, the sensible world; and the Hebdomad, which is neither begotten nor begets.²⁰

3. Research

When I first decided to deal with *Periphyseon*, my primary interest revolved around Eriugena's understanding of *materia formata* and *materia informis*. However, very soon it became clear to me that one cannot speak about *materia* without first explaining *creatio ex nihilo*. In addition, one cannot avoid discussing human resurrection and the return of all things into the One when dealing with *creatio ex nihilo*. Eriugena applies the Neoplatonic notion of procession (*πρόοδος*) and return (*ἐπιστροφή*) to the Christian creation out of nothing and return.²¹ Édouard Jeuneau, in his article *From Origen's Periarchon to Eriugena's Periphyseon* shortly concludes Eriugena's idea about procession and return:

Procession corresponds to the division which, coming forth from the supreme Unity, spreads out onto the multitude of creatures. The return is the reverse movement, the reunification (*congregatio*) of the infinitely varied multitude of creatures and their absorption into the infinitely simple Unity which is in God, which is indeed God.²²

¹⁹Stephen Gersh, "Eriugena's Fourfold Contemplation: Idealism and Arithmetic," in *Eriugena: East and West*, ed. Bernard McGinn and Willemien Otten (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 151. see also Sheldon-Williams, "Greek Christian Platonist Tradition," 522.

²⁰ Sheldon-Williams, "Greek Christian Platonist Tradition," 522.

²¹ Édouard Jeuneau, "From Origen's *Periarchon* to Eriugena's *Periphyseon*," in *Eriugena and Creation: Proceedings of the Eleventh International Conference on Eriugenian Studies*, ed. Willemien Otten and Michael I. Allen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 140.

²² Ibid.

To speak about the procession, it is unavoidable to talk about the return too. As Eriugena himself asserts – “the procession of the creatures and the return of the same are so intimately associated . . . that they appear to be inseparable from one another . . . and 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.” [529A]

I suggest that the whole *Periphyseon* is written in a similar manner. One cannot pick a subject that would not lead to the One, that is God, or vice versa. The text itself represents the Unity and Multiplicity. That is why, even though I will try to mainly focus on the creation of the human body and its return and unification with God, it will be inevitable to discuss such topics as motion, primordial causes, the Will of God, etc. One of the main aims of my research, besides understanding the whole subject, is to distinguish the influence of Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory the Theologian, and Maximus the Confessor on Eriugena’s thought corresponding to the creation of the human body and its return.

It is preposterous to claim that this thesis offers any significant novelty to a field that has been explored by many distinguished scholars, such as Édouard Jeuneau, Dermont Moran, Stephen Gersh, William Otten, John O’Meara, I.P. Sheldon-Williams, John, and many others. Stephen Gersh, for instance, in his article “The Structure of the Return in Eriugena’s *Periphyseon*,” discusses the topic so exhaustively that one might not even dare to return to it.²³ In his extensive work, “From Iamblichus to Eriugena,” he similarly follows the ideas of procession and return from Iamblichus through Ps. Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor to Eriugena with great diligence. Dermont Moran provides extensive information in his book

²³ Stephen Gersh, “The Structure of the Return in Eriugena’s *Periphyseon*,” in *Reading Plato, Tracing Plato: From Ancient Commentary to Medieval Reception*, Variorum Collected Studies Series (London: Routledge, 2005), 109–126. Originally published in *Eriugena: East and West*, ed. Bernard McGinn and Willemien Otten (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 213–230.

"Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena" regarding his philosophy and its background. William Otten examines Eriugena's anthropology and studies *Periphyseon* through a lens in which man is viewed as the central character in John's literary structure.²⁴ He organizes his text according to Eriugena's fourfold division and follows man from creation to return, which aligns precisely with my area of interest. However, I would argue that none of the aforementioned scholars emphasize the role of Gregory of Nyssa in the process of return, as presented in the fifth book of *Periphyseon*. Even the dissertation by Joel Irving Barstad, titled "Body Soul, and Image: Gregory of Nyssa's Influence on Eriugena," claims that Gregory of Nyssa's "De Imagine" "makes only an auxiliary contribution" to Eriugena's notion of return and states that "only one significant Nyssen contribution remains to be considered, the view that man's return to his proper state is to be expected from the very nature of things."

Anybody who has at least once glanced at *Periphyseon* knows that Eriugena confuses the two Gregories – Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory the Nazianzen (or the Theologian), whom Eriugena is aware of through the writings of Maximus the Confessor. The simplest example of this confusion would be from the book III – "Again, Gregory of Nyssa, who is also called Nazianzen." [735D] However, every scholar tries to separate the two Gregories, while my view is that we must think about them as one person and only then can we understand the whole process of return in totality. For Eriugena, Gregory of Nyssa and Nazianzen were one; thus, whenever he would face the difference in their thoughts, he had to improvise and find a way to reconcile them, and that is when the original idea of Eriugena was born. Stephen Gersh draws attention to Eriugena's tendency to combine different sources too and that by doing so, he produces his original thought.²⁵ The mixture of the two Gregories has been so out of the scope

²⁴ Willemien Otten, *The Anthropology of Johannes Scottus Eriugena*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 20 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 2.

²⁵ Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition*, Studien zur Problemgeschichte der antiken und mittelalterlichen Philosophie, vol. 17 (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 249. see footnote 214.

of the scholarship that even scholars sometimes make the same mistake as Eriugena did. For example, Carlos Steel in his article *The Return of The Body Into The Soul*, where he discusses the idea of return in *Periphyseon*, repeats Eriugena's mistake, or rather without paying enough attention paraphrases him and ascribes Gregory the Theologian's theory of body's absorption into the soul to Gregory of Nyssa.²⁶ William Otten acknowledges the fact that Eriugena confuses the two authors however claims that "he is apparently aware that they are two different theologians."²⁷ Which I will try to show that is misleading.

In the later parts of the thesis I will discuss the five stages of return – 1) dissolution of body; 2) bodily resurrection; 3) transmutation of body into soul; 4) soul into primordial causes; 5) absorption by God – and try to show that Gregory of Nyssa influences the first two stages, and it is visible not only by the idea itself but within the used terminology as well. While the rest is taken from the Nazianzen through Maximus' *De Ambigua*, I would also claim that to jump from Nyssean understanding of bodily resurrection towards the absorption of it by God, Eriugena uses the 24th chapter of Nyssa's *De Imagine*.

As mentioned, one cannot avoid specific subjects while discussing the procession and return. Both concepts, of course, imply the motion. As Eriugena says, it is the motion *a se ipso in se ipso ad se ipsum* [453A], that means motion from God, in God, towards God. Gersh summarizes it as follows – "the transcendent God is the end of his own immanent motion".²⁸ In the same manner, it is unavoidable to speak about the primordial causes since all the accidents and simple elements that create material world dwell in them. It is that "by their motion they [simple elements] join together in the right proportions they make all the sensible

²⁶ Carlos Steel, "The Return of the Body into Soul: Philosophical Musings on the Resurrection," in *History and Eschatology in John Scottus Eriugena and His Time*, ed. James McEvoy and Michael Dunne (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002), 592–593.

²⁷ Otten, *The Anthropology of Johannes Scottus Eriugena*, 11.

²⁸ Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 249.

bodies, both celestial and aerial and watery and earthly” [712A]. Thus, the motion takes place through the primordial causes, which I will try to show that corresponds *in se ipso* movement in Eriugena’s tripartite framework of motion.

Thus, in the first chapter, I will discuss Eriugena’s notion of *nihilum* and his five modes of *being* and *non-beings*. I will show how using his scheme of *beings* and *non-beings* shifts from nothingness to somethingness, that is to say, from *ex nihilo* to *ex/de aliquo*. Eriugena can identify *nihil* as *omnia*²⁹ not only by Pseudo-Dionysian negative theology, but also by his scheme of *beings* and *non-beings*. The scheme allows him to claim, at first sight, contradictory statements because it gives different viewpoints to Eriugena as an observer.

In the second chapter, I will show how Philoponus’ impetus theory of motion can be applied to Eriugena’s understanding of the divine motion. I will show that the “invisible motion”, the basis of the creation of the whole world out of nothing, is God’s motion from unity to multiplicity. I will discuss God’s transcendent and immanent motions and show that for Eriugena, the statement that “God is in all things” [518B] means the manifestation of God’s motion *a se ipso in se ipso ad se ipsum*.

The third chapter will discuss the return of all the created things to God. It will show symmetry of the procession and return motions, not only in the process itself but also in the terminology used. I will conclude that creation, which is also the motion from *nothing* towards *nothing*, that is, from God to God, can similarly be identified as *from something to something*.

²⁹ [663D]: *Prius siquidem dixerim eam esse omnia quam nihil*.

4. Dialogism

I suggest using dialogism as an instrument to identify Eriugena's voice through the dialogue of his characters – Nutritor and Alumnus. There is only one scholarly work that I have found so far that deals with the text of *Periphyseon* as a literary work. It is a dissertation called *The Poetics of Periphyseon: Philosophical Style in John Scottus Eriugena* by Jeffrey Scott Lehman. Lehman touches on the issue of dialogue and the importance of giving more attention to both interlocutors at some point. However, it only relies on Moran's sympathy for Alumnus, which does not say much about his importance in understanding Eriugena's thought as a whole.³⁰ I suggest that a comprehensive study of *Periphyseon*'s dialogical framework would benefit scholarship. However, here I only try to use dialogism as a tool, as a lens of scope through which I will observe the text through my studies.

Periphyseon of John Scottus Eriugena is clearly a philosophical and theological work³¹. Still, it is also a piece of literature and dialogue is a tool of literature to present the philosophical discourse. First, it is important to discuss to what extent the philosophical text is literature and then observe the role of dialogue as a literary tool in philosophy. As Albert William Levi says in his *Philosophy as Literature: The Dialogue*, dialogues clearly have literary qualities.³² Therefore, a philosophical text using that tool may be observed as literature to some extent. Many other literary tools are used in philosophical texts as well. In his presidential address to the American Philosophical Association called *Philosophy as/and/of Literature* Arthur C. Danto speaks about crossovers of the two disciplines. He mentions all the literary forms used

³⁰ Jeffrey Scott Lehman, *The Poetics of the Periphyseon: Philosophical Style in John Scottus Eriugena* (PhD diss., University of Dallas, 2002), 153.

³¹ in *De Predestinatione* Eriugena says: true philosophy is true religion and conversely that true religion is true philosophy. Thus, if *Periphyseon* is truly dialectical work then it is truly theological work as well and vice versa; see Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, 7.

³² Albert William Levi, "Philosophy as Literature: The Dialogue," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 9, no. 1 (1976): 1–20.

for expressing the truth in the philosophical texts and claims that there is no “field of writing as fertile as philosophy has been generating forms of literary expression”.³³

Every literary tool may be used in different ways, for various reasons, by different authors, and so is dialogue. For Plato, as Steven Rendall claims, dialogue is an instrument not to state but to inquire the truth, so that both participants should be open to the discussion and eager to grasp the truth itself and should not be in defense of their own beliefs.³⁴ Dermont Moran expresses a very similar notion about Eriugena using dialogue. He claims that it is not “merely to instruct and impart knowledge, but also to provide a vehicle for travelling on the road towards spiritual enlightenment”, so to speak, it is „*inquisitio veritatis*“.³⁵ However, I would argue that if Plato’s works clearly see Socrates as an authority, there is no explicit authority in *Periphyseon*. Of course, the relation between the teacher and the disciple leads us to a certain intuition that the master should be accepted as someone who distributes the truth. Even the names *Alumnus* (a pupil, nursling) and *Nutritor* (a bringer up, breeder) give us that impression. However, Alumnus is not a simple receiver of knowledge, but he has a significant role in the *inquisitio veritatis*. “Alumnus, for his part, is not the characterless pupil or novice that any commentators have seen in him. He is a practicing philosopher,” suggests Moran.³⁶ Here emerges the question: How should one determine Eriugena’s thought if there are two active contributors to the philosophical discourse? Even though the hierarchical difference between the teacher and the disciple is apparent, the role of Alumnus is much more than simply accepting the knowledge from Nutritor. To understand Eriugena’s original thought, one must look at the dialogue between the master and the disciple carefully, since there is a tendency of

³³ Arthur C. Danto, “Philosophy as/and/of Literature,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 58, no. 1 (1984): 5–20, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3131555>.

³⁴ Steven Rendall, “Dialogue, Philosophy, and Rhetoric: The Example of Plato’s ‘Gorgias,’” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 10, no. 3 (1977): 165–79.

³⁵ Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 68.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 77.

Alumnus suggesting his own ideas, or asking questions that Nutritor does not want to answer. For example, in the first book of *Periphyseon*, while discussing a formless matter, Nutritor suggests Alumnus not to enquire about the subject any further since there are far more important subjects to discuss. Alumnus, although considering the authority of Nutritor, replies:

... I shall not, I think, trouble you further. But I keep wondering at your having said that more important matters await our consideration: for what should be more important, after God, for the reason to consider than unformed matter, I do not see, ... [499C: 5-10]

And they continue the deeper discussion of the subject regardless of Nutritor's initial denial.

Again, elsewhere in the third book, Alumnus asks the teacher:

I only inquire how all things are at the same time eternal and made in the Word Who is eternal with the Father. For it does not, as I think, accord with reason that made things shall be eternal or eternal things made. [667C: 31-33]

Nutritor answers that he is somewhat disturbed that he “seeks for reason where all reason fails, or understanding, where all understanding is surpassed [668A].” While his language here seems to be very strict and insists that one should avoid reasoning such matters, later after several paragraphs, he appears to be more humble in his response admitting his inability to answer: “But of the manner and reason of the establishment of all things in the Word let him speak who can; myself, I confess I do not know [671A].”

I assume that the passage above shows not only that Eriugena did not have an answer for the question but, most importantly, that he had the question itself, which he could not answer, though it was important enough to ask. So, through the passage, we can observe the process of thinking, an inner dialogue of some sort, where he challenges himself and even admits his inability to reason about the subject. Thus, the role of Alumnus in identifying Eriugena's thinking process is undeniable.

There is another passage where Alumnus is used to reveal Eriugena's preference for Greek authors over the Latins in the subject of human resurrection. Alumnus tells Nutritor that he quotes first Gregory of Nyssa³⁷, then Maximus the Confessor, and only after them St. Ambrose, only to justify his inclination towards the Greeks:

and then you add the opinion of the Blessed Ambrose on the unification or Return to the One of human nature so as not to give the appearance that you were following the authority of the Greek writers only without corroboration from the Latins, even of those concerned with philosophy . . . [880C]

Eriugena sometimes uses Alumnus as a provocative interlocutor, or announcer of his inner thoughts that would have been inappropriate otherwise. The fact that Eriugena prefers to follow the Greeks in one of the most important subjects is softened by Alumnus' remark. He can say anything since he has no authority as a student. Thus, observing his comments and questions carefully is crucial, even when they may appear naïve.

But what kind of methodology should be applied to the dialogue between Nutritor and Alumnus? Frederic Cossutta, in his article *Philosophy as Self-Constituting Discourse: The Case of Dialogue* speaks about the methodology of studying dialogism. He describes two types of dialogic enunciation, as he calls them, *locutive heterogeneity* and *locutive homogeneity*.³⁸ The former is a "conversational mode" between "individualized speaking-subjects", while the latter is where the dialogue takes place between fictional characters.³⁹ *Locutive homogeneity* itself consists of two types of dialogisms – *enunciative homogeneity* and *enunciative heterogeneity*. The first one has an apparent authority, "the text is carried by a voice, the enunciative activity being always implicitly present," whether it is in the form of monologue

³⁷ He actually quotes Gregory the Theologian.

³⁸ Frederic Cossutta, "Philosophy as Self-Constituting Discourse: The Case of Dialogue," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 39, no. 3 (2006): 181–207.

³⁹ Ibid.

or dialogue, whereas in the case of *enunciative heterogeneity*, the explicit authority is erased from the text and the dialogue is presented by fictional interlocutors.⁴⁰ Cossuta says that the disappearance of the active voice of the author is explicit when his name is mentioned only as an author.⁴¹ If it is true, then it will be apparent that we should observe the dialogue of *Periphyseon* through the lens of *enunciative heterogeneity*, as there are fictional interlocutors and Eriugena's name is only mentioned as an author. However, there is indeed a resemblance between the identities of Nutritor (the master) and Eriugena himself. Both are masters of Liberal Arts, they both acquire Greek language and quote Greek fathers. To diminish their resemblance would be a mistake similarly as to forget the active role of *Alumnus* in the dialectical process. By using the framework of dialogism, I will be able distinguish the authority of the speech in the dialogue and therefore to use "Eriugena" without hesitation in any circumstances, whether I refer to *Nutritor* or *Alumnus*. Some scholars are inclined to separate those two characters and give them specific roles. Some assume that *Nutritor* would be Eriugena himself, and *Alumnus* would be his disciple. For instance, D.W. Hadley begins his article in *History and Eschatology in John Scottus Eriugena* with the same assumption.⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² D. W. Hadley, "The Return of the Body into the Soul," in *History and Eschatology in John Scottus Eriugena and His Time*, ed. James McEvoy and Michael Dunne (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002), 413.

Chapter 1: *Nihilum*

To understand Eriugena's thought process about the creation out of nothing, first we must be aware of his five modes of *being* and *non-being*, because as he puts it the whole nature means all the things that are (*ea quae sunt*) and all the things that are not (*ea quae non sunt*).⁴³ There are different modes of *being* and *non-being*, which means that from different standpoints, the same things may be described both as *being* and *non-being*.

The first mode as Moran summarizes, follows the line of negative theology, when God is ascribed the notion of absolute *non-being*, not by privation but by his excellence (*per excellentiam*), and everything that is created, corporeal or intelligible, is under the notion of *being* (*esse*).⁴⁴

The second mode distinguishes the hierarchy of beings in the created world from the highest to the lowest, that is, from intelligible creatures to corporeal things. This means the highest order would be seen as *non-being*, while the lowest would be called *being*.⁴⁵

The third mode of being distinguishes actual being from potential being. Eriugena compares it with the potentiality (*uirtus*) of the seeds. When the plant or the flower is still in its potentiality, it is said *not to be*, but when it manifests itself, it is said *to be* [445B].

⁴³ Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 217.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 219

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 221.

The fourth mode suggests that everything that is subject to intellectual contemplation is rightly said *to be*, while everything that is corporeal and subject to perishing is said *not to be* [445C].

The fifth mode suggests that man is said *to be* in his pristine condition when he was made in God's image, while he is said *not to be* after his original sin [445C].

Here we will focus only on the first mode of *non-being* because, as our interest currently is in the creation out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*), which for Eriugena begins with the notion of the nothingness (*nihilum*). That means everything created is created from nothingness, and this nothingness is nothing but God himself.⁴⁶

However, one should understand that Eriugena uses the name *nihilum* strictly in the Pseudo-Dionysian sense of negative theology, since for him *nihilum* is predicated to divine goodness not as privation, for God cannot be described by privation, since he does not lack anything, but due to his transcendent and incomprehensible nature.⁴⁷ Moran summarizes the meaning of privation for Eriugena in the sense of missing something that essentially is there.⁴⁸ Thus, it cannot be applied to Divine Goodness since Eriugena claims that privation is impossible without possession (*priuatio non potest esse, ubi non est habitus* [686A]). However, he introduces the notion of universal privation (*priuatio universalis*) that would perfectly describe the nothingness of God, since only he may be signified as total negation of possession, essence, or substance, and all the things that can be said and understood.⁴⁹ Thus, God must be called

⁴⁶ Duclow, Donald F. "Divine Nothingness and Self-Creation in John Scotus Eriugena." *The Journal of Religion* 57, no. 2 (April 1977): 109–23. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1201686>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 220.

⁴⁹ [686D]: *Si uero quis dixerit neque priuationem habitudinis neque absentiam alicuius praesentiae nihili nomine significari, sed universalem totius habitudinis et essentiae uel substantiae uel accidentis et simpliciter omnium quae dici et intelligi possunt negationem, concludetur sic. Eo igitur uocabulo deum uocari necesse est, qui solus negatione omnium quae sunt proprie innuitur, quia super omne quod dicitur et intelligitur exaltatur, qui nullum eorum quae sunt et quae non sunt est, qui melius nesciendo scitur.*

nihilum, because he is the negation of all the things that are; he is nothing from the things that are and are not, and he is better known by his unknowability. For Eriugena, the name *nihilum* signifies the incomprehensible superessentiality of the Divine Goodness:

by that name is signified the ineffable and incomprehensible and inaccessible brilliance of the Divine Goodness which is unknown to all intellects whether human or angelic — for it is superessential and supernatural —, which while it is contemplated in itself neither is nor was nor shall be, for it is understood to be in none of the things that exist because it surpasses all things. . . [680D]

Hence, as God is incomprehensible, he is called *nihilum* due to his excellence (*per excellentiam*) as Eriugena summarizes and by his theophanies he manifests himself, begins to appear in creation, like he proceeds from nothing to something (*ueluti ex nihilo in aliquid*).⁵⁰ Thus, every visible or invisible creature may be called his theophanies, or divine appearance (*diuina apparatio*).⁵¹

As Wolfson says, the Latin tradition uses *ex nihilo* as a technical term that corresponds with Greek *ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος*, which would be either “from non-existence” or “from non-existent”.⁵² He shows that Gregory of Nyssa in *De Hominis Opificio* (i.e. *De Imagine*), similarly to Eriugena, identifies *ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος* with God himself.⁵³ The resemblance between Eriugena’s notion of God being beyond all the essences (*super omnem essentiam*) and Gregory’s *ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος* is clear. For God neither is (*neque est*) nor was (*neque erat*) nor will be (*neque erit*) because he is none of the existing things (*nullus existentium*) [681A]. Thus, Eriugena’s God

⁵⁰ In [445A] Eriugena highlights the difference between the first mode of non-being and the third one, because in the first sight one might see them as identical. Thus, he clarifies that the first is different from the third mode by generically (*generaliter*) being in all things, while the third mode non-being is specifically (*specialiter*) in the things that are still hidden in their causes.

⁵¹ [681A]: *Dum ergo incomprehensibilis intelligitur, per excellentiam nihilum non immerito uocitatur. At uero in suis theophaniis incipiens apparere, ueluti ex nihilo in aliquid dicitur procedere; . . . Ideoque omnis uisibilis et inuisibilis creatura theophania (id est diuina apparatio) potest appellari.*

⁵² Harry A. Wolfson, “The Identification of Ex Nihilo with Emanation in Gregory of Nyssa,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 63, no. 1 (January 1970): 55. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/1508995>.

⁵³ Ibid.

may be understood in both meanings of $\mu\eta\ \delta\upsilon\tau\omicron\varsigma$, that is, *non-existence*, because he is beyond existence, and *non-existent*, since he does not exist in the sense of all the visible and invisible things that *are*. However, Eriugena, when translating $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\delta\ \mu\eta\ \delta\upsilon\tau\omicron\varsigma$ in *De Imagine*, does not use the term *ex nihilo* but translates it straight as *ex non existente*.⁵⁴ In *Ambigua*, Eriugena also translates it mostly as *non ex existente*, though he only uses *ex nihilo* once.⁵⁵ I think it does not make any difference what kind of terminology he uses in translation, as long as the concept seems to be the same. Moreover, his interchangeable use of the term in *Ambigua* also indicates that Eriugena understood *ex non existente* as *ex nihilo*. Although Eriugena very much follows the language of Maximus in describing the creation out of nothing, it seems that he disagrees with him about the existence of God. Maximus writes that everything is created by ever existing God ($\Theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon\delta\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\delta\ \acute{\alpha}\epsilon\iota\ \delta\upsilon\tau\omicron\varsigma$) out of nothing ($\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\delta\ \mu\eta\ \delta\upsilon\tau\omicron\varsigma$),⁵⁶ Elsewhere he clarifies that by saying that God exists he does not mean his certain existence, but simple and ungraspable existence, that is beyond all existence – $\text{Ὁ}\theta\epsilon\upsilon\text{ν}\ \tau\omicron\ \theta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\omicron\upsilon\text{ν}\ \text{᾽᾽}\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu\alpha\iota\text{᾽᾽}\ \lambda\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omicron\upsilon\text{ν}\tau\epsilon\varsigma,\ \omicron\upsilon\ \tau\omicron\ \pi\omicron\varsigma\ \epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu\alpha\iota\ \lambda\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omicron\mu\epsilon\nu\text{᾽᾽}\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \delta\iota\acute{\alpha}\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\delta\ \tau\omicron\ \text{᾽᾽}\epsilon\acute{\sigma}\tau\iota\text{᾽᾽}\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \tau\omicron\ \text{᾽᾽}\eta\gamma\text{᾽᾽}\ \acute{\alpha}\pi\lambda\omega\varsigma\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \acute{\alpha}\omicron\rho\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\omega\varsigma\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \acute{\alpha}\pi\omicron\lambda\epsilon\lambda\upsilon\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omega\varsigma\ \acute{\epsilon}\pi\text{᾽}\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon\delta\ \lambda\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omicron\mu\epsilon\nu\text{᾽᾽}.$ ⁵⁷ Let us look back at the passage where Eriugena at first clearly rejects Maximus’ language – *eo nomine [nihilum] significatam crediderim, quae, dum per se ipsam cogitator, neque est, neque erat, neque erit* [681A]. He opposes Maximus’ $\kappa\alpha\iota\ \tau\omicron\ \text{᾽᾽}\epsilon\acute{\sigma}\tau\iota\text{᾽᾽}\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \tau\omicron\ \text{᾽᾽}\eta\gamma\text{᾽᾽}$ with *neque est, neque erat, neque erit*. However, it is not because he opposes him in general, but because he wants to distinguish between two modes of being and non-being about God. For creation out of nothing, he uses the first mode, that is to say, resembles Gregory of

⁵⁴ Jean Scot Érigène, *Iohannis Scotti Eriugenae Carmina, De Imagine*, ed. Michael W. Herren and Giovanni Mandolino, *Opere fere omnia* 167 (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2020), *De Imagine*, chap. XIII, col. 213C.

⁵⁵ Maximus Confessor, *Ambigua ad Iohannem iuxta Iohannis Scotti Eriugenae latinam interpretationem*, ed. Édouard Jeuneau (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 1988), 99. VI. 1605, 1185/1188

⁵⁶ Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, trans. Nicholas Constas, *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014) 308. *Ambiguum* X, 41.

⁵⁷ Maximus the Confessor, *The Ambigua*, vol. 1, 294. X, 38: Thus, when we say the Divine “exists,” we do not say it exists in a certain way. And for this reason we say of God that He “is” and “was” in a simple, infinite, and absolute sense.; *Ambigua*, VI, 38, 1445, 1180/1181: *Unde deum esse dicentes, non aliquo modo esse dicimus, ac per hoc “est” et “erat” simpliciter et infinite et absolute in ipso dicimus.*

Nyssa's idea about God creating out of nothing, himself being non-existent. But when in several paragraphs below Eriugena shifts onto theophanies through which God manifests himself, he summarizes that although God is considered as non-being and that he is absolutely nothing (*nihil*), when he manifests himself through everything that is created, he is rightly said that he is:

... in all things it [Divine Goodness] both is and is said to be (*et est et dicitur esse*), because it is the Essence of the whole universe and its substance and its genus and its species and its quantity and its quality and the bond between all things and its position and habit (*habitus*) and place and time and action and passion and everything whatsoever that can be understood by whatever sort of intellect in every creature and about every creature. [681D]

Thus, Eriugena makes a distinction between two modes of being of God. In the first sense, he does not have existence, since he surpasses the whole existence; however, when descending “from the negation of all essences into the affirmation of the essence of the whole universe . . . as though from nothing into something (*veluti ex nihilo in aliquid*), from non-essentiality (*ex inessentialitate*) to essentiality (*in essentialitatem*)” [681C], he is and said to be (*et est et dicitur esse*), because he is the Essence of the whole universe. One must understand this distinction not as an essential difference, but as the inquirer's perspective. As Moran claims, Eriugena's remarks about *being* and *non-being* are original and radical, and they subvert “the metaphysical tenet of the primacy of being”:

Rather than take substantial being as the fundamental and absolute bedrock of nature, he argues that being must be understood in perspectival or relative terms; sometimes being comes out as greater than non-being, and sometimes it is the other way round. It all depends on the viewpoint of the inquirer and his position on the scale of being.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Moran, *Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 218.

Hence, for Eriugena, we can see that the identity of God's existence depends on the inquirer's point of view. In this double understanding of God's existence, that he may be predicated with both negative and affirmative terms, he follows Pseudo-Dionysian negative theology. He asserts that God must be predicated with following types of predications: "first by the Cataphatic, that is, by affirmation . . . then we deny by apophatic, that is, by negation . . ." and by the third type, that expresses His super essentiality, so that his being above all essences be "more-than-praised" (*superlaudanda est*) [522B].

But how exactly does the creation happen out of nothing? This is the question Alumnus asks his teacher [634B]. To answer the question, let us again highlight the difference between *nihil per priuationem* and *nihil per excellentiam*.⁵⁹ The first can be ascribed to the created thing, since the privation only takes place when there is an initial possession (*priuatio non potest esse, ubi non est habitus* [686A]), and the second is ascribed to God, because there is no possession in him. Now, the creation out of nothing can be observed from different standpoints. One would be the perspective of procession from God, and another from the observer's perspective inquires about formless matter (*materia informis*), from which God created the world. For Eriugena himself says that "He Who made the world from unformed matter (*de materia informi*) also made unformed matter (*informem materiam*) out of nothing at all (*de omnino nihilo*)" [636D]. To say plainly, "Nothing" made nothing, out of which He made the world. Since the formless matter is *nothing* only due to the privation and not by its essence, it is not true *nothing* but clearly the closest one to it – *nilque uicinius ad non uere esse quam informis materia* [546D] – says Eriugena.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, nothing is closer to the true being than the causes of all the created things, which are called primordial causes.⁶¹ It does not mean that the former is true non-being and the latter true being in general, but rather it resembles the second mode of Eriugena's

⁵⁹ Ibid., 217.

⁶⁰ [546D]: nothing [is] closer to true not-being than formless matter.

⁶¹ [546D]: *nil propinquius est ad uere esse quam causae creatae creatarum rerum*.

beings and non-beings. Because Eriugena establishes both of them in the first mode *non-beings* alongside God, thus, in general, both of them are *nihilum* from which God creates:

but that those which because of the excellence of their nature elude not only all sense but also all intellect and reason rightly seem not to be — which are correctly understood only of God and matter and of the reasons and essences⁶² of all the things that are created by Him. [443A]

What I suggest here is that the primordial causes are assumed to be higher non-beings than the formless matter; thus, following Eriugena's second mode categorization, primordial causes are said *to be* due to their higher order, while the formless matter would be said *not to be*. Eriugena never uses such terms as *higher* and *lower* with primordial causes and formless matter. Thus, it may be a little misleading. All I wanted to show was the resemblance between the second mode of being and the discussed passage. Both primordial causes and formless matter are *nothing* alongside God, and in their nothingness, primordial causes are closer to *being*, while formless matter is closer to *non-being*. My interpretation would be that since the primordial causes as Eriugena puts it— “are what the Greeks call *ἰδέαι*, that is, the eternal species or forms and immutable reasons after which and in which the visible and invisible world is formed and governed” [616A] – they are higher non-beings than the formless matter. Moreover, there is a very dubious⁶³ passage where Alumnus claims that although they are two distinct things, formless matter is produced by flowing from the primordial causes – “the unformed matter of things (*informis rerum materia*) also is believed to flow from no other source than the primordial causes (*ex primordialibus causis*)” [547D]. In the same passage Eriugena explicitly says that the formless matter is closest thing to the privation of true essence

⁶² *rationes* are identified as primordial causes (*primordiales causae*) [616A] while essences (*essentiae*) subsist in their reasons (*rationes*) [866D-867B].

⁶³ The passage is dubious because Alumnus asks question whether formless matter subsists in primordial causes or not, since it also flows from the primordial causes. However only answer he gets from Nutritor is just a conclusive statement that they are indeed two separate things: *Alius igitur intellectus est primordialium causarum, alius informium materialium* [548A].

(*uerae essentiae priuationi, quae nihil dicitur, proximum*) and the primordial causes are closest to the true essence (*uerae essentiae est propinquum*) [546D]. Despite the ambiguity of the passage, two things are clear, that the primordial causes and the formless matter are two distinct things and that the primordial causes are higher in the sense that they are closest to the true essence, and it is them what gives forms to everything. Even the formless matter seems to be made from primordial causes. Let us follow the logic of Eriugena. He says that:

quantities and qualities, although through themselves they are incorporeal, [yet] when they come together (*in unum uero coeuntes*) they produce formless matter (*informem efficient materiam*), which by the addition of incorporeal forms (*formis*)⁶⁴ and colours moves into various bodies (*in corpora mouetur*). [663A]

Thus, the formless matter is produced by the quantities and qualities, which themselves are possession of “the simple, invisible, and insensible bodies”, i.e. the four simple elements [664A-B]. In addition, during the discussion whether all composite (*composita*) and dissolvable (*solubilia*) things are made from nothing or something Nutritor and Alumnus agree with each other that the four elements themselves subsist in primordial causes [664A]. Therefore, they reach to the assertion that all the corporeal things “are from something, not from nothing [664A]”. To summarize shortly, they assert that in the process of creation everything was created from something – formless matter from qualities and quantities, qualities and quantities from the four simple elements⁶⁵, and the elements themselves subsist in primordial causes. Thus, only thing left is to inquire “about the primordial causes themselves, whether they are made out of nothing in the Word of God, or were always in it” [664B]. After a lengthy argumentation Eriugena asserts that primordial causes eternally subsist in the Word of God and

⁶⁴ In O’Meara’s translation it is *shapes*, while in the Latin text it is *formis*. So here I have changed the word to be more precise.

⁶⁵ [663A-B]: that every corporeal thing is created of coming together (*coitu*) of the intelligible things, such as “quantities and qualities, shapes or species, the colors, the dimensions of length, breadth, height, and together with these the places and times, which if you withdraw, there will be no bodies;” and all of these intelligible things are composed (*componi*) by the simple four elements.

since there is no place for *nothing* neither external nor internal to God, it may be concluded that primordial causes are made in the Word of God eternally, thus the creation is both eternal and made [664B-666B]. He rather harshly asks the rhetorical question:

So, after considering these reasonings, who but the excessively stupid or excessively contentious would not grant that all things which are from God are both eternal at once and made (*omnia quae ex deo sunt et aeterna simul esse et facta*)? [666B]

Eriugena then explains that creation out of nothing means nothing else but that there was (a time) when they were not: “They were always; they were not always, and there was not (a time) when they were not, and there was (a time) when they were not” [665A].⁶⁶

Through the investigation of the notion of *nihilum* in Eriugena’s thought it is visible that one must be aware of his five modes of beings and non-beings.⁶⁷ He clearly shifts from one mode to another. What can be more illustrative to this than the shift from *creation out of nothing* to *creation out of something*?

⁶⁶ [665A]: *Semper erant, semper non erant, et non erat quando non erant, et quando non erant erat.*

⁶⁷ Moran argues that there are three additional modes in *Periphyseon*: 1) God possess all being and the creature is mere nothingness; 2) that only substance exists and all the accidents or relations do not have being; 3) being of *possible* and non-being of *impossibles*. Moran, *Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 226.

Chapter 2: Procession as a Divine Motion

Creatio ex nihilo needs to be explained by a concourse of simple elements and that involves some sort of motion as Eriugena himself notes.

. . . but when by their invisible motion they [simple elements] join together (coitu) in the right proportions they make all the sensible bodies, both celestial and aerial and watery and earthly . . . from the highest to the lowest are made from their concourse (concurso), . . . [712A]

What is “their invisible motion”, and how should one understand it? Eriugena in the first book of *Periphyseon* claims that “He [God] is at rest unchangingly in Himself, never departing from the stability of His Nature; yet He sets Himself in motion through all things in order that those things which essentially subsist by Him may be [452C-D].” I would argue that the “invisible motion” seems to be God himself; his own motion creates all things in himself. Indeed, one of Eriugena’s explanations for the etymology of the word Θεός is that it is a derivative of the verb θέω – I Run. “When Θεός is derived from the verb θέω it is correctly interpreted ‘He Who runs’ (*currens*), for He runs throughout all things and never stays but by His running, fills out all things, as it is written: ‘His Word runneth swiftly’ [Ps. 147,15].”

However, there remains a question, what sort of motion is it, since as Eriugena later asserts “no motion can lack a beginning and an end [514C]” and vice versa - “everything which lacks a beginning and an end necessarily lacks all motion also [516A].” And God indeed lacks the beginning and the end:

God is anarchos, that is, without beginning, because nothing precedes Him or makes Him to be; nor does He have an end because He is infinite: for it is understood that there is nothing after Him since He is the Limit of all things beyond which nothing proceeds. Therefore, He does not admit any motion. [516A]

Eriugena's answer to this question would be that the motion inside God is nothing but his Will, "by which he wills all things to be made" [453A]. Alongside the Will, God's motions are Love, Desire and Seeing. Eriugena uses Maximus' idea that "being Love and Desire God is moved, while as Loveable and Desired He moves to Himself all things which are receptive of love and desire" [521A]. Thus, God moves and is moved through love and desire. He quotes Matt. 10:20 "*non vos estis qui loquimini, sed spiritus patris qui loquitur in vobis*" and claims that it may be expanded on such verbs as Love, Desire, Move and See. He believes that it may be said in the same way as follows: "it is not you who love, who see, who move, but the Spirit of the Father ..." [522BC]. And all these verbs that are predicated of God are one and the same in Him:

Therefore to be and to will and to make and to love and to desire and to see and the other things of this sort which, as we said, can be predicated of Him, are not different things for God, but all these are to be accepted as one and the same in Him, and indicate His ineffable Essence in the way in which it allows itself to be signified. [518D]

Rohstock, speaking about Eriugena's understanding of divine love, says that: "God's activity as divine love is nothing more than his negative self-referentiality. And love must be understood in the sense of this singular relation in order to relate love to God. This is because God's relation of love to himself and to his creatures is indescribable."⁶⁸ This self-referentiality of God is self-knowledge⁶⁹ or self-seeing, or self-love and all the other verbs that are predicated on him. Indeed, Eriugena explicitly says that "God loves himself and is loved by himself in us and in Himself . . . He sees Himself and is seen by Himself in Himself and in us; ... He moves Himself and is moved by Himself in Himself and in us;" [522A] But as a follower of Ps.

⁶⁸ Max Rohstock, "Love in the Thought of John Scotus Eriugena," in *Platonic Love from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. Carl Séan O'Brien and John Dillon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 178. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108525596.014>.

⁶⁹ again, every affirmative notion must be followed with negative notion – e.g from [586C] Eriugena speaks about why "God does not know of himself what he is"

Dionysius' negative theology he immediately adds on each of these sentences that yet God does not Love himself nor is Loved by himself in us, does not See himself nor is Seen by himself in us and does not Move himself nor is Moved by himself in us, because he is more than love and more than seeing and more than movement. [522A] He insists that God must be predicated of with three types of predications: "first by the Cataphatic, that is, by affirmation . . . then we deny by apophatic, that is, by negation . . . then, above everything that is predicated of Him, His superessential nature which creates all things and is not created must be super-essentially more-than-praised." [522B]

Eriugena in his theory of divine motion completely follows Maximus the Confessor⁷⁰, he verbatim quotes Maximus' summary of God's motion: "*movet et movetur, quasi sittens sitiri et amans amari et diligens deligi.*" [520C] He uses similar simile of light and arts to describe this motion like Maximus does in *Ambigua* in the quoted passage.⁷¹ Maximus states: "one might say that because light stirs the power of sight to see, it too must be subject to motion, yet properly speaking it is not moved but rather moves all sight and vision."⁷² Thus, for him here the light is unmoved mover of some sort. However, Eriugena in his simile more explicitly highlights motions of light: 1) he calls *lux sensibilis* to *solare corpus*, which is both *semper immobilis* and *moveri* in the following sense – *ideoque moveri putatur, quia radios oculorum ut ad se moveantur permovet, hoc est oculorum motionis ad videndum causa est.* 2) while light is *semper immobilis*, it is also *vehiculum*. This force spreads the light, that "flowing forth from this vehicle as from an inexhaustible source, so pervades the whole", that it does not leave place into which it moves itself, thus remains *semper immobilis*. [521A-B] Hence, Eriugena tries to describe God as unmovable that moves all things, but also "being Love and Desire God is

⁷⁰ Maximus himself quotes Areopagite.

⁷¹ Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, trans. Nicholas Constas, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 4-5. *Ambiguum* 23, vol. II. "*quasi sittens sitiri*" is from Gregory the Theologian, Or. 40.27 (SC 358:260,1.28).

⁷² Ibid.

moved” [521A]. Furthermore, Eriugena claims that for God it is one and the same to be and to make, that is to say, “God and his making, that is, his action” are “one and simple indivisible thing”. [518A] Therefore, as he asserts:

“God is in all things, that is, that he is the essence of all things. For only He truly exists by Himself, and He alone is everything which in the things that are is truly said to be. For none of the things that are truly exists by itself, but whatever is understood truly (to be) in it receives its true being by participation of Him, the One, Who alone by Himself truly is. [518B]

Such passages, where it is possible to read Eriugena’s thought as if he identifies creator and creation, later in the 13th century became the main reason for condemning his thoughts as pantheist. He elsewhere writes: “We ought not to understand God and the creature as two things distinct from one another, but as one and the same”, or “Immobile He moves into all things and becomes in all things all things.” [678C-D] Werner Beierwaltes lists even more similar passages where literal interpretation would lead us to believing in Eriugena’s pantheism.⁷³ However, it is clear that Eriugena distinguishes transcendent and immanent manifestations of God. As Rohstock says that “God as absolute transcendence surpasses every type of opposition. Rather, immanence is dominated or determined by transcendence. Immanence cannot stand for itself. Interpreting immanence as independent from transcendence holds the risk of identifying God with the creature itself.”⁷⁴ Stephen Gersh in his book *From Iamblichus to Eriugena* nicely puts that for John Scottus “transcendent God is the end of his immanent motion”. Gersh claims that Eriugena is the first writer to fully elaborate the doctrine of transcendent and immanent motions of God. He argues that John synthesizes the Pseudo-Dionysian immanent motion of God with Maximian transcendent motion.⁷⁵ That means Eriugena by insisting on God’s identity

⁷³ Werner Beierwaltes, “The Revaluation of John Scottus Eriugena in German Idealism,” in *The Mind of Eriugena*, ed. John J. O’Meara and Ludwig Bieler (Dublin: Irish University Press, 1973), 193.

⁷⁴ Rohstock, “Love in the Thought of John Scotus Eriugena,” 179.

⁷⁵ Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 249.

with the creation describes God's immanent motion towards himself through creation and by presenting God's transcendence motion, he distinguishes the creator from creation.

In this case, I think it will be reasonable to use the impetus theory of John Philoponus for providing much easier description of Eriugena's doctrine of immanent and transcendent motions of God. Not to claim any direct connection between Philoponus and John Scottus (because Eriugena did not know him), but to make his transcendent and immanent motions easier to understand.

As Sorabji asserts, while Aristotelian projectile theory claimed that the movement of the thrown javelin is somehow ensured by air, Philoponus shifted the idea and suggested that the force of the thrower is directly implanted in the javelin, so there is no need for external powers.⁷⁶ What Philoponus means in his impetus theory is that:

“force (*ἰσχύς*) and process (*ἐνέργεια*) by which a potentially moveable thing is moved, and brought to fullfilment: it is one single force, but gets the origin of its coming forth (*ἀρχή προόδου*) from the mover, and has its completion and perfection and, so to speak, persistence (*μονή*) in the thing moved. For when it has been generated in what is potential, it does not leave it alone, but persists (*μένουσα*), so to speak, and brings it to fullfilment, and the bringing forth of the potentiality is its fullfilment and that is what motion is.”⁷⁷

Moreover, Philoponus extends the theory of imparted force to an activity of luminous bodies. Sambursky says that he is interpreting the light as *kinetic* phenomenon and gives an analogy with the imparted force, or *ἐνέργεια κινητική*.⁷⁸ He also highlights that “Philoponus draws a close analogy between light and the motive force of a projected body. Both are incorporeal and both of them originate from a body-the impetus of the projectile from the

⁷⁶ Richard Sorabji, *Matter, Space and Motion: Theories in Antiquity and Their Sequel* (London: Duckworth, 1988), 227.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 231.

⁷⁸ S. Sambursky, “Philoponus' Interpretation of Aristotle's Theory of Light,” *Osiris* 13 (1958): 120.

projector and light from the luminous or the reflecting body”.⁷⁹ Although Philoponus’ theory here only deals with the physical world, the similarities between Eriugena’s interpretation of divine motion and Philoponus’ idea of motive force clearly correspond to each other. Even the light analogies are the same as we have already seen. Many believe that Philoponus’ impetus theory was inspired by Christian theology, more precisely the Christian notion of the creation in time, that is, the non-eternity of the world. However, Michael Wolff claims that it is rather plausible to say that his Christianity had little to do in originating the theory.⁸⁰ Thirty or forty years after of writing his commentary on Aristotle’s *Physics*, where he developed impetus theory, Philoponus wrote a text *De Opificio Mundi* where he discusses the Creation in the book of Genesis.⁸¹ Sorabji claims that it is the text where Philoponus extends his impetus theory to the creation, that “it is God who implants (ἐνθεῖναι) a motive force (κινετική δύναμις) in the sun, moon and other heavenly bodies at the time of creation”.⁸²

To conclude, I suggest that Eriugena’s transcendent and immanent divine motions could be expressed in the terminology of impetus theory. Not only due to the visible similarities but also due to the overall Neoplatonic tradition that Eriugena follows through Maximus and Ps. Dionysius. For as Sorabji claims that the most important term for us in this context, ‘efficacious power’ (δραστήριος δύναμις), is used in a similar manner by Iamblichus and Proclus.⁸³ Sorabji based on Philoponus’ quotation below asserts that he emphasizes the transmission of the power from the mover to the moved:

“I say that the efficacious power (δραστήριος δύναμις) by which the pupil is affected is one single power, and has its origin in the teacher, but is generated in the pupil, and moves him, and perfects the potential in him, and clearly is in the

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Michael Wolff, “Philoponus and the Rise of Preclassical Dynamics,” in *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science*, ed. Richard Sorabji (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd, 1987), 107-108.

⁸¹ Sorabji, *Matter Space and Motion*, 232.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 231.

person moved, not in the mover, for the mover does not change in respect of this power.”⁸⁴

Here it is helpful to have an extended quotation of Sorabji’s summary of Proclus’ and Philoponus’ ideas about the transmission of the power. Where he clarifies that Philoponus contrary to Proclus admits that transmitted power persists, or finds its own *mone* in the thing that was moved by it:

And it has been well shown by others that this passage of Philoponus is shot through with the concepts of Proclus, who holds that when a higher entity creates an entity lower in the hierarchy, that lower entity must be seen as coming forth (by a *πρόοδος*) from, as returning (by an *ἐπιστροφή*) to, and yet as persisting (by a *μονή*) in the higher entity. Furthermore, the higher entity itself persists (by a *μονή*) undiminished in the process. Yet, as Michael Wolff has further demonstrated, Philoponus transforms Proclus’ ideas by insisting that the transmitted power finds its *mone*, or, as he guardedly says, its *μονή*, so to speak, not in the original source of motion, but in the thing moved instead. He thereby emphasizes the fact of its transmission.⁸⁵

Thus, the main difference between Proclus and Philoponus ideas is that for the latter the transmitted power itself persists in the moved object. In this sense, that I suggest understanding Eriugena’s interpretation of transcendent and immanent divine motions. Thus, to impart impetus theory to the creation, similarly as Sorabji shows in Philoponus’ case, that he extended his own theory on creation in his *De Opificio Mundi*. Another argument for this claim would be the fact that indeed Maximus the Confessor also speaks in the same Neoplatonic terminology. Maximus in *Ambigua ad Iohannem* uses exact same phrasing - *drasterios dunamis* – speaking about the efficacious power of the Cause of everything.⁸⁶ Which Eriugena translates as *actiua nanque subsistens potentia*.⁸⁷ Moreover, Eriugena in his *Periphyseon* gives an

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ Sorabji, *Matter Space and Motion*, 231.

⁸⁶ *On the Difficulties*, Chpt. 23 – *Δραστήριος γὰρ ὑπάρχουσα δύναμις.*

⁸⁷ Maximus Confessor, *Ambigua ad Iohannem iuxta Iohannis Scoti Eriugenae latinam interpretationem*, ed. Édouard Jeuneau (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 1988), 147.

extensive quotation of the same passage from Ambigua, needing support from an authority to claim that “the beginning of natural motions is identical with their end, and differs from it in nothing” [870C]. Eriugena’s translation of the passage would be as follows: “*Actiua [δραστήριος] nanque subsistens [ὑπάρχουσα] potentia [δύναμις] et facit facta divinitus ut principium praemittit, et attrahit mota provide ut finis et finit*” [871A].⁸⁸ And it is the power through which “in all things the divine goodness (*bonitas diuina*) will be active (*operabitur*) and manifest (*apparebit*)” [918C].

As we have already seen above, Philoponus’ idea is that while the efficacious power (*δραστήριος δύναμις*) is transmitted from the mover to the thing that is moved, analogous to the master and disciple relation in transmitting the knowledge, the power persists in the thing that is moved, meanwhile the mover is immutable, “for the mover does not change in respect of this power”.⁸⁹ I claim that it is in this sense that for Eriugena divine power (*diuina virtus*) “is both above all things and is made in all things” [879B]. God for him is a transcendent in the sense that it is beyond the creation, i.e. the thing that is moved, but immanent in the sense that the active power, that is *actiua potentia*, dwells “in the innermost depths of the creature”⁹⁰, or more precisely operates through it. To put it in the framework of Philoponus’ impetus theory, for Eriugena, God is beyond the creature as a thrower of a javelin, but persists in the creature as a divine power (*diuina potentia/uitus*) as the force of the thrower persists in the javelin.

But how does God maintain his immutability, how does he rest in itself while he “runs” (*currens*), for He runs throughout all things and never stays but by His running fills out all

⁸⁸ my translation: as a principle, the active and subsisting power divinely creates all the things that are created and sends forth, and as an end, foreseeably draws back and ceases all the things that are in motion; It is important to acknowledge that Eriugena translates *δύναμις* interchangeably with *potentia* and *virtus*, however, it seems that he uses *potentia* with divinity, while *virtus* with both, that is, divinity and man. *Peri*. I. 486C – Nam cum in omni rationabili intellectualique natura tria inseparabilia semperque incorruptibiliter manentia considentur. ΟΥΣΙΑΝ dico et ΔΥΝΑΜΙΝ ΕΝΕΡΓΕΙΑΝque (hoc est essentiam, virtutem, operationem).

⁸⁹ Sorabji, *Matter Space and Motion*, 231.

⁹⁰ [443C]

things” [552C]. To this question Eriugena would answer with the following analogy about the inexhaustible source of light:

the light itself, flowing forth from this vehicle as from an inexhaustible source, so pervades the whole world by the immeasurable diffusion of its rays that it leaves no place into which it may move itself, and remains ever immutable. [521A]

The analogy perfectly shows the motion of the unmovable. It hints us how to understand the paradox of the divine motion which in the end is not motion at all, or to use Gersh’s terminology, it is the motion of immobility.⁹¹ God’s divine power (*diuina potentia/uirtus*) acts as an inexhaustible source of power that pervades the whole created world, intelligible and sensible, and pervades not as an external actor, so to speak merely as a transcendent operator, but it is his own motion from Himself through Himself to Himself (“*a se ipso in se ipso ad se ipsum*” [453A]). By this transcendent and immanent activity, it may be concluded that “transcendent God is the end of his own immanent motion”.⁹² The conclusion may also be supported by the passage from *Periphyseon* where Eriugena claims “that the beginning of natural motions is identical with their end, and differs from it in nothing” [870C]. Since through the created things God moves himself towards himself, thus, their beginning is his beginning, and their end is his end, it clearly indicates that he is both the beginning and the end of himself.

Another example where impetus theory may be applied is Eriugena’s understanding of eternity and time. Moran in his *Time, Space and Matter* shows that for Eriugena there are two types of time, that is eternal and temporal. He says that for John “creation is a self-manifestation of eternal in time”.⁹³ Thus, eternity is the sort of power that runs through time and makes itself apparent in temporal activity. Moran specifies that time and eternity will reunite by the return

⁹¹ Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 250.

⁹² Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 249.

⁹³ Moran, *Time, Space and matter*, 93.

of all things and that this reunification itself is not a temporal process, but strictly interwoven with the process of divine emanation outwards (*πρόοδος*).⁹⁴ Similar notion of duality of time can be also found in Proclus' works. As Gersh shows, Proclus introduces an immobile time according to its internal activity and time in motion according to its external activity.⁹⁵

To go back to the notions of rest and motion, what we have seen is that at first look Eriugena provides rather paradoxical view that God at the same time is at rest and in motion. However, he clarifies that when we say the words rest and motion towards God, those words “are transferred from the creature by a kind of divine metaphor to the Creator”, because:

From him they begin to run (*ab eo incipiunt currere*) in order that they may be, since He is the Principle of them all; and through Him they are carried towards Him by their natural motion so that in Him they may rest immutably and eternally since He is the End and Rest of them all. For beyond Him there is nothing that they strive for since in Him they find the beginning and the end of their motion. God, therefore, is called He Who Runs (*currens*) not because He runs beyond Himself, Who is always immutably at rest in Himself, Who fills out all things; but because He makes all things run (*omnia currere facit*) from a state of non-existence into one of existence. [453B]

I want to argue here that the invisible motion inside God is also implied in the terminology Eriugena uses concerning *creatio ex nihilo*. I suggest that *coitu* and *concursu*, mentioned in the quotation above [712A]⁹⁶, bear the meaning of motion and rest. Although the dictionary definition would also be *to mingle* or *to coincide*, both words consist of the verbs that describe motion (*curro* – *to run*; *eo* – *to walk*). Moreover, we have seen that even God himself is noted by the word *currens* – He Who Runs, implying his divine motion “*a se ipso in se ipso ad se*

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁵ Stephen Gersh, “Per se ipse,” in *Reading Plato, Tracing Plato: From Ancient Commentary to Medieval Reception*, Variorum Collected Studies Series (London: Routledge, 2005), 1–15. Originally published in *Eriugena: East and West*, ed. Bernard McGinn and Willemien Otten (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), IX, 370.

⁹⁶ [712A] : . . . but when by their invisible motion they [simple elements] join together (*coitu*) in the right proportions they make all the sensible bodies, both celestial and aerial and watery and earthly . . . from the highest to the lowest are made from their concurrence (*concursu*), . . .

ipsum [453A]”, that means motion from Himself, in Himself and towards Himself. Although, Eriugena does not clarify what is implied in the word *omnia* above, I assume, that he thinks of everything that is moved by God, including the four elements too. To conclude, I suggest that “the invisible motion” of the four elements should be understood in the terminology of *currens* and that by their concourse (*concurso*) bodily things are created and among them, of course, human body too. Moreover, Eriugena explicitly says that four elements subsist in primordial causes:

the four elements of this world subsist in the primordial causes. For they are the causes not of some but universally of all things visible and invisible, and nothing in the order of all the natures is perceived by the sense or reason or intellect that does not proceed from them and causally subsist in them. [664A]

And following Ps. Dionysius⁹⁷, the primordial causes themselves are divine volitions (Θεῖα Θελήματα - *id est divinae voluntates*) [529B] which is not yet clear for me whether these divine volitions are one and the same as God’s Will, or something slightly different. In any circumstances they are connected with each other, and I will discuss this subject later in detail. However, here I would like to show that the divine volitions in which, as we have already seen, subsist the four elements, are the causes of the motion. Eriugena claims that in God there is no motion “except that of His Will, by which He wills all the things to be made” [453A]. Thus, the “invisible motion” that moves the four elements is the motion of God himself - he wills, hence moves Himself. But again, this motion does not imply any alienation to himself, it is not a linear motion.⁹⁸ Eriugena uses an extensive quotation from *De divinis nominibus* to describe

⁹⁷ Ps. Dionysius, *On the divine names*, Ch. V, sec. VIII.

⁹⁸ [523B] : “Again: even when the theologians say that the Immutable goes forth into all things and is mutable, must not this also be divinely understood? For that motion of His is to be piously understood not as a carrying away, or as an alienation from oneself, or as an exchanging, or as a turning round, or as a motion in place, not in a straight line, not in a circle, not in a combination of the two, not intelligible, not psychic, not physical; but as God’s bringing into essence and containing all things, and providing in every way for all things, and being present to all things by His immeasurable circumambience of them, and by His providential outgoings (*processionibus*) and operations (*operationibus*) towards all existing things.”

divine motion and rest. He quotes that “motion must be understood as His steady procession and fruitful rest, and motion in a circle as His self-identity holding together the middle and the extreme parts” [523B].

In his translation of *De opificio hominis*, which he names as *De Imagine*, Eriugena uses *concursum* to translate Gregory of Nyssa’s *συνδρομή*, both in the 24th (about the creation of body) and 27th chapters (about the resurrection). For the similarity of the used terminology, I suggest that the resurrection similarly to the creation of the body, implies some kind of motion. Whether they are the same or simply resemble each other, I will discuss it later.

Chapter 3: Return – Reverse Motion

Gregory of Nyssa in the 27th chapter of *De Opificio Hominis* gives a very short description of the process of resurrection. He claims that after the dissolution of the body, the soul “attracts again to itself that which is its own and properly belongs to it,” therefore, “in the bodies that rise again there will be a return from the common stock to the individual” and everyone will be recognizable as Lazarus after death.⁹⁹ He uses a noun ἡ συνδρομή that derives from the verb συντρέχω (τίς πόνος . . . τῇ θεῇ δυνάμει κωλύσαι τῶν οἰκείων τὴν συνδρομήν)¹⁰⁰, that is exact equivalent for *concurro*. Eriugena speaking of bodily resurrection follows Gregory. He quotes exactly the same part from the 27th chapter of *De Imagine* and highlights that “the soul cannot forget or cease to know her parts” and “in the restoration of man to the unity of his nature they are to be recalled, so that at the time of the Resurrection the soul will receive the whole of that which had been subject to her” [802C]. The description of bodily resurrection to some extent mirrors Eriugena’s description of creation of the visible bodies by the concurrence of the simple elements. He says that the end of the life is the beginning of the next:

The end of this present life, then, is the beginning of the next; and the death of the flesh is the token of the restoration of our nature, and the Return to our pristine integrity. [876A]

We have already seen that the *beginning* also implies the motion. Hence, if the end of the present life is the beginning of the next life, it should be a motion towards the final end, that is “the Return to our pristine integrity”. Moreover, Eriugena himself asserts: “the dissolution of the body is the starting point of the Return of nature [875C].” Édouard Jeuneau calls it *reverse*

⁹⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Human Image of God*, ed. and trans. John Behr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 283-285.

¹⁰⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Human Image of God*, ed. and trans. John Behr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 282.

movement, he uses the term to describe the process of the return, or the reunification of multitude into the simple Unity which is in God.¹⁰¹ Eriugena's idea of purgation of the soul in temporal interval (*spatium temporale*) [858A] makes the idea of the reverse movement during the resurrection process even more congruent. Jeauneau only slightly touches the subject; he only tries to put forward Eriugena's idea about purgation in the context of Origen's thought. However, he does not elaborate his discussion.¹⁰² As we have already seen "no motion can lack a beginning and an end [514B]" and the beginning and the end implies the temporal interval as well. Thus, the temporal interval (*spatium temporale*) of Eriugena's purgation can be identified as the time during which the reverse movement of the body takes place. That is, the end (dissolution of the body), which is actually the new beginning, gathering four elements and the end, unification with one, thus the Return.

Eriugena summarizes his ideas about the resurrection into the five steps. The first is the dissolution of the body into the four elements. The second is when "each shall take his own body out of the common fund of the four elements [876A]." Which Eriugena takes almost verbatim from his translation of *De Imagine*:

In Periphyseon: Secunda in resurrectione implebitur, quando unusquisque suum proprium corpus ex communione quattuor elementorum recipiet. [876A]

In De Imagine: Non igitur extra credibile est credere ex communione ad proprium resolutionem resurgentium corporum fieri.¹⁰³ [225D]

This second stage is the last point where Eriugena agrees with Gregory of Nyssa, since then he shifts to Maximus the Confessor and Gregory the Theologian, and I will return to this matter

¹⁰¹ Jeauneau, "From Origen's *Periarchon*", 140.

¹⁰² *ibid.*, 179.

¹⁰³ Érigène, *Carmina, De Imagine*, 144.

later when I discuss the final three stages of Return. Here I want to highlight that one must not understand the resurrected body as a truly physical individual.

Eriugena in the second book of *Periphyseon* asserts that Christ resurrected in his bodily appearance “so that their faith in the resurrection might be confirmed. For they would not recognize Him if they did not see the shape that was known to them [538A].” While from the second book one might assert that Eriugena clearly highlights Christ’s physical appearance after his resurrection, from the fifth book Eriugena makes clear that Christ resurrected in a spiritual body and appeared to his disciples in this way, that body is similar to an angelic body and human being also will resurrect in a spiritual body of this sort.¹⁰⁴ Eriugena then asserts that “for each man contains hidden within himself the reason of his body, into which this mortal and earthly body shall be transformed at the resurrection, and in which it will become similar to the angelic body [994A].” The angelic bodies are not “material bodies composed of the qualities of the elements of the physical world, but spiritual bodies that have been made one with Mind” as Eriugena describes.¹⁰⁵ Thus, one might assume that according to him, humans should resurrect in a spiritual body that does not have any corporeal entity. However, it is not entirely true. Gregory of Nyssa too, based on Matthew [20: 30] and Luke [22: 35-36], highlights the resemblance between the humans and angels in the moment of resurrection:

Now the grace of the resurrection promises us nothing other than the restoration of the fallen to the primordial state; for the grace looked for is a kind of ascent to the first life, bringing back again to Paradise him who was cast out from it. If then the life of those restored is akin to that of the angels, it is clear that the mode of life before the transgression was something angelic, and hence our ascent to the primordial condition of life is likened to the angels.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon: The Division of Nature*, trans. I. P. Sheldon-Williams, rev. John J. O’Meara (Montréal: Éditions Bellarmin; Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1987), 680.

¹⁰⁵ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, 680, col. 993D.

¹⁰⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Human Image*, 233.

However, we have already seen that he believes that the soul “attracts again to itself that which is its own and properly belongs to it.”¹⁰⁷ Although the resurrected body for Gregory of Nyssa “is compared to the angels”, it does not mean that the body loses all that he attracts again from the dissolved body. For Nyssa resurrected body preserves its ‘physical’ individuality of some sort. Even Eriugena adds to his own idea about the angelic bodies that:

These bodies are not fantasies, they are real. There can be no doubt that the spiritual bodies are true bodies, proceeding from genuine causes. It was in such a body that we believe Christ to have appeared to His disciples after His Resurrection — not that this Body was different from the body that was born of the Virgin, crucified and raised again from the dead: it was the same body, but from being mortal it had become immortal, from being animal it had become spiritual, and from being earthly it had become heavenly. [993D]

At this stage of the process of the Return, Eriugena entirely agrees with the ‘Gregory’ (in fact Nyssa). However, if Gregory does not take further motion into the process, since for him it ends with the “return to the first life”¹⁰⁸, Eriugena takes it on another scale, following Maximus the Confessor and Gregory the Theologian. Which means the additional three stages of the Return.

1. Unity with One

Before discussing the last stages of the Return, it is important to understand why Eriugena follows Maximus and Gregory the Theologian. First of all, he mixes up Gregory of Nyssa and the Theologian, he perceives them as one person. In the passage where Eriugena speaks about

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 283.

¹⁰⁸ To understand Gregory’s notion of “The first life” from the quotation, See. Gerhart B. Ladner, “The Philosophical Anthropology of Saint Gregory of Nyssa,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 12 (1958): 59–94, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1291117>. ; Giulio Maspero, “Anthropology,” in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. Lucas F. Mateo Seco and Giulio Maspero, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 37–47.

the *double creation* of Gregory of Nyssa, he mixes up two Gregories and claims that “none of the Greeks has higher authority in expounding the Holy Scripture than Gregory the Theologian” [804D]. One of the clearest examples of his confusion is as follows: “Again, Gregory of Nyssa, who is also called Nazianzen, brother germane of the aforesaid Basil [735D].” For him Gregory of Nyssa is one of the highest authorities, thus, Gregory Nazianzus too and I suggest that one must read *Periphyseon* always keeping in mind that for Eriugena two Gregories actually are one and the same as I pointed above. He is aware of the works of Gregory the Theologian through the Maximus’ quotations in *De Ambigua*, which he had translated himself and I think that the main source of his confusion stands on the passage where Maximus introduces him as a brother of Basil of Caesarea speaking about the resurrection. “*iste et magnus magister, in epitaphio quod est in Caesarium fratrem suum de resurrectione, ait...*”¹⁰⁹ – translates Eriugena. Now, what the *Magnus Magister* says here, or more precisely, what is quoted by Maximus, is crucial to distinguish between the influences of the two Gregories on Eriugena regarding the Return. In the first part of the passage their ideas match. “And a little later, the soul will receive that which was born with her, namely, the fleshly body” – says Gregory the Theologian. Then he adds:

And as the body, which was born with the soul, shares her labours, so it shall be wholly absorbed into her from its mortal and passing life and partake of her joys and, liberated from this mortal and transitory life, shall be with her one soul, one mind and one God. [877C-D]

Maximus adds his comment:

So, at the moment of the Resurrection, in accordance with a happy future conversion, through Grace of the Incarnate God in the Holy Spirit, the flesh will be absorbed by the soul in spirit, and the soul in God, Who is truly the Life, and

¹⁰⁹ Maximus Confessor, *Ambigua ad Iohannem*, 141

the whole soul shall manifestly possess Him as the most unique Whole of all things. [878A]

It is clear that Eriugena's main focus here is on the absorption of the body "by the soul in spirit, and the soul in God". That is what he stresses out in the last stages of the Return:

The third when body is changed into soul. The fourth when soul, and in fact the whole human nature, shall revert to its Primordial Causes, which ever and immutably abide in God. The fifth when that spirit with its Causes is absorbed into God as air is absorbed in light. For when there is nothing but God alone, God will be all things in all things. [876B]

However, later Eriugena again quotes Maximus, stressing that the human nature wholly remains in the process of absorption. "The whole man remains in soul and body according to his nature" and "the properties of the natures will not destroy the unification; the unification will not destroy the properties of the natures"¹¹⁰ – asserts Eriugena through Nutritior. However, Alumnus observes a problem in the discourse of the unification of body with the soul and the soul with God himself. He is perplexed how two quotes of Maximus the confessor can be reconciled. How should we understand together these two ideas - "the flesh will be absorbed by the soul in spirit, and the soul in God" and "The whole man remains in his nature as body and soul, and yet the whole is in body and soul made God through Grace"?¹¹¹ Thus, Eriugena has to solve the problem of the nature of the body and soul. How can these two be unified in the manner that it does not oppose the reason?

First of all, Eriugena presents explanatory *similes* to show how the absorption happens in a way that neither the body nor the soul cease their substances. Like air does not cease its

¹¹⁰ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, 546, col. 880A.

¹¹¹ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, 546–47, col 880D.

substance in the light, or like any metal, melted in the fire, only seems to have become into the fire, “It is in the same manner that the substance of the body will pass into the soul, not so that that which it is, shall perish, but so that it shall be preserved in the better essence”¹¹² – believes Eriugena. However, it is not a sufficient, he feels obliged to present the philosophical argument too. He claims that it is the *genus* in which the body and the soul unify without “confusion, mixture and composition”¹¹³.

Is it not a fact that in one species there are many individuals, and in one genus many species, and in the one essence many genera, but in such a way that, as true reason teaches us, in the single οὐσία each genus preserves its proper principles distinguished from those of another, not confused nor mixed nor compounded together, but unified so as to form, as it were, a one which is both multiple and simple? And the same is true of the species in the genus, and the most special individuals in the species. For each one of these severally possesses both its own property and unification (with the rest), without any composition. [881C]

Thus, he claims that the body and the soul are one in their genus, like Socrates and Plato, or as it is in the Christian tradition, Peter and Paul are the same in their human nature. But for this claim Eriugena first needs to assert that the body and the soul are of one genus and that is intelligible. And he makes that assertion earlier, before the above-quoted passage. He shortly puts as a fact that “nothing exists in human nature which is not spiritual and intelligible, for even the substance of the body is intelligible”¹¹⁴. In this way he assures the preservation of the idea of absorption without the confusion of the substances. Eriugena’s premise that there is nothing in human nature that is not intelligible comes from Gregory of Nyssa. He in the first book of *Periphyseon* suggests not to be surprised “that bodies are created from incorporeal causes and are resolved into them again” [501D]. And then introduces an extensive quotation

¹¹² Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, 545, col. 879B.

¹¹³ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, 547, col.881C.

¹¹⁴ Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, 544, col.879A.

from the 24th chapter of Nyssa's *De Imagine* where he explains how bodies are created from the concourse of the incorporeal things:

If, then, colour is (solely) intelligible, and if solidity is (solely) intelligible, and quantity, and the other peculiarities of this kind, and if when any of these is withdrawn from the subject the whole concept of the body shall disappear as well, it will follow (for us) to assume that, of those things whose absence we find to be the cause of the dissolution of the body, the coming together creates its material nature. [502D]

Hence, this argument opens a door for Eriugena to easily explain the absorption of the resurrected body into the soul, the soul into the primordial causes and the soul with its own causes into God. However, it should be again highlighted that Eriugena's five stages of the reverse motion of the body in the process of resurrection and absorption into the One is constructed upon his mistake mixing up two Gregories, Nyssa and Nazianzen. As it has been shown the first two stages not only resemble Nyssa's notion of bodily resurrection but uses the same terminology, while describing the last three stages Eriugena turns to the ideas and terminology of Nazianzen. However, to accommodate bodily resurrection with its absorption by the intelligibles, that is the soul, the principles and the One, Eriugena turns back to Nyssa's identification of the body as the concourse of intelligible things. Eriugena's knowledge of Nyssa's work is limited to *De Imagine*.¹¹⁵ Where Gregory deals with the resurrection in the 27th chapter and clearly stops his investigation at the point of the bodily resurrection. He does not speak about its absorption by the One. Here it is also crucial to mention the vast similarities in the notion of bodily resurrection between Nyssa and Nazianzen. Gregory the Theologian in his funeral oration for his brother also speaks about regaining the bodily parts after the dissolution:

¹¹⁵ Joel Irving Barstad, *Body, Soul, and Image: Gregory of Nyssa's Influence on Eriugena* (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 1997), 2.

And a little later, the soul will receive (*receptura*) that which was born with her (*congenitum carnale*), namely, the fleshly body (*corpus uidelicet*), and therewith contemplates the things which are Yonder, that is, in the future life. [877C]

However, it is visible that the terminology is rather different from Nyssa's and does not imply the details about the concourse of the four elements. Eriugena needs to use Gregory of Nyssa's phrasing to show more clearly how "the end of this present life, then, is the beginning of the next" [876A]. He needs to use the same terminology for both the creation and the resurrection to highlight the similarities between the two processes, and in this I claim that he follows again Gregory of Nyssa. Eriugena describes the creation of the body as the concourse of the accidents, which happens by the invisible motion I have already discussed in the chapter about the Motion:

. . . but when by their invisible motion they [simple elements] join together (coitu) in the right proportions they make all the sensible bodies, both celestial and aerial and watery and earthly . . . from the highest to the lowest are made from their concourse (concurso), . . . [712A]

and mirrors the creation with the resurrection, that resembles the same invisible motion as it is present in the creation process. First stage is the dissolution of the body into the four elements and then –

The second is fulfilled at the Resurrection when each shall take his own body out of the common fund of the four elements. [876A]

It seems that Eriugena here highlights not only the consistency of the motion but also the consistency of the notion of dialectical procession and return in nature. Namely, that from the unity of the body is dissolved into multiplicity and regains itself later by the return of "his own body out of the common fund of the four elements" [876A]. I would suggest that due to the consistency of his thought about the motion, Eriugena introduces the possibility of purgation

after the dissolution of the body. Since in the process of regaining the four elements from the common fund implies motion, it also implies the presence of the temporal interval (*spatium temporale*). Eriugena, quotes *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* where Maximus explains how the body is purged through practical philosophy (*per practicam philosophiam*) through the lifetime [858A]. And straight after the quotation Eriugena turns to his own theory of afterlife purgation. At the end of the quotation saying “thus far Maximus” (*hactenus Maximus*) Eriugena indicates that from now on he introduces something new by transferring Maximus idea to the afterlife purgation as well:

Thus far Maximus. Now I think that the days of the life of the mind in which it tolls 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 (*spatium temporale*) 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 in company, and in the other life after the death of the body, 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 the bodies and the day of judgment. These then are the days in which the mind eats the earth of its heart, that is, performs the function of purgation. For after the end of the sensibles we read that no further purgation will be practised for then will have occurred the Return of nature to its original purity. [858A-B]

This passage supports my argument about the necessity of the existence of a temporal interval after the dissolution of the body till the final return. Here Eriugena clearly uses the language which indicates the movement through time after the dissolution and this movement begins with the dissolution of the body and the process of the regaining the four elements.¹¹⁶ We have already seen that “no motion can lack a beginning and an end” [514B] and everything that has the beginning has the end as well. And the purgation process clearly has a beginning

¹¹⁶ Again, let us remember Eriugena saying that “The end of this present life, then, is the beginning of the next”. [876A]

and an end, which are the dissolution of the body and “the Return of nature to its original purity”. Moreover, Eriugena himself claims elsewhere that “the dissolution of the body is the starting point of the Return of nature” [875C]. Meanwhile the usage of such terminology as temporal interval (*spatium temporale*) or “these are then days” (*Hii sunt igitur dies*) clearly implies temporal understanding. Thus, the motion of the bodily parts, first dissolution and then regathering must imply the movement through time. However, it is difficult to claim whether Eriugena thinks that it is exact same time as in corporeal life or something different. If we have to understand afterlife temporal interval as a natural time, then arises the problem of afterlife space as well. Because elsewhere Eriugena explicitly asserts that there is no motion through space that lacks motion in time and if something lacks motion through space also must lack motion in time, because they either are together, or none of them are present, for they are inseparable from each-other [1001A].¹¹⁷ Gersh when discussing the return in *Periphyseon* also deals with space and time in that process. He shows that Eriugena indicates non-spatiality and non-temporality in return. However, Gersh is careful saying that “human beings achieve a transcendence of the spatio-temporal sphere *at least* by the end of the process of return . . .”¹¹⁸ He clearly speaks about the final stage of return and avoids the discussion about the first two stages, which as already has been shown is connected with purgation through some sort of temporal interval (*spatium temporale*). Gersh by using an adverbial phrase *at least* I think preserves the possibility of “spatio-temporal sphere” in the first stages of the process of return, although he does not mention it at all. In general, to the best of my knowledge scholars do not touch the subject of purgation and its possible temporality. The exception would be Édouard

¹¹⁷ [1001A] : Hoc enim dixi graecorum auctoritatem sequens, quae incunctanter astruit omne quod localiter mouetur temporaliter moueri. Omne autem, quod locali motu caret, sequitur temporali etiam carere. Haec enim duo (locum dico et tempo) aut simul erunt aut auferentur, quoniam a se inuicem disgregari non patiuntur.

¹¹⁸ Stephen Gersh, “The Structure of the Return in Eriugena’s *Periphyseon*,” in *Reading Plato, Tracing Plato: From Ancient Commentary to Medieval Reception, Variorum Collected Studies Series* (London: Routledge, 2005), 109–126. Originally published in *Eriugena: East and West*, ed. Bernard McGinn and Willemien Otten (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), XI, 116–117.

Jeauneau. However, he only mentions the passage in a different context and without any further elaboration on its philosophical explanation.¹¹⁹

Thus, if I am correct and Eriugena's *spatium temporale* during the purgation process implies the motion in time, or at least spiritual time of some sort, which Gersh would call "temporal or quasi-temporal"¹²⁰, then it would be also true to say that the motion during the first two stages of return is as real manifestation of God's motion as it was during the creation. That is to say, the concourse of the four cosmic elements from common fund is not a metaphorical motion but the natural one. And the *rest* of the created things that are in motion dwells in God himself, since -

through Him they are carried towards Him by their natural motion so that in Him they may rest immutably and eternally since He is the End and Rest of them all.
[453B]

But what exactly does it mean to "rest immutably and eternally" in God? To achieve that condition there still takes place that quasi-temporal motion, as Gersh calls it.¹²¹ When Eriugena distinguishes five stages of the return, he summarizes that on the fourth stage "the soul and in fact the whole human nature (*tota hominis natura*), shall revert to its Primordial Causes, which ever and immutably abide in God" and after that on the fifth stage the human nature with its own causes will be moved (*mouebitur*) in God, as light moves in the air [876A]. Primordial causes themselves eternally subsist in the Word of God, and as Eriugena says they are called divine volitions (*diuinae uoluntates*) because everything that God wished to make, he made in them primordially and causally.¹²² Since the primordial causes of all things were made

¹¹⁹ Jeauneau, "From Origen's *Periarchon*", 179-180.

¹²⁰ Gersh, "The Structure of the Return," XI, 118.

¹²¹ However, Gersh uses the term *quasi-temporal* for the whole process of the return, while I would use it only for the first two stages.

¹²² [635C]: For concerning the primordial causes of all things it was agreed between us that they were made by the Father in His only-begotten Word, that is, in His Wisdom, all together and once for all and eternally, so that as that Wisdom of the Father is eternal, and coeternal with the Father, so also all things which are made in it are

eternally, everything that was made in primordial causes also must be made eternally. Indeed, Eriugena asserts that “the universe of the whole creation is eternal in the Word of God” [639C]. Thus, what may be asserted is that everything that will return to their primordial causes, will actually return to their own essence, that is *οὐσία*. For every creature must return to its reasons (*rationes*) and since the end of every movement is in its beginning, the whole of the sensible world will return and find its rest “into those *reasons* whence it sprang”, since those reasons (*rationes*) are causes of all things [866D]. Eriugena explicitly claims that Greek *φύσις* that in Latin would be *natura* is used for corruptible material manifestations of creatures. While *οὐσία*, that in Latin would be *essentia*, is used for every creature, visible and invisible, and indicates the essence of the creature, that nor diminishes in size, nor increases and is incorruptible [867A-B]. Thus, the return of all the things means the return to their own reasons where subsist their essences. Therefore, since the primordial causes, i.e. the reasons of all the things are eternally created in the Word and in those reasons subsist essences of all the things, Eriugena allows himself to assert that “all things are not only eternal in the Word of God but also are the Word itself” [641B]. To highlight the unity and at the same time the multiplicity of the things in the Word, Eriugena says – “the Word Itself and the multiple and most primary reason of the whole created universe are one and the same thing” [642A].¹²³ As Moran shows Eriugena takes the idea of *simplex et multiplex* from Maximus’ *Ambigua*. He presents examples where Eriugena

eternal, except that they are all made in that which is not made but is begotten and is their maker; for in the establishing of the universal creature, as the will of the Father and the Son is one and the same, so is the operation one and the same. Therefore, in their primordial causes all things are eternal in the Wisdom of the Father but not coeternal with it; for the cause precedes the effects.

[616B]: They are also customarily called by the philosophers *θελήματα*, that is, divine volitions, because everything that God wished to make He made in them primordially and causally; and the things that are to have been made in them before the ages, and therefore they are said to be the principles of all things because all things whatsoever that are perceived or understood whether in the visible or in the invisible creation subsist by participation in them, while they themselves are participations of the one Cause of all things, namely, the most high and holy Trinity

¹²³ [642A]: *Possumus etiam sic dicere: Simplex et multiplex rerum omnium principalissima ratio deus verbum est.*

identifies the primordial causes as *unum, simplex atque individuum* [624B], that means that causes of all things are complex unity (*unum multiplex*) [674C].¹²⁴ Hence, individual reasons (*rationes*), that themselves correspond with essences (*essentiae*) are understood as simple unity. Therefore, the return of all the things to their own essences implies the return to the Word itself as well. And it is in this sense that things do not cease their substance in the process of return through the reunification with their Cause. When Carlos Steel explains the paradoxical connection between the verbs *perire* (to perish) and *permanere* (to remain), asserts that “to cease to be (*perire*) in this corporeal mode is for a thing not to pass away to nothing, but to return to its intelligible essence”.¹²⁵ It is Alumnus who questions the consistency of the idea about perishing and remaining at the same time. “These two processes, perishing (*perire*) and abiding (*permanere*), appear to be mutually contradictory: how can that which abides perish or that which perishes abide?”[910B] – asks the disciple. He is interested whether whole sensible world will perish and will be reduced to the nothingness out of which it was created, or it will remain and endure. The master answers that nothing can perish that eternally subsists in the word:

Have you not just admitted that your chief reason for certainty about the eternity of the Causes was the fact that they were created in the Word of God? For (you argued) nothing can perish which is contained within the Everliving Word, in Whom all things are eternal life, subject to no corruption or decay. [910C]

Thus, every creature will return not to nothing, but to something that is to its essence or cause. In the chapter about nothingness, I’ve discussed the part where Eriugena abandons his initial claim that every visible thing is created out of nothing, or rather shifts his explanation, not to contradict himself but to show another standpoint for observation. Namely, he follows

¹²⁴ Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 75.

¹²⁵ Carlos Steel in *History and Eschatology in John Scottus Eriugena and His Time*, “The Return of The Body Into The Soul”, 2002, 588.

his own logic that every corporeal thing is created of coming together (*coitu*) of the intelligible things, such as “quantities and qualities, shapes or species, the colors, the dimensions of length, breadth, height, and together with these the places and times, which if you withdraw, there will be no bodies;” and all of these intelligible things are composed (*componi*) by the simple four elements[663A-B]. Then Nutritor addresses Alumnus’ concern that although he follows the reasoning and understand how all the things are created by the concourse of the four elements, but he cannot see why how actually they are “made not of nothing but from something”, because he thinks that although everything is created from the four elements, they themselves are made from nothing:¹²⁶

What then are you going to say of the primordial causes of which we have spoken much? For it must be asked why they are called causes if they do not proceed into their effects. For if all bodies (come) from the elements but the elements from nothing, their cause will seem to be nothing and not those primordial causes which God the Father made in His Word: and if so, nothing will not be nothing, but it will be a cause. [663C]

Hence, for Eriugena the four simple elements subsist in primordial causes, and they process from the causes which are eternally made in the Word. Indeed, he makes Alumnus to agree on this subject. “I am forced to admit that the four elements of this world subsist in primordial causes” [664A] – says Alumnus; and this admission leads to the main point of Eriugena, where he asserts that – “all composite and corruptible bodies, which occupy the lowest place in all the natures, are from something, not from nothing” [664A].

¹²⁶ Alumnus [663B]: I will not deny it. But I would say that these elements which are simple in themselves and by their composition make all bodies are made from nothing.

[663B]: *Non negabo. Sed illa elementa per se simplicia suaque compositione omnium corporum effectiua de nihillo esse facta dixerim.*

To conclude, if all the corporeal things are created from something and not nothing, and meanwhile they are about to return to something and not nothing, it may be said that their natural movement is from something to something. One might have a question then why this thesis is called *ex nihilo ad nihilum*. If everything is said to be coming from something to something, what is the notion of nothingness. Indeed, Eriugena deals with this paradox again with Ps. Dionysian negative theology. For him divine nothingness is nothing else but transcendent God.¹²⁷ Alumnus begs his teacher to explain what the holy theology means by the name “nothing” and he gets the following answer:

so long as it [Divine Goodness] is understood to be incomprehensible by reason of its transcendence (*per excellentiam*) it is not unreasonably called “Nothing”, but when it begins to appear in its theophanies it is said to proceed, as it were, out of nothing into something (*ex nihilo in aliquid*), and that which is properly thought of as beyond all essence is also properly known in all essence, and therefore every visible and invisible creature can be called a theophany, that is, a divine apparition. [681A]

Hence, here we are back again to transcendent and immanent motions of God. It is his procession from himself that brings essence to all things and in this sense after proceeding from being beyond all essence he may be called with affirmative terms, since he manifests himself through creation and all the visible and invisible creatures are rightly called as his theophanies, or as Eriugena says in the next paragraph, they get “name of manifest theophanies” (*manifestissimarum theophaniarum nomen*) [681B]. Eriugena clarifies that the Divine Goodness is called *nihilum* for the reason that it is beyond of all the essences, but it “descends from the negation of all essences into the affirmation of the essence of the whole universe; from itself into itself (*a se ipsa in se ipsam*), as though from nothing into something (*ueluti ex nihilo in aliquid*), from non-essentiality into essentiality, from formlessness into innumerable

¹²⁷ Duclow, Donald F. “Divine Nothingness and Self-Creation in John Scotus Eriugena.” *The Journal of Religion* 57, no. 2 (April 1977): 109–23. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1201686>.

forms and species.” [681C]. We are again with the same terminology as was discussed in the chapter about the motion. It is all about the divine motion from himself into himself (*a se ipsa in se ipsam*), and by this motion, the transcendent manifests itself in the creation. Thus, this movement appears as if it were from nothing (*ex nihilo*) to something (*in aliquid*). Duclow also summarizes this subject similarly: “Creation *ex nihilo* is therefore nothing other than creation *ex Deo*: it is the manifestation, the procession of transcendent negativity into the differentiated otherness of being and essence.”¹²⁸ And *something* in this passage is identified as all the essences of the things created in the primordial causes. To conclude with Eriugena’s words himself, Divine Goodness (*divina bonitas*) when it is considered above all things, it is regarded as non-being (*non esse*) and absolute nothing (*omnino nihil esse*), however, when it is in all things:

it both is and is said to be (*et est et dicitur esse*), because it is the Essence of the whole universe and its substance and its genus and its species and its quantity and its quality and the bond between all things and its position and habit and place and time and action and passion and everything whatsoever that can be understood by whatever sort of intellect in every creature and about every creature. [681D]

And when it descends into all the visible and invisible forms, it looks back to itself (*ad se ipsum*) as its own formation (*ueluti ad formationem suam*) [681D]. Thus, the movement expressed in terms of *ex nihilo ad nihilum*, would describe the transcendent divine motion from God to himself and movement expressed in terms of *ex aliquo ad aliquid*, that is from something to something, would describe the immanent motion of divine goodness, that is its manifestation through the creation. This something (*aliquid*) is exactly the same something (*aliquid*), when Eriugena asserts that “all composite and corruptible bodies, which occupy the

¹²⁸ Ibid.

lowest place in all the natures, are from something, not from nothing” (*de aliquo esse, non autem de nihilo*) [664A], because their reasons subsist in primordial causes.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I dealt with Eriugena's understanding of *creatio ex nihilo* and his ideas of the Neoplatonic motions of procession (*processio*) from God and return (*reditus*) to God in his main work, the *Periphyseon*. I followed the influence and differences of three Greek Fathers on Eriugena's understanding of motion through creation and return – Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory the Theologian and Maximus the Confessor.

By highlighting Eriugena's mistake in confusing the two Gregories (Nyssen and Nazianzen) I suggested that one must read the *Periphyseon* keeping that mistake in mind. Whenever Eriugena mentions either of the two Gregories, we must acknowledge that he reconciles two thoughts into one. With this assumption I showed that the process of return is not influenced only by Nazianzen but is also heavily dependent on Nyssen's thoughts.

In the first chapter about *Nihilum* I have introduced Eriugena's five modes of *being* and *non-being*. I showed that for him God is *nihilum* only due to his excellence (*per excellentiam*), however, through his own manifestation into the creation He may be said *to be* (*et est et dicitur esse* [681D]). Thus, whether God is predicated of as *being* or *non-being* depends on the perspective of the observer. Eriugena by changing his own positions as an inquirer first introduces *creatio ex nihilo* as creation out of absolute nothingness, that is God. Creation happens from nothing to something (*ueluti ex nihilo in aliquid*) through God's theophanies in the created things. Later shifting to another mode of *beings* and *non-beings*, namely introducing the ideas of primordial causes and formless matter, he asserts that "all composite and corruptible bodies, which occupy the lowest place in all the natures, are from something, not from nothing" (*de aliquo esse, non autem de nihilo*) [664A]. I argued in the chapter that notions *ex nihilo* and *de aliquo* do not contradict each other in Eriugena's dialectics. I claim that both

are one and the same notion, though seen from different viewpoints, namely, Eriugena's different modes of *beings* and *non-beings*.

In the second and third chapters, I analyze Eriugena's thought on the divine motion - not as physical displacement but as a metaphysical expression of divine activity. Since for Eriugena, all motion has a beginning and an end, and vice versa, everything that has a beginning, and an end is motion, we can claim that the Return is a part of the Creation, and both are the divine motion itself. They are the Beginning and the End. It is a motion *ex nihilo ad nihilum*. God starts the invisible motion, moves towards himself and the motion ends in himself - "*a se ipso in se ipso ad se ipsum*". He is the beginning of all things and "He is the End and Rest of them all [453B]."

This is the end of all things visible and invisible, for all visible things shall pass into intelligibles, and all intelligibles into God Himself. But, as we have often said, this wonderful and ineffable unification does not involve the confusion of the individual essences and substances. [894A]

When I say *ex nihilo ad nihilum*, all I mean is from God to God. For, it is clear, that Eriugena believes in the return and unification with God in the manner that nothing ceases its "individual essences and substances", thus one should also argue that it is not *nihilum*, but something (*aliquid*). However, what I mean in *ex nihilo ad nihilum* is God's movement in himself towards himself.

God is immutable, but His essence is expressed in his motion through creation. This paradox is resolved by distinguishing between God's transcendent rest and His immanent motion. He remains unchanged, yet through His motion all things come into being and are sustained. I employed John Philoponus' impetus theory as a conceptual framework to clarify this dynamic. Just as a thrown object carries the enduring force of its thrower, creation carries the enduring motion of the divine will. This model helps to articulate Eriugena's idea that divine power

persists in created things without compromising God's transcendence. In Eriugena's thought, motion becomes the vehicle of divine self-manifestation, an invisible, unceasing procession from God, through God, and toward God.

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