

# Human mind as manifestation of God's Mind in Eriugena's philosophy

*La mente humana como manifestación de la Mente Divina  
en la filosofía de Eriúgena*

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**Abstract:** Many scholars, B. Stock among them, pointed to the words in Eriugena's *Periphyseon* IV 776, which could with good reason be described as Eriugena's *cogito*, namely the words *intelligo me esse*. Here I would like to discuss the special function of Scotus' *cogito* in his thought. Scotus' *cogito*, unlike Descartes', is not meant to ground the certainty of the subject's existence and thereby to provide the foundation for the certainty of his system. The full meaning of Scotus' *cogito* is recovered when it is seen as a manifestation of hidden God and the "locus" for the constitution of the world.

**Keywords:** *Cogito, officina omnium*, self-constitution, dialectics, Neoplatonism.

**Resumen:** Muchos estudiosos, entre ellos B. Stock, han llamado la atención hacia las palabras de Eriúgena en *Periphyseon* IV 776, que pueden describirse con razón como el *cogito* de Eriúgena, a saber, las palabras *intelligo me esse*. Aquí quiero discutir la función especial del *cogito* de Escoto en su pensamiento. El *cogito* de Escoto, a diferencia del de Descartes, no pretende fundar la certeza de la existencia del sujeto, ni por lo tanto fundar la certeza de su sistema. El significado del *cogito* de Escoto se recupera cuando se ve como manifestación del Dios oculto y el "lugar" para la constitución del mundo.

**Palabras clave:** *Cogito, officina omnium*, autoconstitución, dialéctica, neoplatonismo.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

**B**rian Stock pointed out that in Scotus' *Periphyseon* we find two distinct passages in which the conception of the *cogito* is expressed<sup>1</sup>. Undoubtedly, the better known of the two is the passage in *Periphyseon* IV, in which Eriugena states:

Although I know that I am, my knowledge of myself is not prior to myself because I and the knowledge by which I know myself are not two different things: if I did not know that I was I would not be ignorant that I did not know that I was: therefore whether I know or do not know that I am I shall not be without knowledge: for there will remain the knowledge of my ignorance. And if everything which is able to know that it does not know itself cannot be ignorant of the fact that it is (for if it did not have any existence at all it would not know that it did not know itself) it follows that absolutely everything has existence which knows that it is or knows that it does not know that it is. But if anyone is so far sunk in ignorance that he neither knows that he is nor perceives that he does not know that he is, I should say that either such a one is not a man at all, or that he is altogether dead<sup>2</sup>.

My objective in this paper is modest enough: it is to quote a number of new arguments in support of Brian Stock's masterly analysis of

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1. Cf. B. STOCK, *Intelligo me esse: Eriugena's 'Cogito'*, in *Jean Scot Erigene et l'histoire de la philosophie* (Ed. R. Roques, Paris, 1977) 328.
  2. ERIUGENA, *Periphyseon* IV, 776 B-C, tr. by J. J. O'Meara (Bellarmin-Montreal, Dumbarton Oaks-Washington, 1987) 423; IOHANNIS SCOTTI SEU ERIUGENAE, *Periphyseon. Liber quartus* (Ed. E. Jeaneau [further: PP IV, Jeaneau, CCCM 164], Turnholti, 2000) 51: "Scio enim me esse, nec tamen me praecedit scientia mei, quia non aliud sum et aliud scientia qua me scio; et si nescirem me esse, non nescirem ignorare me esse. Ac per hoc, sive scivero, sive nescivero me esse, scientia non carebo: Mihi enim remanebit scire ignorantiam meam. Et si omne quod potest nescire se ipsum, [nescire] non potest ignorare se ipsum esse (nam si penitus non esset, non sciret se ipsum nescire), conficitur omnino esse omne quod scit se esse, vel scit se nescire se esse. [Si quis autem tanta ignorantia obrutus est, ut nec se ipsum esse sciat, nec nescire se ipsum esse sentiat, aut penitus talem non esse hominem, aut omnino extinctum dixerim]".

this problem contained in his article and thus to contribute to the development of his idea. In the course of his analysis of the *Periphyseon* text and discussing points of similarity as well as differences between Augustine, Eriugena and Descartes, Brian Stock comes to affirm:

For despite similarities in word and even thought one essential difference remains. Descartes says, I think, therefore I am; Augustine, I am, therefore I think. Eriugena's place is somewhere between the two. Like Augustine, his affirmation is *esse*. But instead of just answering doubt, he pursues the consequences of *Intelligo me esse* within a system that places great weight on the active intelligence. His position is a 'phenomenology' in which *intelligo* and *esse* are to be read together. For both Augustine and Eriugena ignorance is the result of sin and a replica of the Trinity is permanently imprinted on the mind as a foretaste of grace. But in Eriugena it is a *docta ignorantia*. The divine triad is not a receptacle of divine illumination. Man, as God's *officina*, directly reflects his maker. In Augustine, *esse* is an existential question; in Eriugena *ousia* is phenomenological. There is no parallel in Augustine for Eriugena's transcendental subjectivism, as illustrated in the proof of other minds. In this, Eriugena does not anticipate Descartes but Husserl<sup>3</sup>.

I follow the meaning that Scotus' conception of the *intelligo* is as an constitutive act: for it is precisely human mind that is the locus of manifestation of what is being created and what paradigmatically, as an exemplar, is located in the Divine Word (God's *Virtus Gnostica*). For this reason man can rightly be described as the *officina omnium*, the "workshop," in which the reality of created things is being forged, that is, in which created beings become reality. This

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3. B. STOCK, *Intelligo me esse* cit., 334. Cf. D. MORAN, *Christian Neoplatonism and the Phenomenological Tradition: The Hidden Influence of John Scottus Eriugena*, in W. OTTEN, I. ALLEN (eds.), *Eriugena and Creation* (Brepols, Turnhout, 2014) 601 and f.

revelation of all things in man's mind is the clearest mark of man's likeness to the Word, the Logos which is "the Father's Speech" in which the Father's inner depths are revealed. Thus the *intelligo* in Scotus is given a function which is specific to his system: this is not so much to be the source of certainty for the thinking self of its own existence, but rather as the locus of the inaccessible God manifesting Himself.

## 2. INTELLIGO

Catherine Wilson drew a comparison between the conceptions of St Augustine and Descartes and was able to find quite a number of essential points of similarity bringing the two doctrines close to each other. Among these was the assumption that sense experience is a source of prejudices and should be rejected, that the human soul is an incorporeal substance, that we possess an innate idea of God and that the existence of sin and evil in general has to be reconciled with God's goodness<sup>4</sup>. Perhaps, provocatively, one might say, that Eriugena's proposals go further and penetrate deeper: for him the human soul is incorporeal (as it is in Augustine and Descartes) but it contains in itself the totality of corporeal being, man is God's image and God's idea constituted in the Divine Mind; and it is man's fall that introduced evil into the world, God's Goodness being altogether free from blame.

To throw more light upon these seemingly paradoxical assertions let's begin with an analysis of the passage in the *Periphyseon* where — as B. Stock has shown<sup>5</sup> — Eriugena introduces his *intelligo* for the first time:

Thus, when I say, 'I understand that I am', do I not imply in this single verb, 'understand', three (meanings) which cannot be separated from each other? For I show that I am, and that I

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4. Cf. C. WILSON, *Descartes and Augustine*, in J. BROUGHTON, J. CARRIERO (eds.), *A Companion to Descartes* (Wiley-Blackwell, Malden, 2011) 41.

5. Cf. B. STOCK, *Intelligo me esse* cit., 328 and f.

can understand that I am, and that I do understand that I am. Do you not see that by the one verb are denoted my *ousia* and my power, and my act? For I would not understand if I were not, nor would I understand if I lacked the power of understanding, nor does that power remain latent in me, but breaks forth in the operation of understanding<sup>6</sup>.

At an earlier point in his work Eriugena explained that there are these three elements present in every created being, whether corporeal or incorporeal, the elements that are both indestructible and inseparable from each other, namely: *ousia/essentia*, *dynamis/virtus* and *energeia/operatio*<sup>7</sup>. These elements made their appearance at an earlier stage in the development of Neoplatonic philosophy, e. g. in Proclus where they were invoked to describe the process of causal action in Proclus' objective theory<sup>8</sup>. Eriugena applies them specifically to the explanation of the way human knowledge functions (subjective theory).

What Eriugena suggests in this passage appears to be very close to the intention of Augustine's *Si enim fallor, sum*, as it shows that the power (*virtus*) of thinking and the very process of thinking (*operatio*) reveal the fact of being of an I (*quia*), which does not imply, that the I comprehends the "what" (*quid*) of its being (what an I is). Thus the *intelligo* reveals the fact of human existence, yet the very essence of man still remains concealed. To be able to affirm that he knows his own essence, man would have to be able to give his own essential definition (*ousiades*) in which he would have to limit the

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6. PP I 490 B, p. 82-83; Cf. IOHANNIS SCOTTI SEU ERIUGENAE, *Periphyseon. Liber primus* (Ed. E. Jeaneau [further: PP I, Jeaneau, CCCM 161], Turnholti 1996) 67: "Dum ergo dico 'intelligo me esse', nonne in hoc uno verbo quod est 'intelligo' tria significo a se inseparabilia? Nam et me esse, et posse intelligere me esse, et intelligere me esse demonstro. Num vides uno verbo et meam OUCIAN meamque virtutem et actionem significari? Non enim intelligerem si non essem; neque intelligerem si virtute intelligentiae carerem; nec illa virtus in me silet sed in operationem intelligendi prorumpit".

7. Cf. PP I 490 A, p. 82.

8. Cf. PROCLUS, *The Elements of Theology* 27, 77, ed. E. R. Dodds (Oxford 1963) 31, 73. Cf. S. GERSH, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena. An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (Brill, Leiden 1978) 82.

boundaries of his own nature, which, according to Eriugena, is impossible. For to him definition is the “locus” of the defined reality, and consequently its delimitation and description<sup>9</sup>. Implied in this conception is a redefinition (peculiar to Eriugena) of the concepts of time and place; and none of the created things can be conceived of without time and place. Thus a place is the “natural definition and mode and position of each creature,” while time is “the beginning of movement of things through generation from not-being into being, and the fixed measurement of this motion of changeable things”<sup>10</sup>.

If this is the way one defines time and movement, then it becomes clear, that defining and measuring presupposes a mind that performs both these operations. The mind in question is human mind, in which all things undergo a “second creation”<sup>11</sup>. Now the essential question that here arises is that concerning the particular mode in which this second creation, or positing of all things in human mind, is carried out, in particular whether this second creation regards the essential or only the accidental being. If the first alternative is accepted, that is if it is assumed that the very essences of all things were created in man, then it would appear to follow, that only part of the Universe could have been created in man, to the exclusion of all accidental reality. Yet if, on the other hand, we assume, that absolutely all reality was produced in man, it would ap-

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9. Cf. C. D'AMICO, *Locus und deffinitio bei Eriugena und Cusanus*, in A. KIJEWSKA, R. MAJERAN, H. SCHWAETZER (eds.), *Eriugena-Cusanus* (Lublin Catholic University Publishing House, Lublin, 2011) 171 and f.; cf. M. VOLLET, *Raum und Grenze bei Eriugena and Cusanus*, in *Eriugena-Cusanus* cit., 193 and f.; C. STEEL, *Maximus Confessor and John Scottus Eriugena on Place and Time*, in *Eriugena and Creation* cit., 291 and f.
10. PP I 483 B-C, 74; JEAUNEAU, *op. cit.*, 58: “Ac per hoc concluditur nil aliud esse locum nisi naturalem diffinitionem modumque positionemque uniuscuiusque sive generalis sive specialis creaturae, quemadmodum nil aliud est tempus nisi rerum per generationem motionis ex non esse in esse inchoationem ipsiusque motus rerum mutabilium certae dimensiones donec veniat stabilis finis, in quo immutabiliter Omnia stabunt”. Cf. B. STOCK, *Intelligo me esse* cit., 329.
11. Cf. J. TROUILLARD, *Erigène et la théophanie créatrice*, in *Jean Scot Erigène. Etudes* (F. Berland, Paris 2014) 71: “La connaissance implique une création, et il n’est d’efficacité authentique que dans la pensée. Celle-ci est la substance des êtres. De même que Dieu se crée en pensant l’univers et que l’univers a son être dans la pensée divine, ainsi l’homme se réalise en se connaissant et en connaissant les choses, et la nature a sa véritable consistance dans l’esprit humain”.

pear to follow, that man was a conglomerate of diverse heterogeneous elements, a kind of “monster”<sup>12</sup>. Since neither solution appears to be satisfactory, a third way out must be sought after.

### 3. KNOWING - CREATING

The escape from this dilemma has been found by Eriugena in the conception that was one of the formative principles of Neoplatonist thought, namely to the principle that “the spiritual world was not only a hierarchy of causation but also one of cognition”<sup>13</sup>. This principle directly followed from the assumption adopted in Neoplatonism that true causality is only attributable to the sphere of the immaterial (e.g. the Demiurge), and the most perfect activity of an immaterial agent is the activity of cognition<sup>14</sup>.

Now, human mind is immaterial too and human mind can, too, be regarded as a “smithy,” where all things are being “forged” (*officina omnium*)<sup>15</sup> yet this is not to say that God literally, in some corporeal way, somehow produces these things within the structure of man. As John Gavin puts it, a man is “the primordial knower, the field of the first creation”<sup>16</sup>. All things are made in man as he comes to know all things by means of the concepts he has of them in his mind. A direct reversal of the order in the process of knowing assumed in the Aristotelian school is accepted in Eriugena: man is no longer represented as knowing by means of abstracting the contents of his concepts of things from the material delivered to him by his sense experience. Quite the reverse is true in Eriugena: it is the very things, the objects of knowing that get constituted owing to human acts of comprehension and knowing.

12. Cf. PP IV 764 D-765 B, JEAUNEAU, *op. cit.*, 34-35.

13. S. E. GERSH, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (Brill, Leiden, 1978) 82.

14. Stephen Gersh presents the roots of the doctrine in Proclus' philosophy. Cf. there, 111.

15. Cf. IOHANNIS SCOT SEU ERIUGENAE, *Periphyseon. Liber tertius* (further: PP III), 733 B (Ed. E. Jeauneau, CCCM 163, Brepols, Turnholti, 1999) 369.

16. J. GAVIN, *The Incarnational Vision of John Scottus Eriugena*, “Archa Verbi. Yearbook for the Study of Medieval Theology” 10 (2013) (Aschendorff, Münster, 2014) 51.

Thus in the *Periphyseon* the “Nourisher” (*Nutritior*) sets his pupil (the *Alumnus*) the following question: “It is your opinion that everything which is known by the intellect or the reason or imagined by the sense can somehow be created and produced in the knower and perceiver?”<sup>17</sup>. The pupil in response rightly quotes St. Augustine and affirms that this indeed must be the case since the very knowledge of the Word subject to the senses is more perfect than these very things themselves<sup>18</sup>:

I believe — says Alumnus — that the same relationship proceeds from the Divine Providence through all creation, so that not only every nature which has the knowledge of that which follows it is better and superior, but also the knowledge itself, through the dignity of the nature in which it resides, greatly excels the object of which it is the knowledge<sup>19</sup>.

This statement seems obvious enough on the ground of Augustine’s philosophy<sup>20</sup>, especially in what concerns material things, yet doubts immediately arise when we consider the immaterial principles according to which we issue our judgments on the objects we know. The skill in comprehending and applying these principles-norms is what in Eriugena’s eyes constitutes mastery, which he calls the “skill” par excellence. St Augustine held, on the other hand, that these very principles are transcendent with regard to our minds and belong within the order of Divine Wisdom. God allows us to have access to these principles through his enlightenment and in this way He becomes the efficient factor in our knowing<sup>21</sup>.

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17. PP IV 765 C, p. 409; JEAUNEAU cit., 35: “Omne quod cognoscitur intellectu et ratione, seu corporeo sensu imaginatur, putasne in ipso qui intelligit et sentit quodammodo posse creari et effici?”.

18. PP IV 766 A, p. 411 ; Cf. PROCLUS, *The Elements of theology* 134, 118-119; 173, 150-151: “In the Intelligence, accordingly, its priors are contained intellectually”.

19. PP IV 766 B, p. 410; JEAUNEAU cit., 36: “Et si ita est, talis ordo, ut reor, ex divina providentia per universam creaturam procedit, ut omnis natura, quae sequentis se notitiam comprehendit, non solum melior et superior sit, verum etiam et ipsa notitia dignitate naturae, in quae est, praecedit eam longe, cuius notitia est”.

20. Cf. ST. AUGUSTINE, *De magistro* IX, 28.

21. Cf. ST. AUGUSTINE, *De magistro* XI, 38; Cf. R. H. NASH, *Illumination*, in A. D.



Eriugena does not discard the theory of illumination, yet he transforms Augustine's conception of it, as a consequence of his different conception of Divine Ideas. In Augustine exemplarism was the doctrine establishing the sphere of Divine Ideas (*rationes aeternae*) as the rule or regulative principle for all human knowledge; the Divine Ideas were conceived of as the eternal patterns for all things and yet as Divine Thoughts identical with God himself<sup>22</sup>. In Scotus the Divine Ideas constitute the second nature — the one that both creates and is created — and this departs in a way from Augustine's model. The primordial causes (which are the Divine Ideas) can be viewed in two perspectives: as viewed with regard to God they are considered to be identical with the eternal Word of God and form unity with Him; while viewed in relation to creatures they are constituted in human mind and they are pregnant with all those created effects that would in due time come out of them<sup>23</sup>.

Given these premises, Eriugena proceeds to state that the principles of the arts that fix the structure of the created reality are found in the mind of man and along with skill, which is the mastery with which they are comprehended, they form the triadic structure of human spirit, which “measures” and “defines,” that is “constitutes” things. Thus the Teacher addresses the Pupil:

[N] It remains then to consider in what way skill and the art reside in the mind, whether as those natural qualities which are known as potencies, like the species of wisdom and science which it perceives in the reflection of the Divine Ray; or as substantial and constituent parts of itself, so that mind, skill and the art would form a kind of trinity in one essence. [A] Your last suggestion is the one which I would accept. For the three seem to me to form a kind of substantial and connatural trinity.

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Fitzgerald (ed.), *Augustine through the Ages. An Encyclopedia* (Eerdmans, Michigan, Cambridge, 1999) 438 and f.

22. Cf. W. J. HANKEY, *Ratio, Reason, Rationalism*, in *Augustine through the Ages* cit., 697-698.

23. Cf. JOHANNIS SCOTI SEU ERIUGENAE, *Periphyseon. Liber secundus* (further: PP II) 556 B-D, ed. E. Jeaneau, CCCM 162 (Brepols, Turholt, 1997) 158.

[N] Then mind intellectually comprehends both its skill and the art, and is intellectually comprehended both by the one and by the other (though not as to what it is, but as to the fact that it is). For otherwise, the trinity will not be coessential and coequal<sup>24</sup>.

The skill and the art which together form a trinitarian union with human mind reveal the existence thereof. The mind can “discover” the reality of its existence precisely through their “revealing” activity and for that reason the skill and the art identify with the mind and thus constitute unity in plurality. Yet this is not to imply that Eriugena reduces — in the most extreme formulation — the sphere of ideal patterns to the reality of human thought. True, what he calls “the art” identifies with human mind, yet the triad mind-skill-art is only actualized in man when man turns to God. It is by turning to God that the full constitution of human mind as a *sui generis* triadic unit is perfected as the moment of return is a necessary complement of the cyclic movement of cosmic causation. This cycle contains the enduring (*mansio*) of the effects in the cause, the outflow of effects outside of the cause (*processio*) and the return of the effects to the cause (*reversion/reditus*)<sup>25</sup>. The triad of human mind can accomplish the process of its constitution, or rather self-constitution by turning back towards its Source:

I do not doubt — Disciple claims — that the trinity of the mind is formed by a superior Nature, seeing that all things that are formed take from It the origin of their Forms, and it is by being

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24. PP IV 767 C-D, 412-413; JEAUNEAU cit., 39: “[N] Restat igitur considerare quomodo ei insunt peritia et disciplina: Num veluti naturales qualitates, quas virtutes appellat, ut sunt species sapientiae et scientiae, quas divini radii repercussion percipit, an veluti substantiales suas partes, quibus consistit, ita ut quaedam trinitas sit unius essentiae, mens, peritia, disciplina? [A] Quod postremo posuisti crediderim. Videtur enim mihi substantialis quaedam et connaturalis trinitas. [N] Mens itaque et peritiam et disciplinam suam intelligit, et a sua peritia suaque disciplina intelligitur, non quid, sed quia est; aliter enim coessentialis et coequalis trinitatis non erit”.

25. Cf. S. E. GERSH, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena* cit., 217-229.

turned towards It that are formed all things which are turned towards It or can be turned towards It. [N] Any hesitation on this point would be extremely stupid. So only the Mind of God possesses in Itself the true knowledge of the human mind, of its skill and of the art, for by It and for It was this trinity formed<sup>26</sup>.

#### 4. SELF-CONSTITUTION (αυθυποστατον)

Eriugena's is almost model restatement of another fundamental principle of Neoplatonism which establishes that any being can only become a true cause if it first constitutes itself<sup>27</sup>. This self constitution can only be effected by turning towards a superior Nature in contemplation and thereby receiving from that Nature the form that is proper to the self-constituting reality<sup>28</sup>. The conception of *αυθυποστατον* as Eric Dodds has convincingly shown, played a significant role in the doctrine of Proclus. To begin with, it introduced an element of freedom or, more precisely, indeterminacy, to the Neoplatonist conception of reality, since what constitutes itself depends just as much on the higher principle as it does on itself. And secondly, an intermediary principles were introduced which mediated between the absolute causality of the Supreme Principle and the sphere of simple effects (*causata*)<sup>29</sup>. These self-constituting principle are made much of by Proclus himself in his *Elements of Theology* where he attributes to them some significant properties: "All that is self-constituted is capable of reversion upon itself" (Prop. 42) and vice-versa (prop. 43)<sup>30</sup>. "All that is self-constituted is without tem-

26. PP IV 768 A, p. 413; JEAUNEAU cit., 39: "[A] Iam vero, quoniam superior est ipsa, ex qua omnia quae formantur incipiunt formari, et ad quam conversa formantur quae ad eam convertuntur aut possunt converti, ab eadem etiam mentis trinitatem formari non dubito. [N] Hinc ambigere stultissimum. Sola itaque divina mens [notitiam] humanae mentis, peritae, disciplinalis, a se formatae veram possidet notionem.

27. Cf. D. MORAN, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena. A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989) 166 and f.

28. Cf. PROCLUS, *The Elements of Theology* 31 cit., 35: "All that proceeds from any principle reverts in respect of its being upon that form which it proceeds".

29. Cf. E.R. DODDS, *Commentary*, in PROCLUS, *The Elements of Theology* 223-224

30. PROCLUS, *Elements of Theology* 42, 43, 44-45.

poral origin” (prop. 45); “All that is self-constituted is imperishable” (prop. 46); “All that is self-constituted is without parts and simple” (prop. 47); “All that is self-constituted is perpetual” (prop. 49); “All that is self-constituted transcends the things which are measured by time in respect of their existence”<sup>31</sup>. The *intelligo* of Scotus Eriugena is exactly alike with respect to these properties.

Human mind, skill, and art, though described by Eriugena as “substantial parts” constitute a trinity that is one in its nature, though its form derives directly from the Divine Mind. As noted above, the other two, that is the skill and the art permeate each other and “reveal” the reality of the mind, and this amounts to stating that the essential feature is self-reflectivity (ability to turn upon itself).

The factor of indeterminacy as characterizing that which constitutes itself is significant also for Eriugena’s thought, which is strongly marked by intellectualism. Moreover, as John the Scot shows, the arts are an eternal possession of the soul that inheres in the soul and guarantees its eternity. True the truth may go the other way round, that is, perhaps it is the soul that is the foundation of the eternity of the arts. Which one of these two ways is the true, does not matter, for here we move at the level of intelligibility:

For it has been rightly sought out and found by the philosophers that the arts are eternal and are immutably attached to the soul forever, in such a way that they seem to be not some kind of accidents of it, but natural powers [and actions] which do not and could not withdraw from it, and which do not come from anywhere but are innate in it as part of its nature, so that it is doubtful whether it is the arts which confer eternity upon it because they are eternal and eternally associated with it so that it may be eternal, or whether it is by reason of the subject, which is the soul, that eternity is supplied to the arts (for the *ousia* and the Power and the Operation of the soul are eternal), or whether they co-inhere in each other,

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31. PROCLUS, *Elements of Theology* 45,46, 47, 49, 51, 46-51.

all being eternal, in such a way that they cannot be separated from one another<sup>32</sup>.

### 5. *OFFICINA OMNIUM*

Man, owing to the skill and the art that he possesses in his mind also has the mastery of the concepts of all things and these concepts are the true substance of everything. Yet this eternal possession does not make man the absolute maker of all ideas, but merely accords him the status of a kind of “secondary creator,” whose mind is but a “place” in which God posits all things, on the condition that man turns his mind to God in contemplation. Thus the human constitutive activity is but a manifestation of the true, primary creative activity of God.

These problems receive a more detailed treatment in Eriugena's discussion of the opening lines of Genesis, where he reflects on the problem why God created man as contained in the genus of animal, as a “living soul,” while making him at the same time an image of God. It appears that there is some duality entailed by the act through which God constituted man in being. Following the teaching of Gregory of Nyssa, Eriugena refuses to consider the creation of man as consisting of two separate acts, one following the other in time, he tries to make sense of the two aspects of the Biblical anthropogenesis as just two sides of one and the same act, each of these two having its own foundation and its own consequences.

In the *Periphyseon*, the Pupil asks the Teacher whether it might not have been more convenient to constitute man solely as a spiritual being and not in the genus of animals, since man's ultimate

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32. PP I, 486 C-D, 78; JEAUNEAU cit., 62-63: “Siquidem a philosophis veraciter quaesitum repertumque est artes esse aeternas et semper immutabiliter animae adhaerere ita ut non quasi accidentia quaedam ipsius esse videantur, sed naturales virtutes actionesque nullo modo ab ea recedentes nec recedere valentes nec aliunde venientes sed naturaliter ei insitas, ita ut ambiguum sit utrum ipsae aeternitatem ei praestant quoniam aeternae sunt eique semper adhaereant ut aeterna sit, an ratione subiecti quod est anima artibus aeternitas administratur —OYCIA enim animae et virtus et actio aeternae sunt —an ita sibi invicem coadhaereant, dum omnes aeternae sint, ut a se invicem segregari non possint”.

destiny was to achieve equality with the angelic nature<sup>33</sup>. The answer given to that by the Teacher is very characteristic and typical of the Eriugenian rationalism, though one can here discern an echo of Augustine's teaching<sup>34</sup>:

When you ask why God should have created man, whom He proposed to make in His own Image, in the genus of animals, it should be enough for me to reply briefly that He wished so to fashion him that there might be one among the animals in which His Image was expressly manifested. But if one goes on to ask why He wished to do so, he is enquiring into the causes of the Divine Will, an enquiry which is over-presumptuous and arrogant<sup>35</sup>.

Thus the Nourisher does not propose to inquire into the profound reasons for God's project to create man in a kind of dual condition; this inquiry exceeds the powers of human understanding and would smack of arrogance and presumption. On the other hand he does not wish to discourage his pupil's eager desire for understanding, so he proceeds to throw some light on the mystery of man's origin by going into the effects of God's creative action in the created world. He goes on to state that God wished his image to be revealed in and through the animal nature of man, because man was designed by God as a representative in contracted form of the whole of created reality or — to use Gregory of Nyssa's expression — as a microcosm<sup>36</sup>, or the "third world". Owing to the dual creation of man as an animal and as a divine image man's ontological structure encompasses all created orders, and his own nature appears as the

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33. Por. PP IV 763 A-B, 406-407.

34. Cf. AUGUSTINUS, *De Genesi adversus Manicheos* I, II, 4.

35. PP IV 763 C-D, 407; JEAUNEAU cit., 32: "Et mihi sufficeret interroganti tibi quare deus hominem in genere animalium creaverit, quem ad suam imaginem facere proposuit, breviter respondere: Quia ita voluit eum condere, ut quoddam animal esset, in quo imaginem suam expressam manifestaret. Cur autem ita voluit quisquis quaerit, divinae voluntatis causas quaerit, quas quaerere nimis praesumptivum est atque superbum".

36. Cf. PP IV, 793 C, 444.

keystone and the crowning of the whole Universe. By creating man God created at the same time all other created natures:

For among the wise it is maintained that in man is contained the universal creature. For, like the angel, he enjoys the use of Mind and Discursive Reason; and like the animal, the use of physical sense and the capacity to administer his body: and therefore his nature is understood to include that of every creature. For the whole of creation is divided into five parts: the creature may be either a body; or a living being; or a sensible being; or a rational being; or an intellectual being. And all these five parts are in every way found in man<sup>37</sup>.

In the Genesis narrative of the act of creation the account of the creation of man comes at the end, on the sixth day, and this emphasizes the perfection of man as a being which comprises in its constitution the totality of created reality. There is nothing within the created realm that exceeds the boundaries of man's nature:

So the reason why man is introduced at the conclusion of the narrative of the equipping of this visible world is that we might understand that all the things of which the creation is narrated before that of man are universally comprehended within him. For every greater number includes within itself the lesser (...). But as it is, since the creation of man is introduced at the conclusion of all divine operations, it is shown that the divine creations all subsist and are comprehended in him<sup>38</sup>.

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37. PP IV 755 B-C, 396-397; JEAUNEAU cit., 21: "Constat enim inter sapientes in homine universam creaturam contineri: Intelligit enim et ratiocinatur ut angelus, sentit et corpus administrat ut animal, ac per hoc omnis creatura in eo intelligitur. Totius siquidem creaturae quinquepartita divisio est: aut enim corporea est, aut vitalis, aut sensiva, aut rationalis, aut intellectualis. Et haec omnia omni modo in homine continentur". Cf. PP IV 764 B, 408.

38. PP IV, 782 C-D, 431; JEAUNEAU cit., 60: "Proinde post mundi visibilis ornatus narrationem introducitur homo, veluti omnium conclusio, ut intelligeretur quod omnia quae ante ipsum condita narrantur, in ipso universaliter comprehenduntur. Omnis enim numerus maior minorem intra se numerum concludit (...). Iam vero, quoniam in fine omnium divinorum operum introducitur, omnia divina opera in

## 6. MAN - THE CONCEPT IN THE DIVINE MIND

There is, nevertheless, an important restriction imposed on man's *intelligo*, even when it is considered as an act of constituting or positing of all understood things. For while man is in possession of the concepts of all created things, he cannot possess the concept of himself. In the above we have already mentioned that human mind, while capable of knowing with certainty that it is, does not know its own constitution, its own *quid*, which remains veiled for its insight<sup>39</sup>. For clearly, the concept of man's being can only be found in the very Divine Mind, the ultimate creative principle; it is this ultimate principle and the idea of human being contained therein that forms the absolute ontological foundation of man's reality as well as man's cognitive activity, which nevertheless is also creative in its own reduced way and consists in positing the cognized things:

[A] For I understand the substance of the whole man to be nothing else but the concept of him in the Mind of his Artificer, Who knew all things in Himself before they were made; and that very knowledge is the true and only substance of the things known, since it is in that knowledge that they are most perfectly created and eternally and immutably subsist. [N] We may then define man as follows: Man is a certain intellectual concept formed eternally in the Mind of God. [A] That is an extremely true and very well tested definition of man; and not only of man, but of everything else which is formed in the Divine Wisdom<sup>40</sup>.

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ipso subsistere et comprehendi manifestantur”.

39. Cf. A. KIJEWSKA, *Eriugena on the ineffability of God*, in VON H. SCHWAETZER, M.-A. VANNIER (eds.), *Der Bildbegriff bei Meister Eckhart und Nikolaus von Kues* (Aschendorff, Münster, 2015) 171 and f.
40. PP IV, 768 B, 413; Cf. PP IV, JEAUNEAU cit., 40: “Immo vero intelligo non aliam esse substantiam totius hominis nisi suam notionem in mente artificis, qui omnia priusquam fierent in se ipso cognovit, ipsamque cognitionem substantiam esse veram ac solam eorum quae cognita sunt, quoniam in ipsa perfectissime facta et aeternaliter et immutabiliter subsistunt”. Cf. PP IV, 770B, A. 416.



God's mind is the locus of man, just as human mind is the locus of created things; for it is in the Divine Mind that the "description" or "definition" of man's nature is found. For this reason all intellectual activity properly human has to begin by man's turning to the Divine Mind, whence man receives his form, and this reception of form means that the function of *intelligo* is given its full constitution. This is how the properly human activity of *intelligere* and of constitution of things through *intelligere* finds its proper place between the Divine Source and the created outflow of things as a crucial mediating factor in the process of constituting the created reality.

## 7. NAMING

The original concepts of all things created dwell in human mind. Man projects the things he has the concepts of via his skill (in the special sense given to this notion by Eriugena) and art and he gives names to the produced things. This is another aspect highlighting the constitutive power of human mind: whatever exists can be named and only that exists that can be named. Eriugena discusses the process of imposition of names with reference to Gen (2, 19) where Adam is represented as giving names to all things. Adam and his action are the archetype of all human activity, for he is the epitome of human nature as such<sup>41</sup>. The imposition of names, which follows on the constitution of things, is an act by which man affirms his power over things. Man can only name that, of which he possesses the concepts and over which he can exercise domination; thus it is clear that he can possess neither the concept nor the essential definition of either himself or, with even more reason, of God:

...and indeed the essence of man is understood principally to consist in this: that it has been given him to possess the concept of all things which were either created his equals or which he was instructed to govern. For how could man be given the domination of things of which he had not the concept? For his

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41. Cf. A. KIJEWSKA, *Eriugena on the ineffability of God* cit., 167 and f.

dominion over them would go astray if he did not know the things which he was to rule. Holy Scripture gives us a clear indication of this when it says: ‘Therefore, having formed out of the earth every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens, the Lord God brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living soul that is its name’. (...) But what he called anything that is its name, that is, it is the very notion of the living soul<sup>42</sup>.

Adam can name only those things, whose concepts are found in his mind; he cannot possibly have the concept of himself and consequently, cannot name himself, as this would imply that constitutes himself in being. The concept and definition of himself dwell instead in God’s mind and it is only through that concept and owing to the creative and constitutive activity of the Divine Mind that man himself has been called into being and constituted in reality, and it is only by God that he could possibly have been named.

This confirms that in Eriugena’s system the ruling principle is the rigorous hierarchy of cognition, with the higher intelligent principle fixing and describing the lower. In this world ruled by intelligence, dialectics must be both the supreme law of being and the basic method of scientific knowing.

## 8. DIALECTICS

In Eriugena’s understanding dialectics was identical to philosophy itself; the general understanding of the term dialectics was in Eriugena’s time as the art of disputation, by its nature oriented towards

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42. PP IV 768 C-769 A, 414; JEAUNEAU cit., 41: “Et quidem per hoc maxime intelligitur homo esse quod cunctorum, quae sive aequaliter sibi creata sunt sive quibus dominari praecipitur, datum est ei habere notionem. Quomodo enim dominatus eorum homini daretur, quorum notionem non haberet? Siquidem dominatus illius erraret, si ea quae regeret nesciret. Quod apertissime divina nobis indicat scriptura dicens: ‘Formatis igitur dominus deus de humo cunctis animantibus terrae et universis volatilibus caeli, adduxit ea ad Adam ut videret quid vocaret ea; omne autem quod vocavit Adam animae viventis, ipsum est nomen eius.’ (...) ‘Omne autem quod vocavit, ipsum est nomen,’ hoc est ipsa notio animae viventis”.

discovering truth. In Augustinian tradition truth is the same as God, so understandably, Eriugena too considers dialectics to be God's gift for man, a divinely sent device to distinguish truth from falsehood, to set apart what has been mixed up, to reunite what has been separated by division<sup>43</sup>.

But in the realist framework of Eriugena there is more to dialectics than just an efficient means of setting apart true and untrue statements; in fact, the procedures of the dialectical art mirror the objective order of reality, there obtains a close correspondence between the *ordo idearum* and the *ordo rerum*. We know already the fundamental reason for this correspondence: it is that the order of things derives from the order of knowing (including human knowing)<sup>44</sup>. As Giulio d'Onofrio pointed out Eriugena elevated dialectics from the level of a mere *scientia sermocinalis* to the dignity of the science that reveals the deepest ontological order. This has only been made possible by the fact that human mind, when informed by the Divine Mind, is capable of reflecting in the order of its words and concepts the very hierarchy of creations and their ultimate grounding in the unity of the Word<sup>45</sup>. By means of dialectical procedure every thing is accorded its proper place in the hierarchy of genera and species and given its proper name which sets it apart from all other named things. The hierarchy descends from the most universal genera, including the *genus generalissimum* of substance, through the intervening genera of decreasing extension, down to the most particular entities; to that which is contaminated with matter and scattered "outside of" human mind, in other words, to that

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43. Cf. IOHANNES SCOTTUS ERIUGENA, *De Praedestinatione* VII, 1, ed. E. S. Mainoldi (Galluzzo, Firenze, 2003) 70: "Potest enim aliquis in disciplina uerbi causa disputandi quae dicitur dialectica peritus, que nullo dubitante a deo homini donatur, si uouerit bene uti, quoniam ad hoc certissime data est, dum ea ignorantes eam erudit, uera falsaue discernit, confusa diuidit, separata colligit, in omnibus ueritatem inquit".

44. Cf. Ch. ERISMANN, *L'homme commun. La gènese du réalisme ontologique durant le haut Moyen Age* (Vrin, Paris, 2011) 6-9; cf. Ch. ERISMANN, *The Logic of Being: Eriugena's Dialectical Ontology*, "Vivarium" 45 (2007) 207.

45. Cf. G. D'ONOFRIO, *Bene disputandi disciplina. Procédés dialectique et logica vetus* dans le langage philosophique de Jean Scot, in G.-H. ALLARD (ed.), *Jean Scot -écrivain* (Montréal-Paris, 1986) 239-240.

which persists at the level of Eriugena's third nature, the one that is created and does not create. The dialectical *procession* thus retraces the order of Porphyry's tree and this orderly progress is reiterated by the discursive development of human logic. Thus dialectics appears to be the supreme law of development both in knowing and in objective reality<sup>46</sup>.

Naturally, the objective order of beings revealed and at the same time constituted by dialectical procedure, projected and posited as it is by the human *intelligo*, is by no means an arbitrary projection of man. Man's constitutive activity, or man's art, works according to the principles of that higher art issuing from God the Creator himself. Man is by no means the origin, but only an intermediary of the creative act:

From this we may see that that art which concerns itself with the division of genera into species and the resolution of species into genera, which is called *dialektike* 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<sup>47</sup>.

## 9. MAN AS KNOWING

As we have already seen, all things (save from man himself) have been constituted in human intelligence and persist there in the form of concepts. There is no created thing (except for man himself) whose concept would not be found in man's possession. This statement is equally true of angelic creations, which have too been

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46. Cf. Ch. ERISMANN, *L'homme commun* cit., 252 and ff.; Ch. ERISMANN, *The Logic of Being* cit., 213.

47. PP IV, 749 A, 389; JEAUNEAU cit., 12: "Ac per hoc intelligitur quod ars illa, quae dividit genera in species, et species in genera resolvit, quaeque DIALEKTIKH dicitur, non ab humanis machinationibus sit facta, sed in natura rerum ab auctore omnium atrium, quae vere artes sunt, condita, et a sapientibus inventa, et ad utilitatem sollertis rerum indagis usitata".

constituted in man, or at an equal level with man. Man and angels are equals, for in the case of intelligent and rational natures there can be no question of primacy, but instead there obtains perfect simultaneity and mutuality:

If you look more closely into the mutual relations and unity which exist between intelligible and rational natures, you will at once find that not only is the angelic nature established in the human but also the human is established in the angelic. For it is created in everything of which the pure intellect has the most perfect knowledge and becomes one with it<sup>48</sup>.

Naturally, this mutual interpenetration of the minds of man and an angel as well as the perfect cognition by man of all other creatures is far from being actually present as natural and rightful possession in any single human being, nor can any single human individual in his or her ordinary material condition make use of that immense pool of information, allegedly at their disposal. For the case of Adam giving names to all things in Paradise is indicative of the condition of the ideal human nature, human nature as it existed in the original and pure God's conception. This primordial human nature, created in its integrity and purity in the image of God is what Eriugena calls Paradise:

Therefore the limits of human nature are to be considered as the upper and the lower boundaries of Paradise, beyond which no created nature may be supposed to exist<sup>49</sup>.

The correct understanding of Eriugena's concept of Paradise as the primordial and perfect condition of human nature calls for some

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48. PP IV 780 B, 428; JEAUNEAU cit., 56-57: "Si intentus intellectualium et rationabilium naturarum reciprocam copulationem et unitatem inspexeris, invenies profecto et angelicam essentiam in humana, et humanam in angelica constitutam. In omni siquidem quodcumque purus intellectus perfectissime cognoscit, fit, eique unum efficitur".

49. PP IV, 825 C, 481; JEAUNEAU cit., 119-120: "Considera ergo extremitates humanae naturae veluti cuiuspiam paradisi terminos, sursum versus atque deorsum, extra quos nulla creata intelligitur natura".

sophistication. Eriugena asserts that Paradise is not the condition of man that obtained in a distant, primeval past, rather it is the state to be achieved as the final goal in the long process of cosmic return still to be accomplished in the future (provided that the temporal categories of sequence, past and future are at all applicable in a metaphysical context like the one discussed in Eriugena). It follows from that, that the total and perfect knowledge of all created reality is given man as an objective to be conquered rather than as something readily available. This interpretation, it seems, can be distilled from the following statements:

Therefore, not only is irrationality created in the mind, but also every species, difference and property of irrationality, and all things which are naturally learnt concerning it, since the knowledge of all these and similar things is established in it. (...) True knowledge of all these is implanted in human nature although it is concealed from her that she has it until she is restored to her pristine and integral condition, in which with all clarity she will understand the magnitude and the beauty of the image that is fashioned within her, and will no longer be in ignorance of anything which is established within for she will be encompassed by the divine Light and turned towards God in Whom she will enjoy the perspicuous vision of all things<sup>50</sup>.

As one might easily expect in the Christian and Augustinian context in which Eriugena's thought developed, the blame for the total loss of that universal and perfect knowledge that was once a prerogative of man and which is sadly absent in man's present condition,

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50. PPIV 769 B-C, 414-415; JEAUNEAU cit., 41-42: "Creatura igitur in eo irrationabilitas, et omnes species, omnisque differentia, et proprietas ipsius irrationabilitatis, et omnia quae circa eam naturaliter cognoscuntur, quoniam horum omnium et similium notitia in ipso condita est (...). Quorum omnium vera cognitio humanae naturae insita est, quamvis adhuc inesse ei lateat se ipsam, donec ad pristinam integritatem restituatur, in qua magnitudinem et pulchritudinem imaginis in se conditae purissime intellectura est, et nihil eam latebit ex his quae in se condita sunt, divino lumine ambita et in deum conversa, in quo omnia perspicue contemplantur".

is attributed by Eriugena to original sin<sup>51</sup>. Yet the most deplorable effect of original sin was not the loss of the primeval knowledge of all things, but the forgetfulness of God and of man's true nature that became part of the fallen condition of man.

However, even sin, grave as it was, could not totally wipe out God's image impressed in man's nature; and even in the present condition of man, that is after original sin, the hidden image of God can work in man and inspire him with longing for perfect happiness, and thus for coming back to God:

For most might and most wretched was that fall in which our nature lost the knowledge and the wisdom which had been planted in her, and lapsed into a profound ignorance of herself and her Creator, even though we understand that the desire for the bliss which she had lost remained with her even after the Fall, which would certainly not have been the case if she had lost *all* knowledge of herself and her God<sup>52</sup>.

As we have seen, the understanding of *intelligo* as found in John the Scot, is clearly different from that offered by Augustine and also from that implied in the Cartesian *cogito*. In Eriugena, the *intelligo* as revealing the existence of the mind is merely the point of departure. It receives a grandiose development in the metaphysical scheme in which human mind as such is conceived as the "locus" of the constitution of created reality. The created things (except for man himself) receive their shapes and structures in and through human knowledge. This constitutive activity of human intellect is not arbitrary or willful: man is not the principal maker, but an intermediary; he is a "second creator," and his productive activity is

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51. Cf. A. WOHLMAN, *L'homme, le monde sensible et le péché dans la philosophie de Jean Scot Erigène* (Paris, 1987) 32 and f.

52. PP IV 777 C-D, 425; JEAUNEAU cit., 53: "Casus quippe illius maximus et miserri-mus errat scientiam et sapientiam sibi insitam deserere, et in profundam ignorantiam suimet et creatoris sui labi, quamvis appetitus beatitudinis, quam perdidit, etiam post casum in ea remansisse intelligatur, qui in ea nullo modo remaneret, si se ipsam et deum suum omnino ignoraret".

only efficient on condition that he turns his spiritual look to God in contemplation.

Constituted in human mind are both visible and invisible things. The mind contains the immaterial reasons of material things, thus even material reality exists in man in an immaterial way, that is not as subject to dispersal. Eriugena's conception of matter, modeled on that of Gregory of Nyssa appears to be closer to some contemporary theories than to the conception of matter as extended spatially formulated by Descartes.

The human *intelligo* in its function of revealing the totality of created reality is the intermediary through which all God's creative activity passes towards its effects. Its role as the mediator for the totality of God's influence upon the created effects epitomizes the essence of human intelligence as God's Image.

Knowing, as he does, all created essences (except for man himself), man is excluded from knowing his own essence; the "locus" for man's essence is the Divine Mind and it is there that the concept of man resides. From the human perspective, however, even that ignorance of man's own essence, a kind of "learned ignorance" is revealing: it is a revelation of the mysterious, inaccessible God.