
The conception of the First Cause in Book Two of John Scottus Eriugena's *Periphyseon*

El concepto de la Primera Causa en el Segundo Libro del Periphyseon de Juan Escoto Eriúgena

AGNIESZKA KJIEWSKA

Wydział Filozofii
Instytut Filozofii Teoretycznej
Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski
20-950 Lublin (Polonia)
agnieszka.kjewska@kul.lublin.pl

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to present the Eriugenian concept of the First Cause as developed in Book Two of his *Periphyseon*. The paper begins with Eriugena's fourfold division of nature, and focuses upon his concept of the second form of nature, which consists of primordial causes. Eriugena's view that God the Father has established in the Beginning, i.e. in His Son, the primordial causes of everything that are at once eternal and created, has led to many misconceptions and accusations of pantheism and subordinationism. These problems can be resolved against the background of Eriugena's interpretations of Divine creative activity as well as his Trinitarian considerations.

Keywords: Eriugena, First Cause, first causes, creation.

Resumen: El objetivo de este artículo es presentar el concepto eriugeniano de la Primera Causa tal como se desarrolla en el segundo libro de su *Periphyseon*. El estudio comienza con la división de la naturaleza y se centra en su concepción de la segunda forma de la naturaleza, que consiste en las causas primordiales. La visión de Eriúgena consiste en que Dios Padre estableció en el Principio, en Su Hijo, las causas primordiales de todo, que eran al principio eternas y creadas, lo cual llevó a muchos malentendidos y acusaciones de panteísmo y subordinacionismo. Estos problemas pueden ser resueltos desde los fundamentos de las interpretaciones de Eriúgena sobre la actividad creadora divina así como sobre sus consideraciones Trinitarias.

Palabras clave: Eriúgena, Causa Primera, causas primordiales, creación.

RECIBIDO: MARZO DE 2010 / ACEPTADO: ENERO DE 2011

The aim of this paper is to give a presentation of the Eriugenian concept of the First Cause as it is developed in Book Two of his *Periphyseon*. Eriugena's view that God the Father has established in the Beginning, that is in His Son, primordial causes of everything, which are at the same time eternal and created, has led to many misconceptions¹. His interpretation of *causae primordiales* which were created in the Word of God without temporal beginning gave rise to accusations of subordinationism and pantheism directed against the author. I think one can shed some light on his conception of the First Cause while considering it against the background of his theology, that is, the concept of the Holy Trinity. We should remember that for Eriugena, as well as for Boethius, theology was the most elevated part of philosophy and in their mind there was no distinction between "philosophical" and "theological" concepts².

Eriugena started the work on his *Periphyseon* about the year 864, while still at the court of his patron, Charles the Bald³. He had already earned recognition as a master proficient in liberal arts⁴ and had become a center of controversy after he had applied his skills to a discussion of a theological problem. This happened when he wrote in reply to Gottschalk of Orbais, who, quoting St. Augustine, proclaimed the theory of double predestination: to salvation and to damnation⁵. To dispute Gottschalk's ideas Eriugena wrote his work *On predestination* (*De divina praedestinatione liber*), in which he defended the thesis of single predestination.

1. Cfr. R. D. CROUSE, *Primordiales Causae in Eriugena's Interpretation of Genesis: Sources and Significance*, in G. VAN RIEL, C. STEEL, J. MCEVOY (eds.), *Iohannis Scottus Eriugena. The Bible and Hermeneutics* (University Press, Leuven, 1996) 209 and ff.

2. Cfr. A. KIJEWSKA, *The Eriugenian Concept of Theology. John the Evangelist as the Model Theologian*, in G. VAN RIEL et al, *op. cit.*, 173 and ff.

3. Cfr. E. JEAUNEAU, *Jean Scot: l'homme et l'oeuvre*, in E. JEAUNEAU, *Études érigéniennes* (Études Augustiniennes, Paris, 1987) 46 and ff.

4. Cfr. the glosses on the *Introduction* to Priscian's *Grammar*: P. E. DUTTON, *Evidence that Dubthach's Priscian Codex Once Belonged to Eriugena*, in H. J. WESTRA (ed.), *From Athens to Chartres. Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought. Studies in Honour of Edouard Jeauneau* (Brill, Leiden, 1992) 15-45; IOHANNIS SCOTTI, *Annotationes in Marcanum*, Edited by Cora E. Lutz (The Mediaeval Academy of America, Cambridge, 1939); J. J. CONTRENI and P. P. O'NEILL (ed. and trans.), *Glossae divinae historiae: The Biblical Glosses of John Scottus Eriugena* (SISMEL, Firenze, 1997).

5. Cfr. J. PELIKAN, *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)* (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago/London, 1978) 82 and ff.

Already that early work by Eriugena, his first original production, showed the order of arguing on problems of importance which was later to prove typical of him: he begins discussion by considering reasoned arguments, then he quotes from the Scriptures and only then he resorts to other authorities. Eriugena possessed extensive knowledge, for his time at least, of patristic sources, many of which he rendered into the Latin language⁶. His knowledge of ancient authors is considerably more difficult to appreciate, though his erudition in this field was, for his time, outstanding as well⁷. The influence of the great predecessors of John the Scot becomes evident in the very structure of the *Periphyseon*. This work is a monumental dialogue between Master and Pupil, who in a learned conversation undertake a discussion of essential scholarly, philosophical and religious problems. Eriugena makes his starting point the certainty, that all the truth concerning God, the Universe and man is contained in Holy Scripture, whence it must be extracted with the help of scholarly methods, and then interpreted and rationally expounded⁸. All search for truth (*inquisitio veritatis*) should preserve the following order: rational arguments should be explored first, and then the results of our rational discussion should be confronted with Holy Scripture and opinions of recognized authorita-

6. When he was about to begin writing the *Periphyseon*, he had already impressive achievements as a translator to his credit: he rendered into Latin the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius and the *Ambigua ad Iohannem* by Maximus the Confessor. At that time he was also busy translating *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* by Maximus the Confessor.

7. The source of information on the structure and ordering of the material world was, for Eriugena, the portion of Plato's *Timaeus* in Calcidius' Latin re-rendering (Cfr. IOHANNIS SCOTI, *Annotationes in Martianum* cit., 13, 23, 22) and Pliny the Older's *Natural History*. As for Aristotle's logic, he was familiar with Boethius's commentary on the *Categories* and also Boethius's second commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge*, though it is likely that he did not have in his hand the text of the *Isagoge* itself. Cfr. R. MCKITTERICK, *Knowledge of Plato's Timaeus in the Ninth Century: The Implications of Valenciennes*, *Bibliothèque Municipale MS 293*, in H. J. WESTRA, *op. cit.*, 85-86; J. MARENBO, *The Latin Tradition of Logic to 1100*, in D. M. GABBAY and J. WOODS (eds.) *The Handbook of the History of Logic. Volume 2: Mediaeval and Renaissance Logic* (Elsevier, Amsterdam, 2008) 29-30.

8. Cfr. A. KIJEWSKA, *Księga Pisma i księga Natury. Heksaameron Eriugeny i Teodoryka z Chartres* [Book of Scripture and Book of Nature; Eriugena's and Thierry of Chartres' Hexaemeron] (Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski, Lublin, 1999) 80.

tive authors⁹. Eriugena summarizes his thought in the expressive, concise words: “For there is no other health for faithful souls than to believe in what is truly said of the One Principle of all (things), and to understand what is truly believed”¹⁰.

It appears that as the discussion of the subject matter of the *Periphyseon* developed, the work itself grew to surpass the original design of the author. In the Book One are defined the basic concepts, including the concept of nature and its fourfold division. Master introduces the all-embracing notion of Nature in the following words:

“As I frequently ponder and, so far as my talents allow, ever more carefully investigate the fact that the first and fundamental division of all things which either can be grasped by the mind or lie beyond its grasp is into those that are and those that are not, there comes to mind as a general term for them all what in Greek is called *physis* and in Latin *Natura*”.

Master goes on to introduce the fourfold division of nature thus conceived:

“It is my opinion that the division of Nature by means of four differences results in four species, being divided first into that which creates and is not created, secondly into that which is created and also creates, thirdly into that which is created and does not create, while the fourth neither creates nor is created”¹¹.

-
9. Cfr. J. J. O'MEARA, *L'investigation et les investigateurs dans le 'De divisione naturae' de Jean Scot Erigène*, in R. ROQUES (ed.), *Jean Scot Erigène et l'histoire de la philosophie* (CNRS, Paris, 1977) 232.
 10. PP II, 556b, in J. J. O'MEARA, *Eriugena. Periphyseon* (Bellarmin, Dumbarton Oaks/Montréal, 1987) 157. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugena Periphyseon. Liber secundus*, Curavit Eduardus A. Jeauneau, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievals 162 (Brepols, Turnhout, 1977) 4: “Non enim alia fidelium animarum salus est, quam de uno omnium principio quae vere praedicantur credere, et quae vere creduntur intelligere”.
 11. PP I, 441a-b, 25. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugena Periphyseon. Liber primus*, Curavit Eduardus A. Jeauneau, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievals 161 (Brepols, Turnhout, 1996) 3: “Videtur mihi divisio naturae per quattuor differentias quattuor species recipere, quarum prima est in eam quae creat et non creatur, secunda in eam quae creatur et creat, tertia in eam quae creatur et non creat, quarta quae nec creat nec creatur”.

The first form of nature thus conceived refers to God, the Cause of reality as a whole, the second form of nature comprises the sphere of primordial causes of all things. The nature which is created and does not create is found in material reality, which is circumscribed by divisions, time and space. God conceived of as the supreme End of the creative process constitutes the fourth form of nature, which is uncreated and does not create. All these forms of nature are opposed to one another in a number of ways, the most important opposition being that between God and created reality¹². The first and fourth forms of nature are related to God, while the second and third constitute the totality of creation. Thus the fourfold division of nature does not correspond to four different ontological levels, as the first and fourth forms represent a reality that is as simple as it is possible and entirely indivisible¹³. This division captures the way man approaches in his cognition that which he can know and also that which escapes his efforts to comprehend. Pupil pronounces the following, as he sums up Master's words:

“For these two forms are discerned not in God but in our contemplation (of Him), and are not forms of God but of our reason, resulting from our double consideration of (Him as) Beginning and End, nor is it in God that they are reduced to one form but in our contemplation when it begins to consider the simple unity of the divine Nature. For Beginning and End are not proper names of the Divine Nature but of its relation to the things which are created. For they begin from it and that is why it is called Beginning; and since they end in it so in it they cease, it is rightly called by the name of End. On the other hand, the other two forms, I mean the second and the third, not only come into being in our contemplation but are also found in the very nature of created things, in which the causes

12. Cfr. S. GERSH, *Concord in Discourse. Harmonics and Semiotics in Late Classical and Early Medieval Platonism* (Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin/New York, 1996) 71-72.

13. Cfr. D. MORAN, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena. A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (University Press, Cambridge, 1989) 261: “What he [sc. Eriugena] intends to show is that the four divisions are four ways of talking about or viewing the divine reality”.

are separated from the effects and the effects are united to the causes because they make one with them in a single genus, I mean, in the creature"¹⁴.

Periphyseon can be described as a "hexaemeron", that is a commentary on the biblical narrative of the six days of creation¹⁵. In book two Eriugena carries out an analysis of the two opening verses of *Genesis*: "In the beginning God created heaven and earth. The earth was without form and empty, with darkness on the face of the depths, but God's spirit moved on the water's surface"¹⁶. The manner of interpreting the biblical text is a problem in its own right with Eriugena. John the Scot is convinced that Holy Scripture is a sort of "scientific" myth, which narrates the history of the creation of the world and man by God¹⁷. Eriugena wished to expound the narrative of the "work of the six days" in *Genesis secundum historiam*, that is according to historical and literary exegesis and leaving out allegorical

14. PP II, 527d-528a, 127; Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugena Periphyseon. Liber secundus* cit., 7: "Nam duae praedictae formae non in deo sed in nostra contemplatione discernuntur et non dei sed rationis nostrae formae sunt propter duplicem principii atque finis considerationem, neque in deo in unam formam rediguntur sed in nostra theoria, quae dum principium et finem considerat duas quasdam formas contemplationis in se ipsa creat, quas iterum in unam formam theoriae videtur redigere dum de simplici divinae naturae unitate incipit tractare. Principium enim et finis divinae naturae propria nomina non sunt, sed habitudinis eius ad ea quae condita sunt. Ab ipsa enim incipiunt atque ideo principium dicitur, et quoniam in eam terminantur ut in ea desinant finis vocabulo meruit appellari. Aliae vero duae formae, secundam dico et tertiam, non solum in nostra contemplatione gignuntur sed etiam in ipsa rerum creaturarum natura reperiuntur, in qua causae ab effectibus separantur et effectus causis adunantur, quoniam in uno genere, in creatura dico, unum sunt".

15. Cfr. G. H. ALLARD, *La structure littéraire de la composition du De divisione naturae*, in J. J. O'MEARA and L. BIELER (eds.), *The Mind of Eriugena* (Irish University Press, Dublin, 1973) 147.

16. *Gen.* 1, 1-2. Determining the biblical sources of Eriugena is no easy task. He must have known the Septuagint version, as the proofs of his acquaintance therewith are to be found in book two. However in his commentary on the *Celestial hierarchy* he wrote that he had never had this version in hand. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti Eriugena Expositiones in Ierarchiam coelestem*. Edidit J. Barbet, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievals 31 (Brepols, Turnhout, 1975) 176. He had a Greek copy of St. John's Gospel, which served as the basis for his commentary. The editors of his *Biblical Glosses* hold that already in that early stage of his literary career he had the version of the Biblical text edited by Theodulf of Orleans at his disposal. Cfr. J. J. CONTRENI and P. P. O'NEILL, *op. cit.*, 37.

17. Cfr. G. SCHRIMPF, *Die Sinnmitte von 'Periphyseon'*, in R. ROQUES, *op. cit.*, 298.

interpretation¹⁸. This “historical exegesis” was intended to discover the structure of the created world and had to be correlated with the inquiry into created reality. The Holy Scriptures and the created Universe were regarded as two books, which refer to one and the same event of creation. The parallelism of these two books is brought out by the comparison of them to “Christ’s sandals” made in his *Commentary on St. John’s Gospel*¹⁹.

In this light it is clear why Eriugena made use in his discussion of a number of illustrations “taken from nature”. Yet it should be borne in mind in relation to the causal relations obtaining in the created world that they are but a distant analogy of the supreme causality of the Prime Cause, which is cause in both in the primary and the secondary sense, being the immediate cause of every single thing as well as the cause of the complex totality of the Universe²⁰. Likewise Eriugena is far from approving any kind of reflection on material reality: he learned from Maximus the Confessor that when incorrectly pursued, the knowledge of sensible reality can lead one into many grave dangers. It can tempt one into excessive concentration on, and even deification of creation; sense experience, which is the necessary starting point of study of the physical world can dim the intellectual faculties of the soul²¹. To avoid these dangers, Eriugena situates his investigation in the context of his “physiology” or the most universal science of nature (*physis*). The principal intention of his “physiology” and its subject matter is, in his own words, the Superessential Essence, the creative Cause of everything that is and of everything that is not²².

18. Cfr. PP III, 693c, 323. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugena Periphyseon. Liber tertius*, Curavit Eduardus A. Jeuneau, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievals 163 (Brepols, Turnhout, 1999) 107.

19. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugena Commentarius in Evangelium Iohannis I*, Curavit Édouard A. Jeuneau (Brepols, Turnhout, 2008) 65. Cfr. W. OTTEN, *Nature and Scripture: Demise of a Medieval Analog*, “Harvard Theological Review” 88/2 (1995) 257 and ff.

20. Cfr. R. INGARDEN, *Spór o istnienie świata* [The Debate on the Existence of the World], Vol. 3 (PWN, Warsaw, 1981) 46 ff.

21. Cfr. C. STEEL, *The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil*, in G. VAN RIEL et al, *op. cit.*, 253-255.

22. PP IV, 741c, 381. Cf. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugena Periphyseon. Liber quartus*, Curavit Eduardus A. Jeuneau, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievals 164 (Brepols, Turnhout 2000) 3.

The structure of the *Periphyseon* can be viewed in the light of yet another scheme: namely the scheme of outgoing and return. The triad: remaining (*mone*) – procession (*proodos*) – reversion (*epistrophe*) provided the Neoplatonists with the paradigmatic structure encapsulating the causal procession of reality as a whole²³. In the Neoplatonist perspective the first element in the triad, that of remaining, concerned both the feature of the prime cause which remained undiminished throughout the causal process and the effect whose primal indwelling in the cause was the motive force behind its dynamic outgoing and return. The Christian re-working of the remaining-procession-reversion scheme was in principle non-emanationist and related to the doctrine of creationism. Also omitted in the Christian version was the theme of the primeval indwelling of effects in the supreme cause, since all things were thought to be called into being out of nothing by the power of God's creative act²⁴. True enough, Eriugena mentions subsistence of effects in the primordial causes, yet the primordial causes themselves were divinely created principles of all created things. It can thus be safely stated that *creatio ex nihilo* concerned in the first place the primordial causes, which virtually contained all their subsequent effects.

The scheme of remaining-procession-reversion is, nevertheless, found in Eriugena. The second book of the *Periphyseon*, which contains the mentioned analysis of the opening verses of *Genesis*, focuses on discussion of the Prime Cause of all things. While outlining his conception, Eriugena introduces a number of questions essential to his project, such as: 1) the problem of the relation of God the Father to the Son – the Word; 2) the problem of the creation of the causes of all things in the Word, and 3) the problem of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father through the Son. It is only when he has answered these problems that Eriugena proceeds to give an outline of his conception of the First Cause.

I have already mentioned that John the Scot combined his quest for the First Cause with the analysis of the opening lines of *Genesis*. Let's have a closer look at the passage in which Master asks Pupil:

23. Cfr. S. GERSH, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena. An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (Brill, Leiden, 1979) 45 and ff.

24. Cfr. *ibidem*, 217.

“Tell (me), then, please: What do you understand when you hear it said by the divine word: ‘In the Beginning God made’? Pupil: Nothing else than what we have agreed upon, that the Father made all things in His Word. For when I hear ‘God’ I think of God the Father, (and) when (I hear) ‘Beginning’ I understand God the Word”²⁵.

Eriugena quotes a number of explanations of the passage concerning creation before he puts forth his personal reading, which is distinctively speculative, possessing features essentially bound up with his “physiology”. According to him God created all things simultaneously, with one act (*simul et semel*) by positing all of creation in his Word, which is identical with the Father’s Wisdom. In the text of *Genesis* the Word is designated with the name “Beginning”: “For Beginning is not one thing and Wisdom another and the Word another, but by all these names the only begotten Son of God in Whom and through Whom all things are made by the Father is properly signified”²⁶.

God Himself has no beginning, as he is true eternity. The designation of the Son as the Beginning is made in view of His special relationship to the primordial causes of all things created, which have been established in Him.

“What is it [that the theologian says], ‘In the Beginning God made?’ Do you understand that the Father first brought forth His Word and then made heaven and earth in Him? Or perhaps that He brought forth His Word in eternity and in eternity made all things in Him, so that the procession of all (things) from nothing in the Word through creation? [And to put it more clearly: Were the primordial causes not always [in] the

25. PP II, 556 b, 158. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugena Periphyseon. Liber secundus* cit., 41: “N. Dic itaque, quaeso, quid intelligis, quando theologiam dicentem audis: ‘In principio fecit deus’. A. Nil aliud nisi quod inter nos convenerat, patrem in verbo suo omnia fecisse. Dum enim deum audio, deum patrem cogito; dum principium, intelligo deum verbum”.

26. PP II, 563b, 165. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugena Periphyseon. Liber secundus* cit., 50: “Non enim aliud est principium, aliud sapientia, aliud verbum, sed his omnibus nominationibus unigenitus filius dei, in quo et per quem omnia a patre facta sunt, proprie significatur”.

Word of God in Whom they are made, and was there the Word when the causes were not?²⁷ Or are they co-eternal with Him and was the Word never without the causes created in Him, and does (the fact that) the Word precedes the causes created [in Him] mean nothing else than that the Word creates the causes, while the causes are created by the Word and in the Word?²⁷”.

Although the Son is the Beginning in whom all the primordial causes have been established, yet this “beginning” is not to be understood in temporal sense. With respect to time, the primordial causes are eternal, for there was never a moment, in which they started to exist in the Word or rather time itself did not exist at all, since time in the proper sense is a feature of the third nature—the one that is created and does not create. Moreover, there can be no time difference between the cause and its immediate effect, for such a difference would call for another explanation, that is for another cause²⁸. Eriugena affirms:

“Hence it follows that our reason for saying that the primordial causes of things are co-eternal with God is that they always subsist in God without any beginning in time, (and our reason for saying) that they are not in all respects co-eternal with God is that they receive the beginning of their being not from themselves but from their Creator”²⁹.

27. PP II, 556 b–c, 158; Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugena Periphyseon. Liber secundus* cit., 41: “Quid est quod theologus ait: ‘In principio fecit deus?’ Utrum intelligis patrem verbum suum primo genuisse, ac deinde caelum et terram in eo fecisse? An forte suum verbum aeternaliter genuit et in ipso aeternaliter omnia fecit, ita ut nullo modo processio verbi a patre per generationem praecedat processionem omnium de nihilo in verbo per creationem? [Et ut manifestius dicam: Utrum primordiales causae in verbo dei, in quo factae sunt, non semper fuerunt, et erat verbum quando non erant causae? An coaeternae ei sunt, et nunquam erat verbum sine causis in se conditis, et nullo alio modo intelligitur verbum causas in se conditas praecedere, nisi quod verbum creat causas causae vero creantur a verbo et in verbo?]”.

28. Cf. R. INGARDEN, *op. cit.*, 23.

29. PP II, 561d – 562a, 164. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugena Periphyseon. Liber secundus* cit., 48: “Hinc conficitur quod ideo primordiales rerum causas deo coaeternas esse dicimus, quia semper in deo sine ullo temporali principio subsistunt, non omnino tamen deo esse coaeternas, quia non a se ipsis sed a suo creatore incipiunt esse”.

Thus the primordial causes can be described as both eternal (*aeternae*) and at the same time created (*factae*): they are eternal insofar as the category of time does not apply to them; they are created as they depend for their origin and subsistence on their Creator³⁰. The act of establishing the primordial causes is implied in the Scriptures in the place where they mention the creation of “the heaven and the earth”. That is why Master affirms:

“But as for myself, when I consider the interpretations of the many commentators, I think none is more acceptable, nothing more likely to be true, than that in the aforementioned words of the Holy Scripture, that is, by the choice of the terms ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’, we should understand the primordial causes of the whole creature, which the Father had created in His only begotten Son, Who is given the name of ‘Beginning’, before all things which have been created, and that we should accept that under the name of heaven the principal causes of the intelligible and celestial essences have been signified, and under the appellation of earth those of the sensible things by which the universe of this corporeal world is made up”³¹.

If we choose to understand by the creation of “heaven and earth” the creation of the sphere of causes, our next step should be explaining why Holy Scripture describes the created earth as being “void and waste”, or, following the Septuagint version “invisible and non-composed”. In this context John the Scot mentions the opinions of his great predecessors and thus provides the context for his own solution of the problem. The primordial causes comprising the second nature, provide the model after which the things contained

30. Cfr. R. INGARDEN, *op. cit.*, 32.

31. PP II, 546a-b, 146-147. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugena Periphyseon. Liber secundus* cit., 28: “Mihi autem multorum sensus consideranti nil probabilius nil verisimilius occurrit quam ut in praedictis sanctae scripturae verbis, significatione videlicet caeli et terrae, primordiales totius creaturae causas, quas pater in unigenito suo filio qui principii appellatione nominatur ante omnia quae condita sunt creaverat, intelligamus, et caeli nomine rerum intelligibilium caelestiumque essentiarum, terrae vero appellatione sensibilibus rerum, quibus universitas huius mundi corporalis completur, principales causas significatas esse accipiamus”.

within the realm of the third nature are patterned, that is all things circumscribed by time, space and all sorts of divisions. In the words of Master:

“For is it so incredible that the *prototypon*, that is, the principal exemplar, of corporeal nature which is what is meant by *the name* of ‘earth’ and which God in the Beginning, that is, the Father in the Son, had eternally and most perfectly created before this sensible world should be called void and waste?³²—void because it was void of every sensible thing in its effects until it issued forth into the genera and species of sensible nature in places and times; waste because the understanding of the prophet who was initiated into the Divine Mysteries had as yet beheld no quality, no quantity, nothing filled out by corporeal matter, nothing extended in place, nothing moving through time”³².

Thus the description “void and waste” given to the primordial causes is meant as an indication of the perfect integrity of the second nature, not yet spoiled by the outflow by their effects. The same perfect state of the causes is indicated by the words used in that place in the Septuagint: causes are invisible and non-compound; they are invisible as yet, for they will only become visible in their effects. The primordial causes, being created in the inaccessible Word, participate in the inaccessibility of their divine ground. The Bible lays special stress on their unknowability with the words “And the darkness was over the abyss”³³.

Divergent Latin renditions of the next verse from *Genesis* also provide Eriugena with a basis for ingenious speculation: one version

32. PP II, 549a-b, 150. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugenae Periphyseon. Liber secundus* cit., 32: “Num incredibile est ΠΡΟΤΟΤΥΠΟΝ (hoc est principale exemplar) corporalis naturae, quod significatur terrae nomine, quodque ante hunc mundum sensibilem perpetuo perfectissimeque deus in principio (hoc est pater in filio) condiderat, vacuum atque inane posse vocari? Vacuum quidem, quoniam omni sensibili suo effectu vacabat, priusquam in genera formasque sensibilis naturae per generationem locis temporibusque prodiret; inane vero, quia nullam qualitatem, nullam quantitatem, nil corporali mole densum, nil locis dispersum, nil temporibus mobile adhuc in eo intellectus propheticus, qui in divina mysteria est introductus, aspexerat”.

33. PP II, 554d-555a, 156. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugenae Periphyseon. Liber secundus* cit., 39.

has it that “Spirit of God was hovering over the waters”, while according to another it was “warming the waters”. These words highlight the role of the Holy Spirit in deducing from the primordial causes their effects, for it is the Holy Ghost that initiates the process of the third nature’s flowing out of the second³⁴. This reading allows Eriugena to see the whole Trinity revealed in the two opening verses of *Genesis*, with the specific action assigned to each of the Divine Persons. Thus, according to John, the Divine Unity and Trinity are both manifested in these first lines. In his own words:

“And from this understand that the most high and unique Cause of all (things), I mean the Holy Trinity, is openly revealed by these words: ‘In the Beginning God made heaven and earth’, that is to say, the Father under the name of God, and His Word under the name of Beginning, and the Holy Spirit a little later where (the Scripture) says: ‘The Holy Spirit was borne above’ (...) and I readily agree [that by the name of God is indicated the Father, (by the name) of Beginning the Son, (by the name) of Spirit of God the Holy Spirit; while by the word ‘earth’ are indicated the causes of visible (things), by the word ‘abyss’ those of intelligible (things), and the [super] eminence of the Divine [Nature], that is, the transcendence of the Cause of causes, is intimated by the symbol of superlatation or fermentation or fertilization]”³⁵.

The opening fragment of *Genesis* inspires Eriugena to embark on a discussion of the crucial for Christian faith problems of the Trinity. What are the mutual relations of the Persons of the Trinity? How to render into Latin the Greek terminology devised by the Fathers of

34. PP II, 555d-556a, 157. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugena Periphyseon. Liber secundus* cit., 40.

35. PP II, 555d-556a, 157. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugena Periphyseon. Liber secundus* cit., 40: “Ac per hoc summam ac singularem omnium causam, sanctam dico trinitatem, aperte declaratam his verbis intellige: ‘In principio fecit deus caelum et terram’, patrem videlicet dei nomine, verbumque eius principii appellatione, et paulo post spiritum sanctum ubi ait: ‘Spiritus dei superferebatur’ (...). Habeo plane, libenterque accipio dei nomine patrem, principii filium, spiritus dei spiritum sanctum significatos; terrae vero vocabulo visibilium causas, abyssi intelligibilium indicatas, divinae vero naturae supereminentiam (hoc est altitudinem causae causarum) superlatationis seu fatus seu foecundationis symbolo esse suasam”.

the Nicene Council to express the mutual relation of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit? These questions were given particular relevance by the theological controversies of the time, some of them only finished, and some of them still going on. In Charlemagne's days, the minds were agitated by the adoptionist controversy started by Felix of Urgel and Elipandus of Toledo, who affirmed that while Christ was the true Son of God, his human nature, "according to which he was a son of David", received God's Sonship through adoption by God³⁶. The views of the two Spanish bishops inspired further debate about the relationship of the human and divine nature in Christ, the mutual relations of the Divine Persons; the nature common to all the Persons and that which is specific to each of them. It was discussed, how one ought to conceive of the nature of the Trinity in order to save the idea that the assumption of human nature concerned only the Person of the Son and not the whole Trinity. In Eriugena's time, this controversy was exacerbated when Gottschalk of Orbais stepped in with his conception of "trine deity". "Trine deity" was a formula meaning that

"Each person of the Trinity had its own deity and divinity. In the incarnation, therefore, only the deity of the second person of the Trinity assumed a human nature. Each person of the Trinity, moreover, was in itself [*per se*] a primary power, so that in the Godhead 'power', 'principle', and 'fullness' were all both single and trine"³⁷.

John the Scot did not take a direct part in that controversy, but some repercussions of it are clearly discernible in the theological discussions contained in book two of the *Periphyseon*. His approach to this problem is analogous to that represented by Boethius; both authors start from the need precisely to define the terminology used in the discussion. Thus Eriugena states:

"God is Trinity and Unity, that is, three Substances in one Essence and one Essence in three Substances or Persons. For

36. Cfr. J. PELIKAN, *op. cit.*, 52 ff.

37. *Ibidem*, 60.

as the Greeks say *mian ousian treis hypostaseis* or *tria prosopa*, that is: one Essence three Substances or three Persons, so the Romans (say): *unam essentiam tres substantias* or *tres personas*; but [they appear] to differ in that we do not find the Greeks saying *mian hypostasin*, that is, one Substance, whereas the Latins most frequently say *unam substantiam tres personas*. The Greeks say: *omoousion*, *omagathon*, *omotheon*, that is, of one essence, of one goodness, of one deity [or one essence, one goodness, one deity]. But these terms, which among the Greeks signify the indivisibility of the Divine Nature do not go easily into Roman speech, and never do so exactly, I think (...)]³⁸.

It was the Nicene Council that appeared to fix the terminology of the Trinitarian theology and Christology; thus it proposed the famous formula to the effect that the Son is Consubstantial with the Father (*homousios to patri*): “*unius substantiae cum patre, quod Graeci dicunt homoousion*”³⁹.

Originally, the terms *ousia* and *hypostasis* were used interchangeably, as borne out by the use of them in Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Athanasius and Jerome, who treated them as synonyms⁴⁰. In the course of weighty theological controversies the terms *hypostasis* and

38. PP II 567 b-c, 170. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugena Periphyseon. Liber secundus* cit., 56-57: “Deus est trinitas et unitas, hoc est tres substantiae in una essentia et una essentia in tribus substantiis vel personis. Sicut enim graeci MIAN OΥΣΙΑΝ ΤΡΕΙΣ ΥΠΟΣΤΑΣΕΙΣ vel ΤΡΙΑ ΠΡΟΣΩΠΑ dicunt (id est unam essentiam tres substantias vel tres personas), ita romani unam essentiam tres substantias vel tres personas. In hoc tamen videntur differre quod graecos ΜΟΝΗΝ ΥΠΟΣΤΑΣΙΝ (id est unam substantiam) dicere non repperimus, latini vero unam substantiam tres personas frequentissime solent dicere. Graeci dicunt ΟΜΟΟΥΣΙΟΝ ΟΜΑΓΑΘΟΝ ΟΜΟΘΕΟΝ (hoc est unius essentiae, unius bonitatis, unius deitatis) [vel una essentia, una bonitas, una deitas. Haec enim nomina, quae apud graecos inseparabilitatem divinae naturae insinuant, in romanum sermonem non facile vertuntur, et nullo modo ad purum, ut arbitror]”.

39. Cfr. A. BARON and H. PIETRAS (eds.), *Wyznanie wiary 318 Ojców* [Confession of Faith of 318 Fathers], in A. BARON and H. PIETRAS (eds.), *Dokumenty soborów powszechnych [Documents of Councils 325-787]* Vol. 1, (WAM, Cracow, 2005) 24-25. Cf. A. KIJEWSKA, “Boecjusz i patrystyczne źródła koncepcji osoby” [Boethius and the patristic sources of the conception of the person], in M. RUSECKI (ed.) *Personalizm polski [Polish Personalism]* (Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski, Lublin, 2008) 26 and ff. Cfr. J. KOTERSKI, *Boethius and the Theological Origins of the Concept of Person*, “American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly” 78/2 (2004), 208 and ff.

40. Cfr. C. STEAD, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* (Univesity Press, Cambridge, 1994) 162.

prosopon, came to be related, just as were also the terms *ousia* (essence) and *physis* (nature); significant contribution was made to these debates by the Cappadocian Fathers⁴¹. St. Basil employed the term *hypostasis* as well as the term *prosopon* (person). Each of the Divine Persons, while participating in unique, common and eternal Divine Nature, possesses nevertheless its specific characteristics (τὸ ἰδιάζον τῶν ὑποστάσεων). The Nature (φύσις) common to all the Persons was conceived as the source of ‘might’ and ‘power’, and thus as the unique center of action, the center that Basil refers to by the term *ousia* (essence)⁴².

In the Latin tradition it was Tertullian, who was responsible for spreading the use of the term *substantia* as the Latin equivalent for the Greek *ousia*. God’s substance provides the basis for the unity of the Trinity, it is the “state” or “power” belongs to the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost⁴³. The Latin Trinitarian terminology owes much also to Marius Victorinus⁴⁴, and above all, to Saint Augustine. The last named was well aware that the Latin “*substance*” can function as an equivalent of both the Greek *hypostasis* and the Greek *ousia*, therefore he used *substantia vel essentia* for the latter while reserving *persona* for the former⁴⁵.

41. Cfr. A. KIJEWSKA, *Boecjusz i patrystyczne* cit., 30 and ff.

42. Cfr. BASILE DE CÉSARÉE, *Sur le Saint-Esprit*, Introduction, texte, traduction et notes par Benoît Pruche (Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 1968) 404-406.

43. Cfr. TERTULLIAN, *Adversus Praxean*, Übers. und eingel. von Hermann-Josef Sieben (Herder, Freiburg/Basel/Wien, 2001) 106. Cfr. R. P. HANSON, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God. The Arian Controversy* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1988) 184.

44. Cf. MARIUS VICTORINUS, *Adversus Arium* I, 11 (1046b-c), in *Opera theologica*, ed. A. Locher (Teubner, Leipzig, 1976) 41: “Sed quoniam et pater in filio et filius in patre, ὁμοούσιοι. Non oportet igitur dicere: duae personae, una substantia, sed: duo, pater et filius, ex una substantia dante patre a sua substantia filio substantiam in hoc, in quo genuit filium, et ex hoc ὁμοούσιοι ambo”.

45. S. AUGUSTINUS, *De Trinitate* VIII, 9-IX, 10: *Sancti Aurelii Augustinus De Trinitate libri XI*, Cura et studio W. J. Mountain, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 50 (Brepols, Turnhout, 1968) 216-217. “Dicunt quidem et illi hypostasim, sed nescio quid volunt interesse inter *ousian* et *hypostasim* ita ut plerique nostri qui haec graeco tractant eloquio dicere consuerint *mian ousian treis hypostaseis*, quod latine, unam essentiam tres substantias. Sed quia nostra loquendi consuetudo iam obtinuit ut hoc intellegatur cum dicimus essentiam quod intelligitur cum dicimus substantiam, non audemus dicere unam essentiam, tres substantias, sed unam essentiam vel substantiam. Tres autem personas multi latini ista tractantes et digni auctoritate dixerunt cum alium modum aptiorem non invenirent quo enuntiarent verbis quod sine verbis intellegabant”.

One gets the impression that Eriugena was aware of these debates⁴⁶, he knew of them both from Augustine's writings and from the texts by the Cappadocian Fathers and Boethius, who confirmed the use of the term "person". He seems to follow particularly closely the affirmation that St. Augustine made concerning the specific characteristics of each of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. The properties that are individually predicated of the singular persons of the Trinity relate to them either because of the relationship of one Person to another, or in consequence of the relation of each Person to the work of creation. All characteristics that are not specific to any Person are attributed to all the Persons of the Trinity in common⁴⁷. The common characteristics of the Holy Trinity are identical with the very being of God, with God's Essence or Substance, whereas particular Persons are distinguished by their individual features, which are designated by St. Augustine as "missions"⁴⁸. These specific features of each of the Divine Persons Eriugena discerns in his analysis of the opening lines of *Genesis*: God the Father creates the primordial causes in the Word, the Holy Spirit divides these causes into their effects. In the context of his "physiology", which is no less than the search for the First Cause, he is lead to the following affirmation:

"There is then, a substantial Cause (which is) unbegotten and begets; and there is a substantial Cause (which is) begotten and does not beget; and also [there is] a substantial Cause which proceeds and is not unbegotten nor begotten nor begetting; and the three substantial Causes are one, and one essential Cause"⁴⁹.

Another essential theological problem that was hotly debated at that time was the *Filioque* problem: the phrase added to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed to the effect that the Holy Spirit proceeds

46. PP II, 600 c-d, 21. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugena Periphyseon. Liber secundus* cit., 103.

47. Cfr. S. AUGUSTINUS, *De Trinitate* V, XI cit., 12, 218-219.

48. Cfr. S. AUGUSTINUS, *De Trinitate* IV, XX cit., 27, 195.

49. PP II, 600 a-b, 209. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugena Periphyseon. Liber secundus* cit., 102: "Est igitur substantialis causa ingenerita et gignens, et est substantialis causa genita, item substantialis est causa procedens, et tres causae unum sunt et una causa essentialis".

from the Father as well as from the Son (*ex Patre Filioque*). Jaroslav Pelikan sees in the unquestioned acceptance of the addition *Filioque* the influence of Augustine's teaching:

"The most striking, and ecumenically the most fateful, example of the pervasive authority of Augustine in Latin Trinitarian theology was the almost automatic manner in which Western theologians accepted the idea of *Filioque* (...). By the time of the Carolingian disputes with the East, it was altogether natural for Western teachers to assert that the Holy Spirit 'Proceeds completely from the Father, and completely from the Son,' or even that 'the Holy Spirit (...) proceeds from the Father and the Son according to the essence' of the Godhead. This equation of the Augustinian version of the Trinitarian dogma with the universal faith of the Church helps to explain the response of the West to the Greek attacks upon its theory of *Filioque*. Only much later in the Middle Ages, and then only rarely, was it suggested that the entire issue was merely a dispute over words"⁵⁰.

Eriugena is well aware of the importance and the difficulty of this problem and the diversity inherent in the approaches to it by the Latin and Greek Fathers. He affirms:

"The difficulty is [moreover] brought to a peak by the fact that the Symbol of the Catholic Faith according to the Greeks [handed down from the Council of Nicaea] professes that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father only [according to the evidence of Epiphanius the Bishop of Cyprus in his book *De Fide*]; but according to the Latins, from the Father and the Son—although in some commentaries of the Greeks we find that the same Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son"⁵¹.

50. J. PELIKAN, *op. cit.*, 21-22.

51. PP II, 601 c, p. 211. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugenae Periphyseon. Liber secundus* cit., 104: "Ad cumulum quoque obscuritatis augetur quod symbolum catholicae fidei secundum graecos a Nicena synodo traditum a patre solummodo spiritum sanctum procedere profiteatur, teste Epiphanio Cypri episcopo in libro suo *De fide*; iuxta vero latinos a patre et filio, quamvis in quibusdam graecorum expositionibus eundem spiritum a patre per filium procedere reperiamus".

However, John the Scot does not think that the controversy is merely verbal. An incorrect interpretation of the doctrine concerning the Son can involve us in grave problems, which have been signalized in the *Periphyseon* by Pupil:

“But even as I consider and believe these arguments concerning the threefold Cause of all things, another difficulty occurs to me. For I am not sure whether the Father alone is the Cause of the Holy Spirit or the Father and the Son, in which case, as the catholic Faith professes that He proceedeth from the Father and the Son, as also we should believe that He has two Causes of His [procession]”⁵².

Master begins by demonstrating, using illustrations taken from created nature and human nature, that it is not possible for two causes to produce one effect. That is why we should accept, that the only Cause of the Holy Spirit is the Father. The *Filioque* problem generates yet another question: since the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son, should we also believe that the Son is generated by the Father through the Holy Spirit?⁵³ Further discussion of the problem by Eriugena points to the fact that Christ as the Incarnated Word was conceived from the Holy Ghost and owing to His power: “daily then is Christ conceived, born, and nourished in the womb of Faith as in the womb of a most chaste mother”⁵⁴, yet this is not to be understood as concerning the generation of Christ as the Only-begotten Son of God. John the Scot, while recognizing the doctrinal import of the *Filioque* addition, justifies its absence in Greek theology pointing to the fact, that this addition could result in misconceptions:

52. PP II, 601 b, 211. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugena Periphyseon. Liber secundus* cit., 104: “...sed mihi talia cogitanti atque credenti de trina omnium causa alia caligo occurrit. Non enim clare considero utrum solus pater causa est spiritus sancti an pater et filius, ita ut quemadmodum fides fatetur catholica a patre et filio procedere, ita etiam credamus duas suae processionibus causas possidere”.

53. PP II, 611a-b, 223. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugena Periphyseon. Liber secundus* cit., 117.

54. PP II, 611 d, 223. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugena Periphyseon. Liber secundus* cit., 119: “Cotidie igitur Christus in utero fidei veluti castissimae matris visceribus et concipitur et nascitur et nutritur”.

“And perhaps the reason why it is declared by the Nicene Synod that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone is to prevent public discussion of such a subject. For if a careful student of the holy word of God hears that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son, why is it not equally true that the Son is born of the Father through the Spirit? But if the Son is born of the Father through the Spirit, why should it be said that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son? For why should that which as Catholics we believe of the Holy Spirit not be believed likewise of the Son? (...) And for this reason that which is recited in the Creed according to the Greeks is entirely unaffected by this problem and unconnected with it. For it says that the Son is *ek tou patros genetheta*, that is ‘Begotten of the Father’, but that the Spirit is *ek tou patros poreuomenon*, that is ‘proceeding from the Father’”⁵⁵.

The conception of the First Cause concerns a problem that is both very complex and of prime importance. Eriugena, as a reader of Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy*, was perfectly aware of the role the conception of causality plays in discussions on the role of chance in the Universe, on the Providence and Fate. The conception to the effect that God’s *Virtus Gnostica* contains causes of things posited in Itself, the causes that are then divided and distributed among the effects by the Holy Spirit, tends to remove chance from the world. All created reality is conceived as subordinate to the Divine Mind and subject to the Divine Providence.

55. PP II, 611 d- 612a, p. 223-224. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugenae Periphyseon. Liber secundus* cit., 119: “Et fortassis ideo a Nicena synodo spiritus sanctus ex patre solummodo procedere traditur, ne talis quaestio ventilaretur. Inquisitor siquidem sollicitus sanctae theologiae spiritum sanctum a patre per filium audiens procedere, mox divino studio admonitus quaerit et dicit: Si ergo spiritus sanctus a patre per filium procedit, cur non similiter filius a patre per spiritum nascitur? Si autem filius a patre per spiritum non nascitur, cur spiritus sanctus a patre per filium procedere diceretur? Nam quod de spiritu sancto catholice creditur, cur non etiam de filio similiter crederetur? Ac per hoc, quod in sancto symbolo secundum graecos canitur hac quaestione liberum omnino est atque absolutum. Dicit enim filium EK ΤΟΥ ΠΑΤΡΟΣ ΓΕΝΕΘΕΝΤΑ (hoc est ex patre genitum), spiritum vero EK ΤΟΥ ΠΑΤΡΟΣ ΠΟΡΕΥΟΜΕΝΟΝ (id est ex patre procedentem)”.

On the other hand, Eriugena knows very well that all what we predicate of God consists of concept deriving from creation and thus it relates to Him improperly. The causal relation we come to know from created reality and when we apply this concept to God, all we can say is that such a relation obtains, and not how it obtains. Eriugena's thought belongs to the tradition of apophatism: God is a radically transcendent reality, both with respect to being and to knowing, and He can not be known for what He really is. Human knowing proceeds owing to determination by means of number, determination that can best be described as "measuring" and "weighing" of things, yet God entirely escapes these categories. This is expressed by Eriugena in beautiful words:

"But God understands that He is none of those things but recognizes that He [is] above all the orders of nature by reason of the excellence of His Wisdom, and below all things by reason of the depth of His Power, and within all things by the inscrutable dispensation of His Providence, and encompasses all things because all things are within Him, and without Him there is nothing. [For He alone is the measure without measure, the number without number, and the weight without weight. And rightly so; for He is not measured or numbered or ordered by anything or by Himself, and He understands that He is not confined by any measure or number or order since in none of these things is He substantially contained, for He alone truly exists in all things, being infinite above all things]"⁵⁶.

John the Scot goes even further to express God's transcendence and infinity of His Being: God is unknowable in His Being not just to

56. PP II, 590b, 197. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugena Periphyseon. Liber secundus* cit., 89: "Deus autem in nullo eorum intelligit se esse, sed cognoscit se supra omnes naturae ordines esse suae sapientiae excellentia, et infra omnia suae virtutis altitudine, et intra omnia suae providentiae ininvestigabili dispensatione, et omnia ambire quia in ipso sunt omnia et extra ipsum nihil est. [Solus enim ipse est mensura sine mensura, numerus sine numero, pondus sine pondere, et merito, quia a nullo nec a se ipso mensuratur, numeratur, ordinatur. Nec in ulla mensura, in ullo numero, in ullo ordine intelligit se esse, quoniam in nullo eorum substantialiter continetur, cum solus vere in omnibus super omnia infinitus existat]".

man, but also to Himself, and this precisely on account of His infinity. Each knowing consists in distinguishing and, simultaneously, circumscribing a thing, in determining it in a definition, and God, as absolutely infinite, cannot be circumscribed by any limits, be these limits merely cognitive and imposed by Himself. God knows Himself for Nothing, for He knows that He is not anything⁵⁷. These considerations lead Eriugena to a dilemma that is typical of his theology, and that seems insolvable: either we ascribe ignorance to God or circumscribe His infinity. Eriugena chooses the solution consisting in preserving the absolute infinity of Divine Being while claiming that God's "ignorance" transcends all knowledge⁵⁸.

John the Scot believed that it is not possible, for any mind, to know what God is, all that can be known with regard to Him is that He is. The privileged path to knowing God's existence is the study of the "book of the world" and the "book of human soul". Eriugena followed here the new way opened by Augustine: the internal structure of human interior is the "image" of the Holy Trinity⁵⁹. Yet this is also the path opened by Christian Neoplatonists—Pseudo-Denys or St. Gregory of Nyssa. Master exhorts Pupil:

"Contemplate, then, and, dispelling all mist of ambiguity, understand with the sharpness of your mind how clearly, how explicitly the substantial Trinity of the Divine Goodness is revealed in the motions of human soul to those who study them carefully, and manifests itself to those who seek it piously as though in a most limpid mirror of their own made in its image, and although it is removed from every creature and is unknown to every intellect descends through its image and likeness (to become), as it were, known and comprehensible and in some measure present to [the eyes of] the intellect [and of its own accord cleanses the mirror which reflects it so that it may shine forth from it most brilliantly (as) one essential Goodness in

57. Cfr. W. BEIERWALTES, *Autoconciencia absoluta*, in W. BEIERWALTES, *Eriugena. Rasgos fundamentales de su pensamiento* (Eunsa, Pamplona, 2009), 173-175, 180-188.

58. PP II, 587b-c, 193. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugena Periphyseon. Liber secundus* cit., 84.

59. Cfr. S. AUGUSTINUS, *De Trinitate* IX, II cit., 2.

three Substances: for this Unity and Trinity (...)]. For the likeness of the Father shines forth most clearly in the intellect, that of the Son in the reason, that of the Holy Spirit in the sense"⁶⁰.

Thus there is an image of the Creator in the human soul and owing to that image man can discover God in His being, in His existence, even though His essence will remain forever inaccessible to human understanding and unknown. Man occupies a privileged position within the universe: in his essence there shines forth both the First Cause of the whole of reality as well as included in his essence there are all the principal orders of creatures. This is the classical theme of man as microcosm, which will be extensively developed in the remaining books of the *Periphyseon*, in particular in Book Four, its importance for the present discussion consists in it pointing to the fact that the privileged "locus" within created reality where God becomes approachable is man⁶¹.

The treatment by Eriugena of essential theological problems allows us to highlight the salient features of his method. One of the most characteristic traits of his method is the dialectical, aporetic approach to any issue that he discusses. All conceivable answers to a given question are included in his account, none of them is rejected out of hand, not even one that seems most absurd or that appears at first glance to contradict the faith; he makes an effort to penetrate into probe into the innermost intention and assumptions of any theory under discussion. In this he is guided by the idea that the stand-

60. PP II, 579 a-b, 183-184. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugenae Periphyseon. Liber secundus* cit., 72: "Intuere itaque acieque mentis tota ambiguitatis caligine depulsa cognosce quam clare, quam expresse divinae bonitatis substantialis trinitas in motibus humanae animae recte eos intuentibus arridet, seque ipsam pie quaerentibus se veluti in quodam proprio speculo ad imaginem suam facto limpidissime manifestat, et cum sit ab omni creatura remota omnique intellectui incognita, per imaginem suam et similitudinem veluti cognitam et comprehensibilem intellectualibus oculis ac veluti praesentem se ipsam depromit [ultroque specillam in qua relucet purificat, ut in ea clarissime resplendescat una essentialis bonitas in tribus substantiis (...)]. Patris siquidem in animo, filii in ratione, sancti spiritus in sensu apertissima lucescit similitudo".

61. PP II, 531c-532a, 131-132. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugenae Periphyseon. Liber secundus* cit., 11. Cfr. M. KURDZIAŁEK, *Der Mensch als Abbild des Kosmos*, in A. Zimmermann (ed.), *Der Begriff der Repraesentatio im Mittelalter* (Walter de Gruyter, Berlin/New York, 1971) 35-75.

point that is opposed to ours is likely to throw light upon the hidden defects, difficulties and confusions inherent in our own approach⁶².

Discovering truth is a long and involved process, yet there are always good reasons for hoping for a success, for the guide and the inspiration of our search for truth is no less a being than God Himself:

“For He who is sought does not abandon those who seek Him, nor refuse to those who pursue their investigation in a spirit of piety and humility the possibility of finding Him. For He Himself says: ‘Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone who asketh receiveth and everyone who seeketh findeth and to him that knocketh it shall be opened’”⁶³.

Translated into English
by Roman Majeran

62. PP II, 602 a, 212. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugenae Periphyseon. Liber secundus* cit., 105.

63. PP II, 601d - 602a, 211. Cfr. *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugenae Periphyseon. Liber secundus* cit., 105: “Non enim ille qui quaeritur quaerentes se deserit, nec inveniendi se possibilitatem pie atque humiliter investigantibus denegat. Ipse enim ait: ‘Petite et dabitur vobis, quaerite et invenietis, pulsate et aperietur vobis. Omnis enim qui petit accipit et qui quaerit invenit et pulsanti aperietur’”.