

IN THE SHADOW OF THE DIVINE: NEGATIVE THEOLOGY AND NEGATIVE ANTHROPOLOGY IN AUGUSTINE, PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS AND ERIUGENA

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I. INTRODUCTION

The recent postmodern debate on negative theology has in many ways been successful. Not the least of its successes is the renewed attention that it has brought to the author who has traditionally been held responsible for the popularity of the so-called *via negativa*, the enigmatic Dionysius the Areopagite (c. 500 CE). After Dionysius's apostolic reputation was discredited in the Renaissance and Reformed theologians such as Luther had added their own criticism, this powerful medieval tradition became widely eclipsed by Enlightenment theism.¹ The intensity of the new debate around negative theology, however, which was started by Jacques Derrida but has since been taken up by many others, e.g., Jean-Luc Marion, suggests that the present resurgence of interest may well be more than a passing phase.² For whatever the outcome of the postmodern debate, it would appear that the texts of Dionysius may once again occupy a place in the larger cultural discussion on matters philosophical and theological. I deliberately use the phrase 'once again' to hark back to the formidable impact these texts had when they first appeared on the theological scene of the Christian West.

Given especially Derrida's critique of the Western onto-theological tradition, however, it is no surprise that he, and many others with him, with the exception of Marion, connect the method of negative theology primarily with the absence of the divine, expressed most poignantly in the notion of the death of God. In the context of their debate negative theology can lead quite naturally into a discussion on negative anthropology, a topic which has indeed begun to attract attention. After all, when God has died and the cosmos is stripped of all numinous qualities, how can humanity sidestep the confrontation with its own finitude?

Outside postmodern circles, however, scholars with an interest in Christian mysticism have started to focus on the tradition of negative theology

as well. Here one may think of Denys Turner's recent study *The Darkness of God*,³ in which he sketches the development of the so-called *via negativa* as it has left its own distinct traces in the history of medieval Christian mysticism.⁴ According to Turner, the strength of this method was not that it allowed for a more accurate account of the human encounter with the divine, but on the contrary, that it criticized overly experiential interpretations of it. In Turner's analysis we thus find an emphasis which in some way resembles Derrida's, albeit that the authors whom he most closely analyses (Eckhart and the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*) appear more concerned to maintain the distance of the divine than to assert its absence. Moreover, as Turner goes on to analyse, for these late medieval authors the element of distance does not so much apply to God himself as that it helps to tidy up the muddy language of mystical experience in which believers could entangle him. This latter function helps to explain why Meister Eckhart, for example, could engage in such pungent criticism of standard devotional practices. His apophatic approach was so intense that he eventually cancelled out the existence of a personal self as well as a personal Godhead. Thus the parallels with the postmodern debate seem evident.

Still, the question arises how these parallels between the late twentieth century and the late Middle Ages help to elucidate the position of Pseudo-Dionysius himself. It is his thought which the present article wants to bring to the fore, if only because it has sparked a debate which still lasts today. The best way to get at Dionysius's position may well be to situate his texts in the context of the historical debate in which they had their first impact. From that debate it seems clear that the central question which exercised Dionysius was how to express the mystery of the divine in human language. But that is also where the similarity with the postmodern debate ends. For the philosophico-theological motive driving Dionysius's linguistic agenda appears not to be the absence or even the distance of the divine, as seems to be the case for Derrida and Eckhart/Turner, but rather that of its *presence*. Instead of a focus on the absence of the divine, Dionysius's texts display a dynamism whose vigour can only derive from the adamant attempts of human language to cope with the divine as an overpowering presence. Only the nearness of the divine can so upset the conventional rules of human speech as to make it entirely unsuitable for describing the mystical encounter.⁵

From acceptance of this hypothesis, certain consequences follow. If it is indeed true that in Dionysius we have a kind of negative theology which leads inevitably to a kind of negative anthropology – which remains to be seen – we have to keep open the possibility that his aim in shielding off the invasive presence of the divine may be very different from what is at stake in the postmodern debate. Rather than embracing human finitude as the only appropriate a/theological option for the decentred self to survive the death of God,⁶ Dionysius's focus on the finitude of humanity reflects the attempt to protect its budding self-consciousness against the divine as a presence whose dominance is not just invasive but potentially crushing.

To elaborate why and how Dionysius differs from both Turner's interpretation of late medieval mysticism – which I hold to be essentially correct – and post-Heideggerian deconstructionism, is one of the stated goals of this article. But the main focus will be on Dionysius in his historical setting. To this aim I will map out the history of negative theology and its passage into negative anthropology. In so doing I will highlight Dionysius's concerns as generally predating the problem of the distance/absence of the divine. By linking his position to that of a predecessor, i.e., Augustine, and a successor, i.e., John the Scot Eriugena, I will flesh out the uniqueness of Dionysius's position even further. The link with Augustine has coloured the reception of Dionysius throughout much of Western intellectual history up to and even beyond Eckhart,⁷ while it is through Eriugena's Latin translation that Dionysius was inducted into that tradition in the first place.⁸ Before taking the path of historical analysis, however, we must analyse the source of all problems surrounding theological language: the notion of humanity as the image of God.

II. HUMANITY AS THE IMAGE OF GOD

The central anthropological doctrine in the Christian tradition is no doubt that of humanity as the image of God. The notion of divine image is also the first characterization of humanity found in the Bible, in Genesis 1:26–27. As an account of sound scriptural provenance, it continues to receive widespread exegetical treatment. Yet the idea of the divine image has certain philosophical implications as well, which makes the tracing of its reception more complex than what might otherwise have been a linear history.

If we contemplate how this notion of divine image has affected the tradition in which Dionysius stands, i.e., that of Christian Platonism, a few characteristics turn out to have been very prominent in shaping it. First of all, there is the idea that humanity is created, that is, made or fashioned, by God. In contrast to mainstream Platonism,⁹ early and medieval Christianity tended to see humanity as an object rather than a companion or kindred spirit of the divine, however intimate their relation could become. For Christian Neoplatonists the dividing-line in the universe was not that between the intellectual and the sensual, as held by the Greeks, but rather that between God and creation.¹⁰ Given that humanity belongs to creation, regarding humanity as an object implied putting humans squarely in the company of other creatures in the cosmos, be they animals or angels, as this entire choir was called into being to sing the praises of their creator. However much humanity strove to transcend its created limits, it would ultimately come face to face with a gulf that it would remain unable to cross: that which separates created life from the divine life itself, its source and principle.

Second, the above account of divine image indicates to us how the contact between God and humanity, as a subject–object relation of some kind, could grow so hierarchical¹¹ as to depend on mediation. A favoured mechanism for mediation in Christian Platonism was that of luminous reflection. Thus the glory of humanity was often seen as deriving from a brighter, more radiant source, i.e., the divine light itself. While in this kind of medieval light metaphysics the divine light was not seen as being diminished by giving off its rays, it was equally clear that the image that would shine forth, i.e., humanity, could never be adequate to its source. It literally remained in the shadow of the divine. In a peculiar twist springing from the perceived inadequacy of the human image, the Christian Platonist tradition likewise held that humanity, being the shadowy reflection of a luminous source that is by definition inexhaustible, could itself also transmit light. Hence, the cosmos became slowly transformed into a play of light and shadows. Not only could humanity receive the divine light more clearly and in purer form than the other creatures, it was also capable of communicating this light to them, even if it could only do so by refracting it.¹² The road to the divine was thus only dimly lit, as humanity's view of the cosmos resembled more and more that of a Rembrandt painting: one bright spot informs the view of the overall picture at the risk of obscuring, or at least not revealing, fairly conspicuous details.¹³

What makes the Christian Platonic tradition even more complicated is the fact that these two functions of humanity converge (if not actually interact) in the single definition of humanity as the image of God. As the object of God's creative activity humanity was also the mediator of light, and it was as a mediator of light that humanity appeared capable of pointing us back to the divine creator himself beyond creation as an assembly of artefacts. It is precisely this interaction which I take to be the most distinctive aspect of the notion of humanity as the image of God, a definition which continued to cast its chiaroscuro shadows on the long and complex tradition of Christian Platonism.

III. FROM IMAGE TO ORIGINAL: THE HUMAN ROAD TO GOD

Although the anthropological notion of divine image conveys to us that God and humanity are closely related, it is their incongruity that would quickly become a fixed point in the various traditional elaborations which this notion received. God is eternal, while humanity dwells in the temporal realm; God is seen as truth itself, while humanity resides in a permanent state of fragmentation, of bits and pieces, in short, in a realm of partial truths. Thus an odd theological situation arose: the standard attempts to unite creation and creator as image and original only served to make it even clearer that they were deeply different from each other. Even the various mechanisms of mediation could not prevent God from being increasingly

pushed upward, that is, away from creation and from humanity. God became the unattainable, the untouchable, the transcendent, while creation lingered behind in a world that was more and more seen as deficient, or transient, and as generally incapable of providing a suitable dwelling-place for divine perfection.¹⁴

It is against the background of this moral–intellectual climate of the first few centuries that the tradition of negative theology can be seen to take root.¹⁵ Throughout all this we have to factor in that the anti-gnostic emphasis of Christian ‘creatonist’ thought on the finitude of the world began to mix in with the familiar Platonic images of the world as shadowland.¹⁶ In Pseudo-Dionysius we encounter a theologian who appears so keenly sensitized to these problems that he wants to develop a more accurate way of naming the divine. It is precisely his strategy which has become known as the tradition of negative or apophatic theology. Perhaps it is good to state from the outset that, because Dionysius develops negative theology as a corrective, it is best to approach it in tandem with its more familiar counterpart: the strategy of affirmative theology.¹⁷ This is also how his famous little tract, the *Mystical Theology*, presents matters, by introducing a clear-cut dialectic between positive and negative ways of naming the divine.¹⁸

Since the conventional ways of naming God through his likeness with creation only heightened the asymmetrical nature of the relation between God and humanity, Dionysius begins precisely there where the deepest problems of human language lie, i.e., in the fundamental incongruity between the human linguistic apparatus and its divine object. Although this article combines the analysis of Dionysius with that of Augustine and Eriugena, it will focus on Dionysius first, because his contribution to negative theology is the more lasting as well as the more profound, which may also explain why it has caused more ripples in the pond of postmodern philosophy. Furthermore, it is in comparison with Dionysius that the contributions of Augustine and Eriugena can gain new meaning.

If we concentrate for a moment on Dionysius’s *Mystical Theology*, it is clear that the divine is evoked here as a being who is supremely transcendent. What is more striking, however – and what lends Dionysius’s theology its unique quality – is that this divine transcendence is being asserted through a kind of superabundant removal of all intellectual options. Every attempt to approach the divine, however insistent and well-planned, must fail inasmuch as it forces the thinker to conclude to its complete inadequacy. The divine displays such remarkable resilience in protecting its divine transcendence that its essence is certain to remain definitively unexpressed. But, while the *via negativa* is attractive for Dionysius because it prevents the divine from becoming entangled in a web of words – as these in the end cannot but collapse – it thereby adds to the central problem of human predication in that it underscores the fundamental incongruity between human words and divine essence. Thus a situation arises in which the remedy seems to worsen the very disease it wants to cure.

Central to Dionysius's use of negative theology throughout all this is the introduction not just of a dialectic between the human and the divine – that much was to be expected from the outset – but the setting in motion of a kind of reverse divine striptease: an unveiling of the divine which results not in its undressing but in its redressing, as the divine bareness becomes more and more hidden.¹⁹ Dionysius's handling of affirmative and negative theology teaches us first and foremost how language, i.e., the various modes of human predication, can be as successful in shielding off the divine as it is in opening it up for public access, or perhaps even more.²⁰ The need to cloak the divine may in part arise from the Neoplatonic, specifically Proclean, tradition over against which Dionysius's thought must be situated.²¹ In this tradition a healthy dose of theurgy was commonplace, as is testified by the references to the Chaldean Oracles.²² But it is further enhanced by the idiosyncratic structure of the author's unique dialectic, in which the stated inaccessibility of the divine is used methodically to sharpen the capacity of human language to register things sensitively and to express things effectively. Through his introduction of negative theology, therefore, more than through any other method, Dionysius sets a new standard of adequacy for theological language.

IV. FROM AUGUSTINE TO ERIUGENA: THE HUMAN ROAD TO GOD

As a side-effect of the intended accuracy of Dionysian language human subjects are forced to conform themselves so completely to the divine object that we can indeed speak of a loss of self. This helps to explain the remarkable and close affinity between what might be called Dionysius's analytical bent on the one hand and his penchant for mystical union on the other. It is rather artificial to separate these two strands of his thought, since they do in fact go hand in hand.²³ Thus it seems true, at least for Dionysius, that logic and ecstasy are not mutually exclusive. This makes it hard to pinpoint just where the dividing-line lies between negative theology and negative anthropology.²⁴ The two are virtually inseparable. Just as we can never be sure that the statements about God actually touch his essence, so it seems we can never be certain that the human subject who pronounces these statements enjoys any kind of permanence. Hence Dionysius's fascination with the biblical figure of Moses.²⁵ Not only is Moses the figure who went up the mountain to see God while never laying eyes on his face, but he is also the prophet whose earthly journey was to a certain extent as unsuccessful as his heavenly ascent in that he never dwelt in the promised land.²⁶

This is what I see as Dionysius's chief contribution to the debate on negative anthropology: the proposition that the radical quest for God so uproots any human sense of self-assurance that we run the risk of losing ourselves completely. This, then, will be a focal point in the discussion

that follows. Before pursuing this point, however, it may be opportune to compare Dionysius briefly to the other two authors this article wishes to discuss. If we step back for a moment from Dionysius's contribution to the debate concerning the accuracy of human predication about God, and confine ourselves to a strictly chronological approach, we can try to follow the development from Augustine to Eriugena so as to see how negative theology and negative anthropology intersect in their works. Since Dionysius's stated approach of negative theology coincides seamlessly, albeit implicitly, with an accompanying negative anthropology, his position appears to defy explanation. It is through comparisons with Augustine and Eriugena, however, as authors who come before and after him, that we may throw his position into relief, as we develop a clearer perspective on how negative theology and anthropology interrelate.

V. AUGUSTINE: HOW TO HAVE A VISION OF 'WHAT NO EYE HAS SEEN?'

For Augustine we shall concentrate on the element of vision as a key concept in his wider epistemology. As Bernard McGinn has recently shown, the notion of *visio Dei* dominates Augustine's idea of mystical union.²⁷ Although certain aspects of Augustine's epistemology point in the direction of a negative theology, it nevertheless seems fair to say that his theology is overall set in a kataphatic mould.²⁸ Be that as it may, this conclusion does not imply that Augustine sees the vision of God as within human reach. Too much is wrong with the human condition for this to be the case. Humanity may by nature be well-equipped to have a vision of God; it does not thereby have the ideal starting position to acquire knowledge of any kind, whether to see itself or to see God. How to go from merely having eyes to actually seeing is the central epistemological problem that underlies Augustine's anthropology.

What the implications are of Augustine's emphasis on seeing God can be nicely demonstrated from a famous passage in the *Soliloquies*. Since this work marks Augustine's first attempt at autobiographical writing, our focus on it here gives due prominence to the important connection between self-knowledge and knowledge of the divine that is regarded as typical of Augustinian spirituality.²⁹ Thus it will also have relevance for the problem of the relation between negative theology and negative anthropology. Before entering into a discussion of important passages, however, we do well to realize that Augustine, being the Neoplatonic philosopher he also is, has a different understanding of the mechanics of the visual process. While the object does indeed leave an imprint on the eye, Augustine also believes that the eye itself sends out rays to catch the object. Thus the saying that 'one lays eyes on something' is quite literally true for Augustine, even in matters spiritual.³⁰ Of course there needs to be little doubt that the chief object any Christian wants to lay eyes on is God.

If we turn to the *Soliloquies*, we notice how in Book I.vi. 12–13 Augustine describes a series of three steps through which the soul must prepare itself for the vision of God:

The soul therefore needs three things: eyes which it can use aright, looking and seeing. The eye of the mind is healthy when it is pure from every taint of the body, that is, when it is remote and purged from desire of mortal things. And this, faith alone can give in the first place ... Reason is the power of the soul to look, but it does not follow that everybody who looks, sees. Right and perfect looking which leads to vision is called virtue. For virtue is right and perfect reason ... Then looking is followed by the vision of God, its true end in the sense that there is nothing more to look for. This truly is perfect virtue, reason achieving its end, which is the happy life.³¹

As a first conclusion from this passage it is clear that Augustine describes an interior vision here, as his concern is with the divine illumination of the human mind. If this interior vision is to be successful, one needs to meet three essential conditions. Before all, one needs to have eyes. It is evident that Augustine refers to the eyes of the soul here. One further needs to have the capacity to look, by which Augustine hints at reason as the so-called *aspectus animae*. With the help of reason the eyes of the soul next begin to function, so that there is more than a blank stare there.³² Only then can we actually see, that is, view an object, the final aim of the visual process being obviously God. Whereas Augustine's account of human vision is not unique, because of its strong Neoplatonic overtones, he Christianizes Neoplatonic vision by accentuating the unfit starting condition of the eyes, which are humanity's central equipment. For Augustine, one cannot even embark on the visual process before the eyes are properly healed. As is to be expected, the intellectual and the moral-religious overlap completely for him, so that we cannot begin to see without faith, which alone possesses the capacity to heal the eyes. A central role in this healing process is attributed to the theological virtues of hope and charity, which alongside faith bring out humanity's continued dependence on God.³³

For Augustine, therefore, the negation that is operative in the description of the soul's journey to God is one which by definition will always imply deficiency. This deficiency can only be redressed by the gifts of faith, hope and charity.³⁴ Despite the flawed character of human knowledge, Augustine nevertheless insists that the resulting vision consists of knowledge made up of both the knower and the known. Thus he emphasizes not just that knower and knowable object should both be present, but hints at the same time that both will become transformed. This goal of a final transformation may also explain why there is a continued emphasis on the need to love in Augustine, for it is only through love that the knower and the known can reach out in such a way as to become linked. The centrality of charity rather than faith becomes especially clear when we find Augustine stating that we will no longer need faith and hope to see God in heaven. Since in heaven all that we will have hoped for and believed in will be accomplished, we will only need love so as to keep growing closer to God.³⁵

By way of a final comment, I would like to state that the other famous sensory images with which Augustine can describe the mystical apex, such as the 'touch of the heart' in the famous conversation with his mother Monica at Ostia (*ictus cordis*, cf. *Conf.* IX.10), show us at times a more positive evaluation of the mystical moment, as humanity appears indeed capable of self-transcendence in its search for God. Yet as his overdue and melancholy recognition of divine beauty – 'late have I loved you, Beauty so old and so new' – reveals,³⁶ the more typical pattern of Augustine's mysticism is that of a human self whose eagerness to transcend itself all too often masks a serious past failure to wrestle with sin as an intellectual and moral deficiency, to the point where the divine disclosure can no longer be properly received. As Augustine so fittingly observes in the same chapter: 'You were with me and I was not with you.'³⁷ If for Augustine, therefore, human self-transcendence and divine disclosure seem at times to meet each other halfway, it is largely because the divine is able to compel its own worship through the law of charity.

VI. DIONYSIUS: INTELLECTUAL ASCENT AS DISPLACEMENT OF SELF

If in Augustine all the initiative lies with the divine, whether directly through its self-disclosure or indirectly through faith as the gift that heals human eyes, in Dionysius there is more room for a human initiative that is not immediately disqualified on account of sin. While for Augustine the mere possession of eyes is not sufficient as long as they are not healed, the alternation of different modes of predication in Dionysius appears intended from the start to provide humanity with more flexibility or leeway in its search for God.

In my initial remarks on Dionysius above,³⁸ I pointed out how in Dionysius we have the unique situation that analytical precision in predication (i.e., an ever-increasing human mastery of speech) and mystical ecstasy (i.e., the displacement of self as a result of humanity's insistent attempts to approach God) go hand in hand. Apparently, Dionysius's successful introduction of negative theology leads quite naturally into a kind of negative anthropology. Against this background it is not surprising that his chief contribution lies in the consistent use of the notion of intellectual ascent. For it is by ascending – and not through the proven Platonic alternatives of progressive steps or circular revolutions – that humanity comes to approach the divine by leaving behind its former sense of self. The image demonstrating this is that of the prophet Moses climbing Mount Sinai.³⁹

To analyse this notion of intellectual ascent, I suggest we look to the beginning of the *Mystical Theology* rather than to its ending. Whereas towards the end Dionysius gets caught up in the thin air of his own dialectic of negative and affirmative theology, here in the beginning we witness how Moses is ordered to remove himself from the crowds to rise to the divine

summit with some chosen priests. Remarkably, he does not then secure a vision of God himself, but contemplates only the place where God dwells. It is only when he breaks totally free that he finds himself in the right position to plunge into the darkness of unknowing:

It is not for nothing that the blessed Moses is commanded to submit first to purification and then to depart from those who have not undergone this. When every purification is complete, he hears the many-voiced trumpets. He sees the many lights, pure and with rays streaming abundantly. Then, standing apart from the crowds and accompanied by chosen priests, he pushes ahead to the summit of the divine ascents. And yet he does not meet God himself, but contemplates, not him who is invisible, but rather where he dwells ... But then he [Moses] breaks free of what sees and is seen, and he plunges into the truly mysterious darkness of unknowing ... Here, being neither oneself nor someone else, one is supremely united by a completely unknowing inactivity of all knowledge, and knows beyond the mind by knowing nothing.⁴⁰

Although it is a hazardous statement to make, one may venture the hypothesis that for Dionysius it is as much an interest in negative anthropology that propels him to enter on the path of negative theology as the other way around.⁴¹ The structure of this episode with its triadic emphasis on purification, illumination and union as indicating simultaneously Moses's movement *towards* God and *away* from his former human self would lend at least some support to this.

But whereas Augustine's repeated insistence on the need for healthy eyes serves as a reminder of humanity's creaturely dependence on God, especially on Christ the physician's power to heal, it is interesting to note how Dionysius gives a minute description of Moses's ascent only to prepare us for a headlong plunge: a plunge into divine darkness. Departing from both Augustine who preceded him and Eriugena who will follow him, Dionysius appears unafraid to define ecstasy in such a way that there is a total absence of any and all firm ground. It is Dionysius's intellectual willingness to enter into this divine void, coupled with his stubborn refusal to analyse it in human terms, that makes it in the end as hard to distinguish between negative theology and negative anthropology as it is to choose between silence and speech.⁴² For the one presupposes the other and the second can only hark back to the first.

VII. ERIUGENA: THE PATH OF DESIRE FROM DIVINE IGNORANCE TO HUMAN KNOWLEDGE

In Eriugena we encounter an author whose uniqueness lies in the fact that he combines both the Western Augustinian tradition and its Eastern Dionysian counterpart. The fact that his main work, the *Periphyseon*, consciously includes both implies that he sufficiently understands the divergences between these two strands to feel the need to bridge them. When he comes

to analyse negative theology, this is not so difficult, to the extent that he finds sufficient concurring evidentiary texts in Augustine and Dionysius to proclaim their consensus. In *Periphyseon* II 597D–598A, for example, Eriugena sees no difficulty in aligning Augustine and Dionysius because both have expressed the claim that, in the case of the divine, true ignorance and true wisdom are identical. In the words of one of the two interlocutors in the dialogue, viz. the Student:

For what the Holy Fathers, I mean Augustine and Dionysius, most truly say about God – Augustine says that He is better known by not knowing, Dionysius that His ignorance is true wisdom – should, in my opinion, be understood not only of the intellects which reverently and seriously seek Him, but also of Himself. For as those who pursue their investigations along the right path of reasoning are able to understand that He transcends them all, and therefore their ignorance is true wisdom, and by not knowing Him in the things that are they know Him the better above all things that are and are not; so also it is not unreasonably said of (God) Himself that to the extent that He does not understand Himself to subsist in the things which He has made, to that extent does He understand that He transcends them all, and therefore His ignorance is true understanding; and to the extent that He does not know Himself to be comprehended in the things that are, to that extent does He know Himself to be exalted above them all, and so by not knowing Himself He is the better known by Himself. For it is better that He should know that He is apart from all things than that He should know that He is set in the number of all things.⁴³

The implications of this, however, reach further than we might expect. For, in a next step, they lead Eriugena to state rather daringly that humans are capable of a similar ignorance of self by reason of their supreme transcendence of the world. Thus the Master exhorts his pupil:

You understand correctly, and I perceive that you have a clear and unwavering view of what reason teaches about these matters; and you no longer see, I think, any difference between the image and its principal Exemplar except in respect of subject.⁴⁴

By this expression Eriugena shows some restraint as he claims that, as the image of God, the existence of humanity depends by definition on the existence of God as the original of this image, which is logically and ontologically prior. But in the same breath he also suggests that in other respects they are much the same, if not identical. However complimentary to the proud nature of humanity this may sound, there is a further circumstance which seriously compromises humanity's being and existence. The Master immediately alludes to this in *Periphyseon* II 598B:

And if any dissimilarity but this is found between the image and the principal Exemplar it has been from the fault of its created image. It has not come from Nature but is an accident produced by sin; and not from the envy of the creative Trinity.⁴⁵

For a proper perspective on Eriugena, it is important to see the above quotations in the context of the *Periphyseon* as a whole. This work, which reflects a dialogue between a Master and his Student, adheres to a particular metaphysical scheme: that of the Platonic procession and return, which

is mirrored in its literary set-up.⁴⁶ The above passages from Book II are part of a discussion in which God's capacity as First Cause is explored. In this context it would not be opportune for Eriugena to flesh out the anthropological dimensions of his statements. After he has completed this discussion in Books I and II, he speaks first about the primordial causes in Book II and in Book III and then proceeds to discuss the status of material creation in the remainder of Book III. Not until then is he ready to embark on the theme of the universe's return. Given the implicit association of Platonic procession with ontological descent, however, it is rather surprising that Book IV does not set in with humanity's sin – as one might have expected – but rather with its creation. Apparently, Eriugena regards sin not as a terrible fall from perfection but as a concomitant aspect of humanity's creaturely status. More precisely, for Eriugena sin tends especially to affect humanity's status as a created knower or a cognitive subject.

When Eriugena unfolds his anthropological analysis in Book IV,⁴⁷ this same problem naturally surfaces. And this time the consequences for his metaphysical scheme of procession and return seem so serious as to lead him away from the path of Dionysius. For, whereas Eriugena does retain his interest in negative theology, his hesitant attempts at a negative anthropology come to an abrupt halt. Early in Book IV, he had felt confident enough to reaffirm his position from Book II that 'the human mind is more honoured in its ignorance than in its knowledge';⁴⁸ he even went so far as to define humanity in proto-idealist terms as 'a notion eternally made in the divine mind'.⁴⁹ But rather than elaborating the capacity of sin to create a cosmic drama, our author stresses the epistemological impact of sin as an incision of irreversible fact; this would seem to persuade him in the end not to absorb human nature entirely into the divine essence. Thus he opts to maintain the creaturely identity of the human self, even if it implies that an adulterated vision of the divine will never be attained.⁵⁰ In an odd way, it seems as if Eriugena deliberately embraces the sinfulness of human nature so as to leave at least some intellectual ground for humanity to encounter the divine. Moreover, he does so knowing not just that this ground is precarious but also, as we will go on to explain, that it is gravely contaminated.

In the order of creation, humanity's status as a primordial cause (i.e., a notion in the divine mind) clearly outshines its more humble status as a created effect. Yet when Eriugena sets out to connect the human and the divine in Book IV, he takes his starting-point none the less in humanity's humbler status as a created effect. Although humans are sinful creatures and suffer from ignorance by reason of intellectual defect rather than ontological supremacy, it is precisely as creatures that they are capable of development, of healing, and therefore of approximating the divine.⁵¹ Eriugena seems remarkably eager to sacrifice humanity's near-divine qualities in an apparent attempt to reinvigorate its faint-hearted and flawed attempts at gaining knowledge, even though this knowledge may have the initial side-effect of alienating humanity from God even more. For the knowledge of

flawed human beings, which is by definition fragmented, sinful and temporal, will generally be of an unsatisfactory quality.

Although the accumulation of human knowledge has the potential of widening the separation of God and humanity by stressing the incongruity of divine and human ignorance, Eriugena still remains convinced that a flawed quest for knowledge is the only way in which humans can satisfy their *appetitus beatitudinis*, their desire for the happy life.⁵² His is not the absolute dependence on God's healing power that we find in Augustine, where God is responsible even for humanity's very search, nor Moses's headlong plunge into utter darkness that characterizes Dionysius's mystical ascent. Instead we find an individualized process of differentiated progress. To fulfil their desire for happiness, humans will design their individual visions of God, the so-called theophanies. In a reference to Dionysius's anonymous fourteenth-century interpreter, these theophanies should be called Eriugena's 'clouds of knowledge' rather than of 'unknowing'. While humanity fails to see God face to face (for in Eriugena's interpretation of the Pauline text, the term *facies* still has theophanic meaning), these 'clouds of knowledge' do enable humans to look back on their lowly starting position as sinful, ignorant creatures and measure proudly how far they have come.

VIII: CONCLUSION

When one attempts to interpret the late-twentieth-century debate on negative theology and negative anthropology by linking it back to the historical debate first sparked by Dionysius, it seems the problem of the absence of the divine permeates the former, while it is God's presence which motivates the latter. This article has tried to make Dionysius's methods of negative and affirmative theology more explicit by comparing and contrasting his position with those of Augustine before him and Eriugena after him. Although Augustine may at times have engaged in negative theology, the overall mould of his theology is clearly kataphatic. In the case of humanity, this means that negation implies more often than not a deficiency, notably the deficiency of human sinfulness. Eriugena's attempts at negative theology, on the other hand, appear to resemble those of Dionysius more closely to the extent that humanity, like God, has the potential to transcend the world and its own creaturely status. Yet in what can only be seen as a major difference with Dionysius, Eriugena's budding interest in negative anthropology is cut short because, like Augustine, he again tends to associate the consistent application of negation to humanity with the deficiency of sin. While both Augustine and Eriugena do engage in negative theology, therefore, only in Dionysius do we find the firm, albeit unspoken, alliance of negative theology and negative anthropology. Although both Augustine and Eriugena do not engage in negative anthropology due to the invasiveness

of human sin, the difference between them is that, while Augustine turns to God in prayer, Eriugena accepts this sinfulness as an epistemological starting-point for humanity's quest for God. While this quest will be flawed and painful, it will enable humans to measure their own progress, as they slowly proceed on the journey to God.

Given the unspoken balance between negative theology and negative anthropology in Dionysius, it is fitting that Derrida and others have picked him to express and develop their postmodern variations on this theme. Especially Derrida's notion of '*différance*' seems to make for fertile connections between these two masters of negation.⁵³ Yet although their choice for the device of negation may be very similar, differences become manifest on the level of content. It should especially be kept in mind that, whereas the postmodern theme of the 'decentring of the self' is logically and culturally contingent upon the notion of the death of God, this is not what drives Dionysius's displacement of the self. In Dionysius the human self provides its own dynamic in fuelling the negation, not as a way to deny or to differ, but rather as an intellectual technique not to become overpowered by the affirmation of a reality greater than which cannot be thought, i.e., the reality of the divine. Although the overlap between the presence of the divine and the integration of the human self appears no longer a viable cultural or theological option, and Derrida may well be as good an interpreter of the Dionysian legacy as there has been in centuries, it is nevertheless important to preserve Dionysius's historical contribution by protecting his '*différance*' from any contemporary appropriation.

Notes

1 For a short discussion of the historical figure of Dionysius and the question of his authorship of the so-called Dionysian corpus, see Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius. A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 14–18. See also the introductions by Jaroslav Pelikan ('Influence and Noninfluence of Dionysius in the Western Middle Ages') and Karlfried Froehlich ('Pseudo-Dionysius and the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century') in Colm Luibheid (transl.), *Pseudo-Dionysius. The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), pp. 11–32, 33–46. The most complete treatment of Dionysius's thought is still René Roques, *L'Univers dionysien. Structure hiérarchique du monde selon le Pseudo-Denys* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1983).

2 See especially the 1987 article by Jacques Derrida, 'How to Avoid Speaking: Denials', in Harold Coward and T. Foshay, *Derrida and Negative Theology* (Albany: SUNY, 1992), pp. 73–142 and Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, transl. by Thomas A. Carlson (1982; Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991).

3 See Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) whose method can be seen as analytical. A different case is presented by Bernard McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century* (New York: Crossroad/Herder, 1992) pp. 157–82 who treats Pseudo-Dionysius as part of a chapter on 'The Monastic Turn and Mysticism'. The recent study by Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Un-saying* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994) seems to bridge these two approaches (analytical and mystical/anagogical) through a concentrated exploration of the impact of negation. While Sells's study has chapters on Eriugena and Eckhart, it does not deal with Pseudo-Dionysius.

4 See Turner, *Darkness of God*, ch. 2: 'Cataphatic and the apophatic in Denys the Areopagite' (pp. 19–49). Turner's approach to medieval mysticism hinges on the somewhat static presupposition that it consists of a mixture of Platonic and biblical motifs (ch. 1: 'The Allegory and Exodus', pp. 11–18).

5 For an analysis of the power and even violence implied by the human encounter with the divine presence in medieval monastic thought, e.g., in Richard of St Victor's *About the Four Degrees of Violent Love*, see M. B. Pranger, 'Monastic Violence' in Hent de Vries and S. Weber (eds.), *Violence, Identity and Self-Determination* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 45–57.

6 For an analysis of the death of God and the disappearance of the self, see Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 19–51.

7 This is one of Turner's underlying arguments. He sees a perfect synthesis of both traditions in Bonaventure. See *Darkness of God*, pp. 102–34 (ch. 5: 'Hierarchy interiorised: Bonaventure's *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*').

8 See Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, p. 5.

9 For a good survey of this development, see A. H. Armstrong (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), especially Part III on Plotinus by A. H. Armstrong (pp. 195–268) and Part IV, The Later Neoplatonists by A. C. Lloyd (pp. 272–325).

10 See I. P. Sheldon-Williams, 'The Greek Christian Platonist Tradition from the Cappadocians to Maximus and Eriugena' in Armstrong, *The Cambridge History*, p. 426.

11 In this regard it is interesting to note that Dionysius has coined the term 'hierarchy'. Yet the problem of how to cross the gulf between God and creation is obviously one which predates his use of the term.

12 See Willemien Otten, 'Nature and Scripture: Demise of a Medieval Analogy', *Harvard Theological Review* 88 (1995), p. 263.

13 Although Dionysius uses light imagery, light metaphysics feature more prominently in the tradition of Augustine, for example, in Anselm and Bonaventure. For Augustine, see the chapters by R. A. Markus, 'Augustine. Reason and Illumination' (ch. 23) and 'Sense and Imagination' (ch. 24) in Armstrong, *Cambridge History*, pp. 362–379. See further the section on Augustine below. The Dionysian influence can be traced via Eriugena to, for example, Robert Grosseteste. See Deirdre Carabine, 'Eriugena's Use of the Symbolism of Light, Cloud and Darkness in the *Periphyseon*', in Bernard McGinn and W. Otten (eds.), *Eriugena East and West* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1994), pp. 141–52, and James J. McEvoy, 'Metaphors of Light and Metaphysics of Light in Eriugena', in Werner Beierwaltes, *Begriff und Metapher* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Verlag, 1990), pp. 149–67.

14 My speculations here are intended to provide a rough account of the emergence of gnostic and Manichaean communities in the second through fourth centuries CE.

15 For a recent survey of the historical tradition of negative theology which includes its pre-Christian aspects, see Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God: Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition: Plato to Eriugena* (Louvain: Peeters/Eerdmans, 1995).

16 For a brief survey of the gnostic position, see Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, pp. 89–99. It is especially in Origen that a perceived anti-gnostic emphasis seems to have reinforced the suspicion of Platonism. For a balanced account of Origen, see Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition* (1966; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 95–123, and McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, pp. 108–30. For an interpretation of *On First Principles* as based not on unbridled Platonic speculation but on a carefully crafted Trinitarian theology, see Charles Kannengiesser, 'Divine Trinity and the Structure of *Peri Archon*', in Charles Kannengiesser and W. L. Petersen (eds.), *Origen of Alexandria: His World and his Legacy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), pp. 231–49, and his 'Écriture et théologie trinitaire d'Origène', in Gilles Dorval and A. le Boulluec, *Origeniana Sexta: Origen and the Bible* (Louvain: Peeters, 1995), pp. 351–64.

17 Although in the Platonic tradition negative theology had a long history dating back to Plato's *Parmenides*, Dionysius is the first Christian author to theorize about it and implement it as a method. For the connection with affirmative theology, see Paul Rorem, 'The Uplifting Spirituality of Pseudo-Dionysius', in Bernard McGinn, J. Meyendorff and Jean Leclercq (eds.), *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), pp. 132–51. A similar position is advocated by A. H. Armstrong in his 'Apophatic–Kataphatic Tensions in Religious Thought from the Third to the Sixth Century A.D.: A Background for Augustine and Eriugena', in F. X. Martin O.S.A. and J. A. Richmond, *From Augustine to Eriugena: Essays on Neoplatonism and Christianity in Honor of John J. O'Meara* (Washington: The Catholic University of American Press, 1991), pp. 12–21.

18 For the text of *Mystical Theology*, see the edition by A. M. Ritter in Günther Heil and A. M. Ritter (eds.), *Corpus Dionysiacum II* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1991), pp. 141–50. I will cite from the English translation by Colm Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*. For a general introduction to Dionysius, see Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (Wilton: Morehouse-Barlow, 1989). A detailed commentary can be found in Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, pp. 183–236, and in Ysabel de Andia, *L'Union à Dieu chez Denys l'Aréopagite* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), pp. 341–98.

19 The more conventional image used by Dionysius to describe his own method is that of clearing away or sculpting (*aphaeresis*, a term which derives from mainstream Platonism), cf. MT 2.1025B. See John N. Jones, 'Sculpting God: The Logic of Dionysian Negative Theology', *Harvard Theological Review* 89 (1996), pp. 355–71. The idea of divine striptease, however, which is suggested by Eriugena's clothing imagery in *Periphyseon* I 416C, reflects more adequately the methodical consistency of Dionysius's search for God which seems designed to have a tantalizing effect on the reader. This is especially clear when one reads the MT in connection with the *Divine Names*.

20 Dionysius's mention that his theology is not for the uninitiated can be seen as a standard rhetorical device in Christian-Platonic texts. For an interesting article that traces the aura of secrecy in Platonic texts back to Plato's own fear to be found guilty of abandoning traditional polytheism, like Socrates before him, see Pieter W. van der Horst, 'Plato's Fear as a Topic in Early Christian Apologetics', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6 (1998), pp. 1–13.

21 For the link between Proclus and Dionysius, see, for example, Henri-Dominique Saffrey, 'New Objective Links Between the Pseudo-Dionysius and Proclus', in Dominic O'Meara (ed.), *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought* (New York: SUNY Press, 1982), pp. 64–74.

22 For a re-evaluation of Plotinus's relation to the Chaldaean Oracles, see John Dillon, 'Plotinus and the Chaldaean Oracles', in Stephen Gersh and Charles Kannengiesser (eds.), *Platonism in Late Antiquity* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1992), pp. 131–40. For a connection with Dionysius through Proclus, see Y. de Andia, *L'Union à Dieu*, pp. 211–24. On theurgy, see also John M. Rist, 'Pseudo-Dionysius, Neoplatonism and the Weakness of the Soul', in Haijo J. Westra, *From Athens to Chartres: Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought. Studies in Honour of Edouard Jeuneau* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), pp. 135–61, esp. pp. 141–4.

23 This tendency has only indirectly been noted in modern scholarship. Thus, Bernard McGinn's account on Dionysius seems to focus on the ecstatic or anagogical (see McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, pp. 157–82), albeit in connection with what he calls his dialectical systematics (p. 170), while Denys Turner emphasizes the analytical aspects (cf. *Darkness of God*, pp. 19–49). See also note 3 above. Although Turner accentuates Dionysius's analytical strengths, he describes his mystical denial of affirmation and negation in terms of a logical paradox, the resulting discourse of which he labels the 'babble of Jeremiah' (p. 22).

24 This conclusion, which follows from the intimate connection between linguistic analysis and mystical experience in Dionysius, has to my knowledge not been thematized in recent literature.

25 On the ascent of Moses in Philo of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa and Dionysius, see Y. de Andia, *L'Union à Dieu*, pp. 303–73.

26 See Deut 34:4.

27 For a balanced and comprehensive account of Augustine's mysticism, see McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, pp. 228–62. McGinn notes that Augustine himself discusses the vision of God with reference to his own experiences, but that on the whole he refrains from union language (p. 230).

28 Notwithstanding the general truth of this statement, which gains poignancy when one compares Augustine and Dionysius, there have been various efforts to detect a kind of negative theology in Augustine. See, for example, Deirdre Carabine, 'Negative Theology in the Thought of St Augustine', *Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale* 59 (1992), pp. 5–22.

29 It suffices to mention the famous passage in *Soliloquies* I.ii.7, where Augustine states that the only two things of which he wants to have knowledge are God and the soul. For the impact of this on Western culture, see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 127–42. In what follows I quote the text from the critical edition by W. Hoermann (ed.), *Soliloquiorum libri duo. Sancti Aurelii Augustini Opera*. CSEL 89 (Prague: Tempsky, 1986) and the translation from John H. S. Burleigh, *Augustine: Earlier Writings* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953).

30 See Margaret Miles, 'Vision: The Eye of the Body and the Eye of the Mind in Saint Augustine's *De Trinitate* and *Confessions*', *Journal of Religion* 63 (1983), pp. 125–42.

31 See *Solil.* I.vi.12–13: Ergo animae tribus quibusdam rebus opus est ut oculos habeat quibus iam bene uti possit, ut aspiciat, ut videat. Oculi sani mens est ab omni labe corporis pura, id est, a cupiditatibus rerum mortalium iam remota atque purgata; quod ei nihil aliud praestat quam fides primo ... Aspectus animae, ratio est: sed quia non sequitur ut omnis qui aspiciat videat, aspectus rectus atque perfectus, id est, quem visio sequitur, virtus vocatur; est enim virtus vel recta vel perfecta ratio ... Iam aspectus sequitur ipsa visio dei, qui est finis aspectus; non quod iam non sit, sed quod nihil amplius habeat, quo se intendat. Et haec est vere perfecta virtus, ratio perveniens ad finem suum, quam beata vita consequitur.

32 The internal role of reason here mirrors the outward role of Reason as Augustine's discussion partner in the compositional structure of the *Soliloquies* as a literary dialogue.

33 See esp. *Solil.* I.vi.12 where Reason says: 'So without these three (i.e., faith, hope and charity) no soul is healed so that it may see, that is, know God': 'sine tribus istis (scil. fide, spe, caritate) igitur anima nulla sanatur, ut possit Deum suum videre, id est intelligere.'

34 Although it falls outside the scope of this article, it is interesting to note that the examples of an Augustinian *cogito* appear to operate also on the notion of deficiency. In *De trinitate* 10.10 and in *De civitate dei* 11.26 it is either through being mistaken ('fallor, ergo sum') or through doubt ('si dubitat, scit se nescire') that Augustine develops his position. For a discussion of the relation between Augustine's and Eriugena's *cogito*, see Brian M. Stock, 'Intelligo me esse: Eriugena's *Cogito*' in René Roques (ed.), *Jean Scot Erigène et l'histoire de la philosophie* (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1977), pp. 327–35.

35 See *Solil.* I.vii.14: 'Now let us see whether these three things are still necessary when the soul has attained the vision, that is the knowledge, of God. Why should faith be necessary when vision is already attained? And hope, too, when that which was hoped for is grasped? From love alone nothing can be taken away, but rather must be added. For when the soul sees that unique Beauty it will love it more.' For the aspect of Beauty, see note 36 below.

36 See *Conf.* X.xxvii.38: 'Sero te amaui, pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam noua, sero te amaui!' With its invocation of God as Beauty this passage draws attention to what Karl Morrison has labelled the 'kinesthetic element' in Augustine's understanding of understanding. See Karl F. Morrison, *Conversion and Text: The Cases of Augustine of Hippo, Herman-Judah, and Constantine Tsatsos* (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 1992), pp. 23–35.

37 See *Conf.* X.xxvii.38: 'et ecce intus erat et ego foris et ibi te quaerebam et in ista formosa, quae fecisti, deformis inruebam. mecum eras, et tecum non eram. ea me tenebant longe a te, quae si in te non essent, non essent. uocasti et clamasti et rupisti surditatem meam, coruscasti, splendisti et fugasti caecitatem meam, fragrasti, et duxi spiritum et anhelum tibi, gustavi et esurio et sitio, tetigisti me, et exarsi in pacem tuam.'

38 See Section III.

39 Compare the title of Paul Rorem's essay 'The Uplifting Spirituality of Pseudo-Dionysius', in McGinn, *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, pp. 132–51, esp. 143–4.

40 See MT 1.3 (1000C–1001A): Καὶ γὰρ οὐχ ἁπλῶς ὁ θεὸς Μωϋσῆς ἀποκαθαρθῆναι πρῶτον αὐτὸς κελεύεται καὶ αὐθις τῶν μὴ τοιούτων ἀφορισθῆναι καὶ μετὰ πᾶσαν ἀποκάθαρσιν ἀκούει τῶν πολυφώνων σαλπίγων καὶ ὄρᾳ φῶτα πολλὰ καθαρὰς ἀπαστράπτοντα καὶ πολυχύτους ἀκτίνας· εἶτα τῶν πολλῶν ἀφορίζεται καὶ μετὰ τῶν ἐκκρίτων ἱερέων ἐπὶ τὴν ἀκρότητα τῶν θείων ἀναβάσεων φθάνει. Κἀν τούτοις αὐτῷ μὲν οὐ συγγίνεται τῷ θεῷ, θεωρεῖ δὲ οὐκ αὐτόν (ἀθέατος γάρ), ἀλλὰ τὸν τόπον, οὗ ἔστιν ... Καὶ τότε καὶ αὐτῶν ἀπολύεται τῶν ὁριωμένων καὶ τῶν ὁρώντων καὶ εἰς τὸν γνόφον τῆς ἀγνωσίας εἰσδύνει τὸν ὄντως μουσικόν, ... πᾶς ὢν τοῦ πάντων ἐπέκεινα καὶ οὐδενός, οὔτε ἑαυτοῦ οὔτε ἐτέρου, τῷ παντελῶς δὲ ἀγνώστῳ τῇ πάσης γνώσεως ἀνενεργησία κατὰ τὸ κρεῖττον ἐνούμενος καὶ τῷ μηδὲν γινώσκειν ὑπὲρ νοῦν γινώσκων.

41 My view here seems to echo the gist of the essay by John M. Rist, 'Pseudo-Dionysius, Neoplatonism and the Weakness of the Soul'. Rist concludes that it is Dionysius's dissatisfaction with Neoplatonic ethics that could have persuaded him to convert to Christianity as the proper way for the soul to return to God (pp. 156–9). Thus the intellectual ascent clearly has moral consequences for Dionysius.

42 On this point my interpretation differs from Turner's in his *Darkness of God*. Turner sees the *Mystical Theology* ending in the 'babble of Jeremiah'. While I hold a more sobering view of Dionysian ecstasy, it is no less radical, as it implies that Dionysius continued his dialectic of affirmative and negative theology without end.

43 See I. P. Sheldon-Williams (ed.), *Iohannis Scotti Eriugena Periphyseon (De Diuisione Naturae) Liber secundus* (1972; Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983), pp. 162–4: 'A(lum)nus. Nam quod sancti patres, Augustinum dico et Dionysium, de deo uerissime pronuntiant – Augustinus quidem "qui melius" [inquit] "nesciendo scitur", Dionysius autem "cuius ignorantia uera est sapientia" – non solum de intellectibus qui eum pie studioseque quaerunt uerum etiam de se ipso intelligendum opinor. Sicut enim qui recto ratiocinandi itinere inuestigant in nullo eorum quae in natura rerum continentur ipsum intelligere possunt sed supra omnia sublimatum cognoscunt ac per hoc eorum ignorantia uera est sapientia et nesciendo eum in his quae sunt melius eum sciunt super omnia quae sunt et quae non sunt, ita etiam de ipso non irrationabiliter dicitur in quantum se ipsum in his quae fecit non intelligit subsistere in tantum intelligit se super omnia esse ac per hoc ipsius ignorantia uera est intelligentia et in quantum se nescit in his quae sunt comprehendi in tantum se scit ultra omnia exaltari atque ideo nesciendo se ipsum a se ipso melius scitur. Melius enim est se scire ab omnibus remotum esse quam si sciret in numero omnium se constitui.' It should be noted that Edouard

Jeauneau is currently undertaking a new edition of the entire *Periphyseon* for the series *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis*. While Books I–III of this edition have recently appeared, Book IV, the text of which is key to my argument, has not. Hence I have decided to quote from the Sheldon-Williams' edition as the only modern edition that is complete at this point in time.

44 See *Per.* II 598A (Sh.-W., p. 164): *N. Recte intelligis et quod de talibus ratio suadet pure ac indubitanter te perspicere sentio nec iam cernis ut opinor ullam differentiam imaginis et principalis formae praeter rationem subiecti (scil. hypokeimenon).*

45 See *Per.* II 598B (Sh.-W., p. 164): *Et si aliqua dissimilitudo praeter hoc imaginis et principalis exempli reperta fuerit non ex natura hoc processit sed ex delicto accidit, neque ex creatricis trinitatis inuidia sed ex creatae imaginis culpa.*

46 To a certain extent this holds true for Augustine and Dionysius also. Yet in both Augustine and Dionysius this scheme is no longer the grand metaphysical scheme it once was in Origen's *De principiis* and still is in Eriugena's *Periphyseon*.

47 For an extensive study of Eriugena's anthropology as developed in Book IV of the *Periphyseon*, which contains his interpretation of Genesis 1–3, see W. Otten, *The Anthropology of Johannes Scottus Eriugena* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), pp. 118–89. See also B. McGinn, 'The Originality of Eriugena's Spiritual Exegesis', in *Iohannes Scottus Eriugena: The Bible and Hermeneutics*, edited by G. van Riel, C. Steel and J. McEvoy (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), pp. 55–80 for an interpretation of Book IV from an exegetical viewpoint.

48 See Edouard Jeauneau (ed.), *Iohannis Scotti Eriugena Periphyseon (De Diuisione Naturae) Liber Quartus* (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1995) 72: '... plus laudatur mens humana in sua ignorantia, quam in sua scientia' (*Per.* IV 771C).

49 See *Per.* IV 768B (Jeauneau, p. 64): 'Possumus ergo hominem diffinire sic. Homo est notio quaedam intellectualis, in mente diuina aeternaliter facta.'

50 This is indeed the result, for in Eriugena humanity's mystical vision of God is always only a theophanic one.

51 See *Per.* IV 777A–B (Jeauneau, p. 86): 'N. Quare ergo unusquisque, mox ut per generationem in hunc mundum prouenerit, non seipsum cognoscit? A. Poenam praeuocationis naturae in hoc manifestari non temere dixerim. Nam si homo non peccaret, in tam profundam sui ignorantiam profecto non caderet, sicut neque ignominiosam generationem ex duplici sexu ad similitudinem irrationabilium animalium non pateretur, ut graecorum sapientissimi certissimis rationibus affirmant.' It is significant that humanity's flawed (self-)knowledge here is linked to its flawed physical generation which implies a gender-division. Eriugena proceeds with a passage on Christ's healing (IV 777C: '... ad medicamentum uulneris uitiatæ naturae ...', which includes the possibility of a more unified body of human knowledge as well as gender-unification.

52 See *Per.* IV 777C–D (Jeauneau, pp. 86–8): 'N. Inerat ergo humanae naturae potentia perfectissimam sui cognitionem habendi si non peccaret. A. Nil verisimilius. Casus quippe illius maximus et miserrimus erat scientiam et sapientiam sibi insitam deserere, et in profundam ignorantiam suimet et creatoris sui labi, quamuis appetitus beatitudinis, quam perdiderat, etiam post casum in ea remansisse intelligatur, qui in ea nullo modo remaneret, si seipsam et deum suum omnino ignoraret.'

53 The obvious apophatic connection between Derrida and Dionysius seems at the moment to be supplanted by other, in my opinion less fruitful, connections between Derrida and Anselm or Karl Barth. See David E. Klemm, 'Open Secrets: Derrida and Negative Theology' in Robert P. Scharlemann (ed.), *Negation and Theology* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992), pp. 8–24, and Graham Ward, *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 173–256.

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