
AREOPAGITISM OF JOHANNES SCOTUS ERIUGENA

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Abstract

The authors of the article touch upon the topic of areopagitism in the works of Eriugena. His religious and philosophical speculations provide an interpretation of the ontotheology of Dionysius the Areopagite and are marked by the following themes: creation is theophany, God is everything in everything and nothing from everything; the world is the procession from one into many, the truth of everything sensible manifests itself in the mind; humans as rational beings are the universal middle, the return of the many to one and their resolution (dissolution) into it. The Areopagite ontotheology of Eriugena is permeated with negative dialectics (superlative theology), which brings Eriugena closer not only to Medieval Christian Platonism (the ‘Clavis Physicae’ manuscripts of Honorius Augustodunensis contained a significant part of Eriugena’s ‘Periphyseon’), but also to Nicholas of Cusa’s doctrine ‘complicatio–explicatio’. Thus, the authors conclude that Eriugena developed in his ‘Periphyseon’ the metaphysics of the return to God while adhering to a religious philosophy permeated with mystical sentiments.

Keywords: areopagitism, periphyseon, metaphysics, mysticism, ontotheology

1. Introduction

For hundreds of years, disputes on the connection between religion and Metaphysics, rather than excluding, resulted in discussions on religious philosophy [1, 2]. This is especially evident in the period of late antiquity and early Middle Ages [3]. The beginning of early medieval thought was distinctive: metaphysical thinking was in the form of logic and dialectics almost until the thirteenth century. Dialectics was one of the seven liberal arts. Although it played a role in the fine art of defining things, it nevertheless was considered only preparatory knowledge en route to the truth [4, 5]. Any reasoning built upon the laws of logic was considered an expression of the truth; and the Aristotelian (in the broad sense of Neoplatonic) metaphysical form of consideration, as a rule, gave diverse solutions to ontological problems and relied on the necessity of allowing things as well as words. Hegel emphasized that logic should be understood as a system of pure reason, the image of God in His eternal essence before the creation of Nature and before any finite spirit [6].

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The logical problem of the universal, as formulated by Boethius in his commentary Porphyry's Isagoge, was clearly interpreted in metaphysical and then theological dimensions. After all, if the dialectical course of reasoning forced the recognition of genera and species outside or within things themselves (universalia ante rem, universalia in re), then the doctrinal content of the arguments acted as a supporting point of all truth (it is known that the Church had a negative attitude toward the nominalistic view of universals) [7]. This article examines the extreme realism of Johannes Scotus Eriugena, who made significant contributions to such discussions. However, since the metaphysical constructions of the Irish thinker were repeatedly condemned and undeservedly remained on the periphery of studies on the history of Philosophy and Theology, research into the internal form (grammatism, Areopagitism, Origenism, etc.) of his doctrine of nature is important now for a general understanding of the history of philosophical thought in the West [8]. As a religious philosophy, Eriugena's views still remain, despite numerous analytical works, extremely difficult for historical-philosophical interpretation [9]. In this article, it is important for the authors to follow Eriugena's philosophical evolution to a metaphysics with elements of mysticism, as set out in the fourth and fifth books of 'Periphyseon'. The authors also study Eriugena's relationship to the ideas of Nicholas of Cusa.

2. Methods

The authors used the following methods for the research: systemic textological analysis and historical-philosophical comparative studies. A systemic textual analysis allows us to determine approaches for reconstructing the premises of Eriugena's thought and clarifying the meaning of the key terms in his teachings. This method provides conceptual clarity, conclusiveness, consistency in the consideration and ordering of a proposed hypothesis by using keywords, determining the meanings of special terms, establishing links between the explicit meaning and implicit ideological structure, which is expressed mainly through a complex deductive procedure. A historical-philosophical comparative analysis was applied to examine the connection between Eriugena's metaphysical ideas and the pantheism of Nicholas of Cusa. This method enables us to understand that during the period of patristics and early scholasticism, Metaphysics, having united with Orthodox theology, acquired features of Christian philosophy, and, as a result, the progressing oblivion of proper philosophical problems of being could not be comprehended and overcome on the path of faith.

Pantheism (God in everything, but everything is not God) is understood as the Neoplatonic position (which then passed into patristics and early scholasticism) that God, or the One, as 'pure reality' is the highest being, the Primary Cause, while the existence of being lies in its creation from nothing. God alone is the Cause of Himself. The existence of God, in the sense of the foundation, is essentially presented only as *causa sui*, as Nothing, in its form and true content exceeding all knowledge. Even to Himself, God is unknowable.

Thus, the metaphysical name of God is 'Nothing'. God is Nothing just as an intelligible sphere has a centre that is everywhere and a periphery that is nowhere. That is why Eriugena, similar to Philo Alexandrinus, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Dionysius the Areopagite, and Maximus the Confessor, understood the creation of the world as the outward procession of God from Himself (while transcending every form and definition) and sought to show in every book of the 'Periphyseon' the existential primacy of denial over affirmation. In Hegel's words, in order for the supersensible to reveal itself, the naturally sensible must disappear, because it, as created in the spirit, has a direct external being only in appearance. On the one hand, Nature was evaluated by Eriugena as a language, as an explication of Divine speech, as an expression of Nothing - a Divine super-being. This kind of extreme realism was combined with the principle of a hierarchical structure of the created world in order to introduce an orderly participation of all things in God. The doctrine of the 'divisions' of Nature leads to the conclusion that the logical articulation of knowledge was considered only a preparation for mystical experience: for the initiate, knowledge became, as it were, a continuous revelation of the Hidden and rose to the level of religious reverence as the highest pleasure. "Only when there was a need for improvable presuppositions of everything that needed to be defined, was mystical speculation elevated to a higher rank, and its carrier transformed from sage to miracle-worker. But even direct assimilation of Divine truth turns out to be in the same thesis form, and continues to be the result of abstraction and application of formal logical procedures peculiar to religious and philosophical grammar." [10] The logic of 'dividing' (defining) thought had its reverse side as the soul's desire to unite with God in an act of intellectual love. This meant that all created existence, residing in thought as an intelligible form, must be returned to God and restored to its intelligible essence in order to achieve final salvation. Important, value-laden meaning was given to the presence in nature of theophanies and general movement towards deification, which on the whole gave Eriugena's thoughts a panentheistic character [11].

Theology, having brought in philosophy as a 'servant', also came into question. As theology was in an inauthentic regime (according to Eriugena, "true religion is true philosophy" [12], "no one ascends to Heaven other than through Philosophy" [13]), it was forced to reckon with the ontotheological thinking of the 'Church fathers' and representatives of scholasticism.

The introduction of the term 'ontotheology' is associated with 'Critique of Pure Reason' by I. Kant. Ontotheology (that is, the existence of a primary essence can be known through concepts alone, without any support from experience) is defined by Kant as one of the types of transcendental theology [14]. Thus, what is meant by Eriugena's ontotheology is the concept of the hierarchy of being. In other words, the difference between types of beings is determined by the properties of the knowable and the way it is cognized (Plat. Resp., 509d-511e). Unlike Plato, Eriugena's question of being is reduced to the knowledge of the existence of God, in which *essence* and *existence* coincide. The existence of God is His essence, and His essence is the existence for all

created things. Thus, the reduction of being to essence is substantiated in God. Yet, say, according to Aristotle, to be does not always mean to be something. Essence is only 'the being of whatness', but not being itself (Arist., *Analyt. post.* 89b 24-35; *Soph. el.* 167a 2-7). M. Heidegger understands ontotheology as the oblivion of Being in favour of these or those 'beings' [15]. Since the name 'ontotheology' contains a dialectic around the question of being, this leads to an abstraction of one aspect of the question at the expense of another. A number of authors define the theology of the Areopagite corpus as anti-metaphysical (theo-ontological), i.e. not giving any positive integral view of the Creator and creation. In our view, the term 'ontotheology' is not opposed to 'theo-ontology' in the way that metaphysical is opposed to anti-metaphysical. 'Theo-ontology' is a specific expression of ontotheology, which focuses on the synthesis of Neoplatonism and mysticism through a detailed metaphysical argumentation on the highest being (One, God). An example of this is Dionysius the Areopagite's reasoning on the hierarchy of the created being: from the super-being (nothing) of God to the lowest orders. Further metaphysical reasoning requires postulating some kind of middle position in every being, taking the highest qualities from the higher being and, by turns, handing them down to lower levels. Doctrine is then developed wherein any level of the universal hierarchy is a moment of enlightening illumination of the Super-Good, the Revelation of God in His creations. In other words, the supersensible light, reflected in the sensually-perceived world, appears as a 'theophany', testifying to the existence of God and allowing one to perceive and cognize Him [7, p. 81-85].

3. Areopagitism of *Doctrina Philosophiae Iohannis Scottigenae*

In his book 'Periphyseon' Eriugena develops the logic of 'divine names' (*θεία ὀνόματα*), which are talked about in 'Corpus Areopagiticum'. Their order is as follows: Goodness, Being, Life, Wisdom and One (*DN II 3, 639-640*). By equating them with the original causes, Eriugena thus tries to give his own distinctive symbolic and metaphysical interpretation of the biblical Hexameron. He provides a kind of theoretical 'framework' ('homily') of the religious truths in the first chapter of Genesis (*Genesis 1.1-26*). In other words, a literal interpretation is contrasted with an allegorical approach, replete with philosophical subtleties [16, 17].

The desire to present logically God's self-determination for beings by using rational argumentation to disclose a metaphysical definition of the Absolute and discover the true 'fabric' of the divine essence, whose speculative character is immanent in the hierarchy of created things, became a particular feature of Eriugena's doctrine of nature (or God). This process of God's manifestation and realization of Himself, the revealing of his own nature, is conducted in such a way that God exits His initial state, evolves Himself and, at the same time, immerses into Himself, thereby disclosing His inner composition and giving Himself a detailed form. In other words, in realizing Himself in Divine Names, He creates a corresponding completed reality; what has been

created by Him, will return to Him from another reality, as a final objective and the truth of the creative process.

Let us try to explain the above. For Eriugena, beholding theology is something eternal and constant, - the cause of all causes; it is the highest level that can be achieved [18]. Of key importance here is the biblical saying: "In the beginning was the Word (Logos), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made." (John 1.1-5) Eriugena's thought completely evolves within the framework of Christian perception, for which Nature, created out of nothing, is just the visible shell of the Word, incomprehensible in its existence [19]. He exists, but any 'something' is alien to Him. He is above the essence and is Nothing out of everything that exists; He is even above any statement or negation [19, col. 457D-462D]. It is impossible to apply to Him any categories of action or suffering [col. 512C-524B]. At the same time, God, having no beginning and no end, can only be the cause of Himself. In other words, a necessary and never-ending creation of God by Himself is taking place. God is the beginning and, in a sense, the middle and the end of everything [col. 688B].

From the eternal aspect, God's creation of Himself is a momentary action [col. 640B-641A]. For a Christian, however, the world is that natural order of things which does not unite, but separates Humans from God, and it is not Humans who discover the truth, as a creature of nature, but God, through the act of Revelation, because, according to Eriugena, due to the imperfection of human reason, God's being is a sequential series of invisible primordial things descending towards the outside, the created being. From the transient aspect, being able to behold God creating Himself in a hierarchical order of being is the only way for us to understand how the ruling divine substance is created in various natures [coll. 527B-C, 640B]. Things are what they are not by themselves, but only in the Nature that perceives them. Therefore, the genuine human is nothing but an intellectual notion created in God from eternity [col. 768B].

It is obvious for Eriugena that the correlation between cause and consequence do not completely express the definition 'to create' in the broad context of an analysis of the hierarchical structure. For God, creating is disclosing Himself at every stage without degrading the completeness of His nature. In order to comprehend this aspect of theology, which was not developed in Western patrology to any depth, Eriugena turned to the religious-philosophical experience of the Greek Church Fathers, where he found such notions as theophany 'θεοφάνεια' and energy 'ἐνέργεια' [coll. 446A-451C, 529B]. As he translated works by Saint Dionysius the Areopagite and Saint Maximus the Confessor into Latin, Eriugena acquainted himself with an entire speculative schematics of creation. He is interested, for example, in a conceptual structure for the transformation of the purest form of God into speculative and then temporal realities, i.e. the simplicity and complexity of the one Cause for everything; the evolution (ἀναλυτική) of God's grace into everything that exists

and its return to the initial unity that God has, and that is God Himself (Θέωσις); the sequential dividing of the unity into plurality accompanied by weakening strength in relation to the result of division; cataphatic (καταφατική) and apophatic (ἀποφατική) theologies are in concordance with each other and they can be employed even for contemplating the created beings; the notion of motion in respect to God; the character of divine perception; the unity and trinity of God and many other notions [20].

Not only God in His essence but also the ideas in the Divine Reason, which cannot be comprehended by angels and humans, can only be perceived in their manifestations, Theophanies [19, coll. 446A-D, 551A-D]. Further divisions of nature, according to Eriugena, are related to the notion of divine manifestation (ἐπιφάνεια). The incomprehensible God will be manifest everywhere, at every level of hierarchy: the Logos, ideas, the world and the final phase of the united theogonic process of returning (ἀποκατάστασις) things to God, which symbolize universal salvation, and are perceived through Theophanies, too numerous to be counted by human reason [col. 683B]. It should be noted that any creature, however tiny, is just an afflation, a token that makes it possible for us to recognize and behold God, for He enlightens the totality of things with His 'Ontic' light, whose beams make everything natural gain completeness [col. 675B-675C]. Everything will return to its source as its final objective [col. 527A]. The previously hidden comprehensible features will reject their sensual shell and be once again collected in the comprehensible Human. Then He, filled with comprehensible notions, will be transformed in the Divine and become one with God. The final deification (apotheosis) will take place and God will manifest Himself to everybody as the One who is not created, but also does not create [coll. 1015D, 1019A, 1020A-1021D]. This principle of Eriugena's defines true metaphysics as theology, where the issue of the truly existing things is tightly connected with the 'divine'.

The areopagitism in the works of Johannes Scotus becomes particularly evident when compared with the doctrine of Nicholas of Cusa. Like Eriugena, Cusanus unites all of these themes in his doctrine 'complicatio-explicatio'. The One, as the presence of infinite power, limits itself, taking shape in a separate reality. This principle of Cusanus shows that movement is neither an illusion nor a degradation, but a manifestation of the infinite dynamism of the One. Each thing differs from others not by the dosage of its participation in Being, but by the double ascending and descending movement of the many to the One and from the One to the many. This is what Cusanus explains with the 'complicatio - explicatio' pair. The latter is understood only in connection with the first. This terminology is so important that the whole work of Cusanus is a contemplation of the 'enfolding-unfolding' pair, which he shows to be inseparable: God is enfolded, because it befits Him to radiate, as if to unfold. An important term is 'inseparability', which helps to understand the inner dynamism of the Infinite. In the One, everything is enfolded (complique), i.e. it gathers in itself the many in its 'fold' (pli); and at the same time it 'unfolds' all things, because it unfolds in them. Only by equating God with the Infinite, i.e. with everything that can be

(God is called 'Possest'), makes it possible to understand that He is everything and that everything is in God, but not as a result of accumulation or addition, but by means of a contracted demonstration, in other words, by means of simplification, enfolding and removal; therefore, everything remains in God and nothing is outside of Him. Unfolding, revealing comes from God in His theophany. It is a multifaceted radiation, an internal diffusion through which Divine nature emanates from itself into itself. Its dissemination (diffusion) creates all things.

According to Eriugena, God 'runs': this is another etymological meaning of the Greek word $\theta\acute{\epsilon}\omega$ (in other words, God always goes through everything, creating everything, but at the same time He remains 'enfolding', i.e. wholly immanent). Thus, when defining God as the Infinite, Cusanus understands plurality no longer as falling away from the One or as further degradation of the original damage. The variety of beings 'unfolds (s'explique) from within the Infinite itself. Consequently, there is no ex nihilo creation, as in Eriugena, but there is radiation emanating from the very centre; in a word, creation is theophany.

For Eriugena, a particular feature of theophany is that, on the one hand, creation is only a manifestation of God, and on the other, God remains elusive in himself. Every being is a theophany. In creation, according to Eriugena, although God himself remains super-essential, He is at the same time the essence of all things (*essentia omnium*). This duality indicates that, by virtue of his superiority, God is nothing from the totality of all things. Cusanus, in turn, understands God as an infinity that exceeds any limits, as an absolute 'somethingness' of things (*quidditas absoluta omnium*), giving itself a finite image in a single being. There is no analogy between infinite God and finite man (*De docta ignorantia*, 1.3.9). Creation appears as a kind of transition from unity, or from absolute simplicity, to the plurality and diversity of beings. This is illustrated in the Neoplatonic image of the radiating monad, the source of numbers and rays, and various created orders (distance from the source means that the being becomes a composite, subject to division, less simple than its cause and condition). Spiritual nature, however, remains simple, close to divine simplicity and tied to divine unity. In general, all reality has its ontological meaning only if it is included in the process of diffusion, flow, 'procession', and 'unfolding'. At the same time, intelligible nature and sensory-perceived nature are two poles of reality between which human nature is placed as a link and a middle. Nevertheless, these two orders communicate with each other in such a way that the second is only the 'originating' and 'unfolding' of the first. According to Eriugena, from the simplicity of non-material elements, as a result of their combining, come material bodies, and, with the exception of essence, the empirical order only confirms its own accidental appearance. And for Cusanus, God is the 'enfolding' (*complicatio*) of all 'unfolded' (*explicatio*) (i.e. when everything radiating in its diversity exists in unity), and intellectual nature is the 'enfolding' corporeal nature, which looks like something 'unfolded'.

As is known, the ‘processio’ and ‘explicatio’ related to the nature of universal process itself, according to Neoplatonic logic, and requirement, ends in a return. Without this completion (reditus, resolutio), creation does not achieve its true purpose, which is realized in God, in unity, and not in an accidental and external state. The dialectic of return is all the more important because it speaks of the person’s place in Creation: in fact, a person must return the empirical world to unity in God precisely for the very reason that a person already contains in himself, because of his privileged position, all created Nature. That is why human nature is such a ‘golden mean’, which, containing both the intelligible and the sensible, is capable of collecting in itself all beings, uniting and returning them from random empirical conditions devoid of simplicity to a spiritual order, simple and essential in its basis. Thus, for Eriugena, as for Cusanus, such a person is an image of God, a theophany par excellence. In him, as in a small universe, all created existence is collected.

Further, if reason is the essence of a person and the image of God, since it contains all existence, if the universal process ends with the movement of the intellect, and the emanation returns to its being, then it is obvious that the highest contemplation will be the perfect state of the intellect. However, what is such contemplation if God, the essence and truth of all that exists, is beyond all affirmation and denial? God is unknowable and inexpressible. Thus, Eriugena’s negative theology engenders a negative ontology: no essence can be defined in its *quid* (what it is), but only in its *quia* (that it just is), because the basic order is God, who is the essence of everything. And, like God, any being considered in its essence is not definable in relation to quid.

Created existence, if considered from the standpoint of essence, or image, is ‘contracted’ (collected) in human nature, the highest expression of which is intellect. Such a mind is so adept in a special kind of ‘wisdom’ (sapientia) that it proclaims ignorance of all quid as the measure of all that is known. “Everything that thinks and senses is something other than the manifestation of the unmanifest, the discovery of the hidden, the assertion of the denied, the comprehension of the incomprehensible, the understanding of the inexplicable, the body of the disembodied, the essence of the super-essential, the form of the formless ... materialization of the spiritual, the appearance of the invisible, the definition of what is impossible define ...” [19, col. 633A-B]. For Eriugena and Cusanus, the most perfect contemplation is scire nesciendo, docta ignorantia, the learned ignorance that elevates the intellect to the highest God. According to C. Riccati, in these systems Platonism “leads to the denial of Christianity within the framework of philosophy” [21] and “the role of Christ ... is reduced to a philosophical sense” [21, p. 275]. It should be indicated that W. Beierwaltes criticized C. Riccati [22], noting that Christian Platonism has a deep connection not only with pure philosophy, but also with the Christian religion; however, the content of this criticism was presented in the form of a metaphor, which in itself is wrong [23].

4. Conclusion

Thus, we are faced with two Areopagite doctrines that leave no room for a personal God, much less for the free intervention of divine will. In them, language loses its supernatural meaning, acquiring an exclusively symbolic and metaphorical meaning. From our point of view, Eriugena, like Nicholas of Cusa, nevertheless, remains within religious philosophy, permeated with mystical sentiments, as evidenced by numerous passages in his book [e.g. 19, coll. 1020D, 1021A].

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