

Idealism in Medieval Philosophy: The Case of Johannes Scottus Eriugena

DERMOT MORAN

University College Dublin

In this article I wish to re-examine the vexed issue of the possibility of idealism in ancient and medieval philosophy with particular reference to the case of Johannes Scottus Eriugena (c. 800–c. 877), the Irish Neoplatonic Christian philosopher. Both Bernard Williams and Myles Burnyeat have argued that idealism never emerged (and for Burnyeat, could not have emerged) as a genuine philosophical position in antiquity, a claim that has had wide currency in recent years, and now constitutes something of an orthodoxy.¹ Richard Sorabji (instancing Gregory of Nyssa) and Werner Beierwaltes (citing Proclus and Eriugena), and Eyjólfur Kjalar Emilsson (discussing Plotinus), on the other hand, have all argued that idealism is to be found in the Neoplatonic tradition, a tradition neglected by Burnyeat.² Similarly, in a

Earlier versions of this paper have been read at the University of Connecticut at Storrs (1992), Columbia University (1992), The XX World Congress of Philosophy in Moscow (1993), the Thomas Institut, Cologne (1997), the Ruhr-Universität Bochum (1997), and at the University of Notre Dame (1999). I am grateful for the comments of members of the seminars in these institutions, especially Stephen Brown, Andreas Speer, Theo Kobusch, Philip Quinn, Stephen Gersh, and Ernan McMullin.

1. Myles Burnyeat, "Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed," *Philosophical Review* 91 (1982): 3–40, repr. in Godfrey Vesey, ed., *Idealism—Past and Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1982), pp. 19–50. Hereafter this essay will be cited in the version printed in Vesey, ed.

2. Richard Sorabji, "Gregory of Nyssa: The Origins of Idealism," in *Time, Creation and Continuum. Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (London: Duckworth, 1983), pp. 287–96; Werner Beierwaltes, *Denken des Einen. Studien zur neuplatonischen Philosophie und ihrer Wirkungsgeschichte* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1985). See also Beierwaltes, "Die Wiederentdeckung des Eriugena im Deutschen Idealismus," in *Platonismus und Idealismus* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1972), pp. 188–201, and his "Zur Wirkungsgeschichte Eriugenas im Deutschen Idealismus und danach. Eine kurze, unsystematische Nachlese," in *Eriugena. Grundzüge seines Denkens* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1994), pp. 313–330. Eyjólfur Kjalar Emilsson, "Cognition and its Object," in Lloyd P. Gerson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1996), pp. 217–49, esp. pp. 245–49. But see, Lloyd P. Gerson, *Plotinus* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 227, n.3, who maintains that Plotinus is not an idealist.

1989 study, I argued not only that idealism was a genuine possibility in late classical and in medieval philosophy, but that that the ninth-century Carolingian philosopher Johannes Eriugena presents a striking example of an extremely radical, almost fantastical, idealism.³ Of course, the whole discussion depends entirely on what is meant by 'idealism'. Burnyeat uses Berkeley's immaterialism as his standard for idealism, and it is this decision, coupled with his failure to acknowledge the legacy of German idealism, which prevents him from seeing the classical and medieval roots of idealism more broadly understood.

Contrary to Burnyeat, I wish to argue that an idealism based on a developed concept of subjectivity and a thinking through of the implications of divine immateriality was not only possible in the Middle Ages but found actual and sophisticated expression in Johannes Scottus Eriugena. Eriugena's extreme intellectualist immaterialism differs from modern idealism in that it is motivated not so much by *epistemological* consideration of sceptical arguments concerning the existence of the external world, but by *theological* consideration of the consequences of the doctrine of divine creation. How is the relation of creation to creator to be understood? Burnyeat charges that the Greek (including the Neoplatonic) concept of creation always involved an imposition of form on matter (Vesey, p. 31), whereas it seems to me that one of the most obvious concerns of the Greek Patristic writers was to articulate a concept of creation which avoided the form/matter paradigm. These Greek authors developed a new paradigm—creation as self-expression or self-manifestation, creation as *theophany*. Similarly, as we shall see, Eriugena, who mediates this Greek Christian tradition in the Latin West, understands divine creation as a kind of self-creation, itself understood as a kind of eternal self-intellection or self-thinking. God's first act is His self-constitution as manifest being, an act which coincides with the overflowing or outgoing of the divine nature in the creation of all things. God's self-expression is also His self-manifestation in the world of causes and effects, and this is understood by Eriugena to be a necessary part of the divine unfolding. In the tradition of Eriugena, as later in Eckhart's *Parisian Lectures*, being understood as form is the product of a kind of self-consciousness or self-reflection. The very nature of reality is approached through the paradigm of reflexive self-consciousness, often expressed in terms of the inner relations between the Persons of the Trinity, and this is directly in line with the German Idealist tradition, specifically Hegel.⁴ This Neoplatonic Christian idealism expressly emphasises the paradigm of self-knowing or self-awareness as the founding, thetic, cosmic act. God's self-understanding is the prime mover in the creation of the universe,

3. Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena. A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1989).

4. See Beierwaltes, "Das Problem des absoluten Selbstbewußtseins bei Johannes Scotus Eriugena," in Beierwaltes, ed., *Platonismus in der Philosophie des Mittelalters* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969), pp. 484–516.

and in this sense, intellection precedes being. The result is a system far removed from the supposed realism of the ancients.

MYLES BURNYEAT'S OBJECTION

In his influential article, first published in 1982 in *Philosophical Review*, Myles Burnyeat has argued that

Idealism, whether we mean by that Berkeley's own doctrine that *esse est percipi* or a more vaguely conceived thesis to the effect that everything is in some substantial sense mental or spiritual, is one of the very few major philosophical positions which did *not* receive its first formulation in antiquity. (Vesey, p. 19)

In support of this claim Burnyeat cites Bernard Williams's survey article reviewing the Greek contribution to philosophy, which likewise asserts that idealism, understood as "the monism of mind, which holds that nothing ultimately exists except minds and their experiences" was not found in the ancient world.⁵ For Burnyeat, all classical Greek philosophy was primarily realist: the Greeks had an unquestioned, "inbuilt assumption of realism" (Vesey, p. 33). With the possible exception of Gorgias, all ancient Greek philosophers supposedly agreed that

[t]here is a reality of some sort confronting us; we are in touch with something, even if this something, reality, is not at all what we think it to be. Greek philosophy does not know the problem of proving in a general way the existence of an external world. That problem is a modern invention. (Vesey, pp. 32–33)

In particular Burnyeat rejects the view that Platonism is an idealism, and he maintains that George Berkeley was both anachronistic and "utterly mistaken" when, in his late work *Siris* §311 (1744), he interpreted Plato, on the strength of a passage in *Theaetetus* 160b, as an idealist who denied, in Berkeley's own words, "an absolute actual existence of sensible or corporeal things" (Vesey, pp. 19–20).⁶ Burnyeat argues against Berkeley that Plato is

5. Bernard Williams, "Philosophy," in M. I. Finley, ed., *The Legacy of Greece. A New Appraisal* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 204–5. Burnyeat acknowledges Williams's influence, Vesey, p. 19, n.1.

6. For a discussion of Berkeley's *Siris* in relation to Plotinus, see N. Baladi, "Plotin et Berkeley: Témoignage de la *Siris*," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 91 (1970): 338–47, and "Plotin et l'immatérialisme de Berkeley: Témoignage de la *Siris*," in *Atti del Convegno internazionale sul tema Plotino e il Neoplatonismo in Oriente e in Occidente* (Rome: Ateneo Press 1974), pp. 597–604.

not presenting his own views in the passage but is merely offering a *reductio ad absurdum* of the view that perception is knowledge.

Burnyeat's article, though provocative and richly suggestive, is problematic in many ways. In particular, his frame of reference is limited and his conclusion is overstated. Part of Burnyeat's problem is that he assumes that realist and idealist are oppositional terms. While Burnyeat is undoubtedly correct that the ancients, by and large, were *realists* in the sense that they did not repudiate the existence of external things, nevertheless, their peculiar kind of realism is not necessarily opposed to idealism, if by idealism we understand a thesis about the *nature* of the really existing world rather than as a kind of scepticism about the external world, which seems to be Burnyeat's interpretation. Ancient philosophy—and especially Platonism in its various forms—is quite compatible with an idealism that denies the independent existence of *material* objects, or argues that all objects are, in some sense, entities produced by mind. Indeed, Plato is both an extreme *realist* in holding the extra-mental existence of the Forms, and—at the very same time—an immaterialist and intellectualist about the true nature of *ta onta*. For Plato, the *being* of these Forms, though intelligible through and through, is still independent of their *being known*, a position which is modified in Plotinus and his Neoplatonic successors, so that their being is constituted by their being intelligized. For Plato, furthermore, physical things which belong to the realm of becoming (*genesis*), while not considered to be wholly non-existent, are not completely real, since they incorporate changing matter in their composition, and belong to the realm of ceaseless mutability.

CONCEPTS OF IDEALISM

Burnyeat's frame of reference is limited in that he has a rather Anglocentric conception of idealism. He assumes that *idealism as such* is best exemplified by Berkeley's immaterialism. But 'idealism' is not a univocal term, and there is no reason to assume that Berkeleian immaterialism represents the modern paradigm. Berkeley, moreover, did not style himself as an 'idealist', but referred to his theory as *immaterialism*. Regrettably, Burnyeat does not consider the complex forms of idealism presented by other modern philosophers who self-consciously embraced idealism, namely, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. Several varieties of idealism are classified and discussed by Kant in *The Critique of Pure Reason* B274–275, who characterizes Descartes as a 'problematical' idealist and Berkeley as a 'dogmatic idealist'. For Kant, both are varieties of what he calls 'material idealism'—"the theory which declares the existence of objects in space outside us to be merely doubtful and indemonstrable or to be false and impossible"

(B274).⁷ Kant dismissed Berkeley's immaterialism as a *subjective* or *dogmatic* idealism which inevitably resulted from attempting to understand space and time as things in themselves.⁸ In place of subjective idealism (which is really a kind of naïve realism) Kant offered his critical or transcendental idealism. Kant then is, to a certain extent, agreeing with Burnyeat in seeing the essence of this kind of idealism as connected with the conception of spatial properties as belonging to things as they are in themselves. But Kant's transcendental idealism is a corrective to this view, and sees spatial properties as belonging to things as they appear. Kant maintains that transcendental idealism is the only view which does not treat the existence of external material objects as problematical and arrived at by inference, but treats them as immediately given in intuition (A369–372).

Furthermore, post-Kantian idealism places a huge emphasis on self-consciousness as the condition for all knowledge. Both Schelling and Hegel, reacting to Kant's continuing dualism of subject and thing in itself, developed a deeper understanding of idealism as involving the resolution of all things into infinite consciousness, which is at the same time self-consciousness. Substance is resolved into subjectivity. Being that has come to knowledge of itself in self-consciousness and is at one with itself is at the very heart of Hegelian idealism.⁹ Instead of using Berkeley's 'immaterialism' as our paradigm of idealism, could we not apply, for example, Hegel's criterion of idealism, as expressed in the *Science of Logic*, namely, that finite reality requires the infinite for its intelligibility and completion.¹⁰ The recognition that the finite requires completion by the infinite is more appropriate for the philosophies of Neoplatonism than Berkeleian immaterialism.¹¹ Thus

7. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965). See also the Fourth Paralogism A368–69.

8. In *The Critique of Pure Reason*, A368ff, Kant distinguished between empirical and transcendental idealism. Empirical idealism is the doctrine which "denies the existence of external objects of the senses" (A368), and transcendental idealism holds that all appearances are representations and not things in themselves. Transcendental idealism is an empirical realism (A371). Empirical idealists on the other hand are transcendental realists who interpret appearances as things in themselves (A369; A372). Dogmatic idealism is the rejection of matter (A377) and is applied to Berkeley at B274 (as opposed to Descartes's 'problematic idealism'). Transcendental realism treats space and time as things in themselves and inevitably leads to Berkeley's idealism (B 71; B274–75). In the appendix to the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1950), p. 123, Kant maintains that Berkeley holds that "all knowledge through the senses and experience in nothing but sheer illusion, and only in the ideas of pure understanding and reason is there truth."

9. See Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism. The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 1989), pp. 163–74.

10. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, chap. 2, Remark "Idealism," trans. A. V. Miller (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1989), pp. 154–56.

11. Hegel saw Proclus as a genuine precursor. Schelling, on the other hand, distanced himself from the idealism of the Neoplatonists.

Eriugena, as a Platonist and a Christian, considers the finite, material, spatio-temporal world (including the human body) to be incomplete and inadequate in terms of being. True reality is infinite, unbounded, anarchic, endless, incomprehensible, and yet it becomes finite, bounded, principled, and comprehensible. Eriugena is searching for ways to articulate this insight that reality is an infinite whole in which both Creator and creation are implicated and enfolded, and he enthusiastically adopts the Pseudo-Dionysian strategy of using affirmations and negations to assert the dialectical nature of the relations within this whole. Indeed, this understanding of the self-development and coming to self-consciousness of the first principle is, I argue, at the very core of Neoplatonic thought. Hegel and his followers recognized the Neoplatonists as their legitimate forebearers in this regard.¹² In particular, the Hegelian theologian Ferdinand Christian Baur recognized Eriugena as holding a doctrine which is equally central to German Idealism, namely that what God is, man also is namely “the absolute consciousness of absolute being [*Das absolute Bewußtseyn des absoluten Seyns*].”¹³

THE MOTIVATION FOR IDEALISM: NOT SCEPTICISM BUT UNDERSTANDING CREATION

To argue, as Burnyeat does, that idealism based on radical scepticism was not possible in the ancient world precisely because such radical scepticism about the very existence of an external world was absent from ancient philosophy (Vesey, pp. 32–33), does not exclude the possibility that other kinds of idealism were possible among the ancients, even if we grant Burnyeat’s by no means uncontroversial thesis concerning the absence of radical world-threatening doubt in ancient scepticism. Although Berkeley understood his immaterialism as a return to commonsense realism and a rebuttal of scepticism, other motivations for idealism are also possible. For instance, Burnyeat entirely overlooks religious or theological motivations towards idealism. Gregory of Nyssa and Eriugena both consider the true nature of the created world to be *immaterial*, which for them is a direct consequence of the divine creation. The act of creation is understood by

12. See Hegel’s *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 3 Vols., trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), 2:399–453, where he sees the Alexandrian identification of self-consciousness and being as paving the way for absolute idealism. See also Werner Beierwaltes, *Platonismus und Idealismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1972) and J.-L. Viellard-Baron, *Platon et l’idéalisme allemand (1770–1830)* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1979).

13. F. C. Baur, *Die christliche Lehre von der Dreieinigkeit und Menschwerdung Gottes* (Tübingen, 1842), II, p. 285, quoted in Beierwaltes, *Eriugena. Grundzüge seines Denkens*, p. 317.

both Gregory and Eriugena to be an exemplification of the principle that *like produces like*. Gregory, and subsequently Eriugena, postulate the immateriality of reality in order to preserve the integrity of *creatio ex nihilo*. If the world is to emerge from nothingness without matter, and if God is the only cause, and the effect is like its cause, then the created cosmos must be immaterial. God is immaterial and eternal, and the created world is also in essence immaterial and eternal. Furthermore, since the universe is a product of a personal God, true being is at least mind. The created world is somehow enclosed within soul and mind. God's transcendence about matter and His self-unity are understood as having the unity and immateriality of mind in Eriugena's conception. Although ultimate reality is more than mind, that is not to say that it has abandoned mind, but that its intellectual essence is so united in itself and in its being as to be beyond comprehension not only by us but by God Himself.

IDEALISM UNDERSTOOD AS MONISM

Let us examine Burnyeat's argument a little more closely. Central to his (and to Bernard Williams's) approach is the view that idealism is a *monism*:

I take it that if the label 'idealist' is of any historical use at all, it indicates a form of monism: monism not about the number of things in existence but about the number of kinds of things. Just as materialism is the monism which asserts that ultimately nothing exists or is real but matter and material things, so idealism is the monism which claims that ultimately all there is is mind and the contents of mind.¹⁴ (Vesey, p. 23)

Williams and Burnyeat both see Greek philosophy as caught in a struggle between pluralism and monism. Both believe, furthermore, that the only monism available to the Greek mind was *materialism*. As Burnyeat says, "a monism leaning in the other direction, from reality to mind, would be repellent to Greek thought, for it would seem to deprive mind of the objects it must necessarily have" (Vesey, p. 33). These remarks should at best be restricted to Greek pagan thought, since Greek Christian thought certainly leads in the opposite direction, although, I must admit, I have difficulties seeing how the Platonic tradition fits into Burnyeat's scheme. Burnyeat him-

14. Burnyeat claims further (Vesey, p. 33) that the natural monism for the Greeks was materialism. This is certainly true for the Stoics whom Burnyeat mentions but also for Augustine as illustrated in the *Confessions*, where he admits to difficulty in conceiving an immaterial God. The point is true of the pre-Socratics too, in the main, but surely Plato in this as in much else went strongly against the current of the age. Burnyeat's citing of Plato's *Parmenides* here needs further discussion.

self argues that Plato and Plotinus cannot be idealists, since they are not strict monists in that they retain an irreducible and alien matter in their cosmologies. However, matter is undoubtedly a product of the One for Plotinus. Burnyeat also claims that the Greeks, including the Neoplatonists, could not help thinking of creation as the imposition of form on a pre-existing matter, and that matter is ineliminable even for Plotinus. Burnyeat concludes:

It seems, therefore, that the grand cosmic metaphor of emanation is evidence less of incipient idealism in a modern sense than of the ancients' final inability to relinquish the traditional dualities of mind and object, subject and attribute. (Vesey, p. 31)

But this seems excessive. After all, the usual opposite of idealism is materialism, it too is a monism but it often is qualified to be matter plus the number series. Monisms need not be strict. Indeed, Aristotle argued that successful explanation required at least two principles. It is not monism *per se* which is sought but the priority of the explanatory principles invoked.

Is idealism necessarily a monism? And, if so, what kind of monism is at stake here? Like the term 'idealism' and indeed most umbrella terms in philosophy, the label 'monism' is capable of a multiplicity of meanings. Burnyeat's paradigm of monism is, perhaps, though this is not clearly stated, atomism or Stoic materialism. But both classical and modern forms of idealism see idealism as a way of expressing unity-in-plurality, for example, the kind of unity that holds between mind and the objects of its knowledge. On this account, idealism seeks to overcome the dualisms of matter and spirit, subject and object, God and created nature. Thus, both Hegel and Hölderlin, early in their philosophical careers, adopted the ancient slogan '*hen kai pan*' to articulate a unity-in-difference which includes a sense of dialectical cosmic process (the *proodos* and *epistrophe* of the Neoplatonists). Neoplatonic and German Idealist monists conceived of an absolute Oneness, but also required a principle of the internal differentiation of this unity. Werner Beierwaltes even claims that the notions of otherness, difference, and alterity are central Neoplatonic notions and hence construes Neoplatonism as 'thinking the one', but not as a static non-dialectical monism.¹⁵ *Contra* Burnyeat, then, there is no compelling reason to assume that monism is central to the definition of idealism.

IDEALISM AS 'MIND DEPENDENCE'

Besides postulating that idealism must be a monism, Burnyeat goes on to characterize it in terms of a certain epistemological position, namely, that

15. Beierwaltes, *Denken des Einen. Studien zur neuplatonischen Philosophie und ihrer Wirkungsgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1985).

the objects in the world, and the world itself, is in a certain very specific sense, *mind dependent*. For Burnyeat, following Williams, mind dependence presupposes some kind of gulf or separation between mind and reality, a separation only conceivable in the light of a radical sceptical attack on the mind's ability to acquire genuine knowledge. Radical scepticism concerning the external world and the implied separation of mind and its object first appeared in the seventeenth century with Descartes, and not only did not but *could not* have occurred in the Middle Ages or in antiquity. Burnyeat contends that no ancient sceptic could have entertained the radical or hyperbolic doubt of Descartes (that is, the possibility of total delusion inspired by the evil demon and the possibility of the non-existence of the world as such). Furthermore, Burnyeat contends, in a puzzling claim to which we will return, that the human body for the ancients had not yet become a part of the external world and thus conceiving of mind alone as the principle of external things was impossible.

Central to Burnyeat's argument is the assumption that an articulation of the concept of mind dependence presupposes a developed conception of subjectivity, which he believes was unavailable to philosophers before Descartes. Burnyeat endorses the widespread view that the medievals did not have a concept of consciousness and self-consciousness in the modern private, internal sense. Descartes is usually credited with introducing this concept into philosophy. However, I contend that a rich appreciation of subjectivity is clearly evident in the Middle Ages, in the personal voice of the poet and the autobiographer (witness Patrick's *Confessio*), and in the appreciation of the plurality of perspectives, irreducible singularities, such as are beautifully expressed by Eriugena when he borrows the traditional imagery of the many eyes fixed on the one golden tower, or the several interpretations of a single text of Scripture. Subjectivity here means a viewpoint, a perspective. Furthermore, once this recognition of irreducible subjectivity and perspectival multiplicity is combined with Greek intellectualism (the primacy of *theoria*) and Christian personalism, a vision emerges which is thoroughly idealist.

AUGUSTINE AND THE ORIGINS OF MEDIEVAL SUBJECTIVITY

I cannot trace here the transformations of the conception of subjectivity in medieval philosophy, but surely any serious reading of Augustine will uncover not just the powerful sense of interiority and privacy in the *Confessions*, not just the inner dialogue of a man with himself (for example, "my inner self was a house divided against itself," *Conf.* VIII.8), but also the novel and philosophically interesting notion of the will divided against itself, of the

difficulty of willing to will (*Conf.* VIII.9), a discussion which displays a sophisticated understanding of the reflexivity of purely mental acts.¹⁶ As Charles Taylor has said, “[I]t is hardly an exaggeration to say that it was Augustine who introduced the inwardness of radical reflexivity and bequeathed it to the Western tradition of thought.”¹⁷

As is also well known, Augustine makes use of versions of the *cogito* very frequently in his writings, and it is now a commonplace of scholarship that Descartes’s works show a heavy reliance on various Augustinian formulations of the *cogito*.¹⁸ Indeed, Augustine’s use of the *cogito* was drawn to Descartes’s attention immediately after the publication of the *Discourse* of 1637. Similarly, in 1648, Arnaud pointed out to Descartes that a *cogito* in the form of ‘*si enim fallor sum*,’ and indeed several other formulations, are to be found in Augustine.¹⁹ Descartes denied Augustine’s direct influence, and while pleased that an ancient authority confirmed his own discovery, always protested that, in using it to respond to scepticism, he was putting this discovery to a different use than Augustine. But several of Augustine’s formulations of the *cogito* are expressly invoked to answer the sceptical (Academical) charge that there is no certain knowledge about anything. As in Descartes, Augustine sees the very recognition that one is doubting as leading to the indubitable truth that one is doubting.²⁰ Burnyeat discounts Augustine’s role in the formulation of the kind of subjectivity required for idealism, on the grounds that the truth of the *cogito* in Augustine is given no special importance and is only one among many refutations of scepticism, and is not used to explore interiority (Vesey, p. 44). But Augustine used his *cogito* to establish the *immateriality* of mind in *De libero arbitrio*, and to prove that the soul is an incorporeal substance in *De quantitate animae* and in the *Confessions*. Furthermore, Augustine regarded the *cogito* as central to

16. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1961), p. 170.

17. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1989), p. 131.

18. E. Gilson, *Etudes sur le rôle de la pensée médiévale dans la formation du système cartésien* (1930; repr. Paris: Vrin, 1951), pp. 191–201. See also Léon Blanchet, *Les Antécédents historiques du je pense donc je suis* (1920; repr. Paris: Vrin, 1985). Gaunilo has a version of the *cogito* for example, in reply to Anselm.

19. Augustine gives versions of the *cogito* in the *Confessions* XIII.11; *City of God* XI.26, *De libero arbitrio* II.3.7; *Contra Academicos* III.xi.26, *De Trinitate* X.10.14 (*si dubitat, vivit*); *De Trin.* XV.12.21; *De vera religione* XXXIX.73; *Soliloquia* II.i.i. See also, *De diversis quaestionibus* where Augustine argues that mind has immediate self-knowledge. See G. B. Mathews, “*Si fallor, sum*,” in R. A. Markus, ed., *Augustine. A Collection of Critical Essays* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1972), pp. 151–64, for the view that the *cogito* in Augustine is primarily negative in intent—aiming to refute Academic objections.

20. Burnyeat argued that Augustine’s *cogito* was not used against extreme scepticism of our subjective states, but see *De Trinitate* XV.12.21, and R. Sorabji, *Time, Creation and Continuum*, p. 289. See also J. M. Rist, *Augustine. Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1994), pp. 63–67.

explicating the self-grounding nature of the self. In *De Trinitate*, for example, this self-presence is a sign that humans are made in the image of God, whose divinity requires immediate self-presence.

But there is much more to Augustine's understanding of subjectivity than is revealed in his discussion of the *cogito*. Indeed, it would be wrong to isolate the *cogito* from Augustine's more theological reflections on the nature of the relation between God and His Word, or the interrelation of the Persons of the Trinity, which is frequently explicated in terms of the model of a kind of intellectual self-understanding. Augustine blends the theology of the Word with Plotinus's discussion of self-knowledge in *Ennead* V.3 to produce a complex and developmental account of different types of self-knowledge (*notitia sui*; *intelligentia sui*; *cogitatio sui*), both implicit and explicit, involving the moment of intellectual understanding or insight, the *verbum interius* or *verbum mentis* (*De Trin.* IX.6.9),²¹ later developed by Aquinas.²² Burnyeat, in his discussion of medieval subjectivity, does not treat explicitly of Augustine's *cogitatio sui*, but he does allow for an awareness of "unambiguously subjective states" in Augustine (Vesey, p. 40). He denies, however, that Augustine privileged these subjective states as Descartes did. Burnyeat concludes:

Whatever hints Augustine may have furnished, it was Descartes who put subjective knowledge at the center of epistemology—and thereby made idealism a possible position for a modern philosopher to take. (Vesey, p. 44)

This is surely an exaggeration. Augustine furnished more than hints—he laid the foundation, and indeed set the parameters, for the consideration of self-knowledge in medieval thought. Thus, *De Trinitate* book X specifically addresses the centrality of self-knowledge as the turning point for the conversion of the soul. Self-knowledge is based on an intellectual act that is transparent to itself, and requires no sensible imagining, no intermediary, no intervention of the phantasm. In Augustine's language, the mind knows itself and circumscribes itself. The act of self-knowing in Augustine is an intrinsically limiting act, a self-enclosing which allows one to appreciate the nature of other less finite subjectivities. Self-enclosure, self-gathering, is the first step towards self-transcendence.

According to Augustine the mind knows itself with an infallible certitude, and this certitude gives the mind its definition, its delimitation. In *De diversis quaestionibus* Q.15, Augustine confirms (in a passage which Eri-

21. In *De Trinitate* book IX.11.16, Augustine identifies *notitia* with the *verbum mentis*, see n.17 "La *notitia* connaissance actuelle ou habituelle de l'âme par elle-même?" in P. Agaësse and J. Moingt, *La Trinité (Livres VIII–XV). Deuxième partie: les images*, Oeuvres de Saint Augustin 16 (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1955), pp. 591–93.

22. See Sorabji, *Time, Creation and Continuum*, p. 289.

ugena will quote) that the mind which knows itself, comprehends or circumscribes itself and is therefore finite. Furthermore, in *De Trinitate* IX.12.18, a text upon which Eriugena will rely, Augustine says that the mind 'gives birth' (*gignit*) to the knowledge of itself (*notitia sui*), a knowledge which is 'equal to itself'. Borrowing from Plotinus, Augustine establishes as principal that the thing known 'co-engenders' (*congenerat*) the knowledge of it in the knower (*De Trin.* IX.12.18). When the mind contemplates an object, the *act* of knowing and the *thing known* together unite to produce the *knowledge*. But when the soul knows itself, there is no object outside itself, and hence it alone engenders the knowledge of itself, since it is both knower and known.²³ Moreover, the soul is *knowable* to itself before it actually knows itself, and when it actually knows itself, then it begets (*gignit*) the knowledge of itself from itself. In *De Trinitate* book X, Augustine asserts that to know an object is to know, and to know is to know that one knows, hence knowledge implies self-knowledge. Furthermore, the soul never ceases to know itself in a certain sense, though it can be wrong about its nature (and, for example, think that it is corporeal, when it is really incorporeal).²⁴ Augustine distinguishes between an implicit knowledge (*nosse*) of oneself and the explicit *cogitatio* of the self. For Augustine *cogitatio* is a reunifying act whereby the soul gathers itself to itself. This dynamic account of human self-knowing is itself used to understand the divine self-knowledge, which, however, itself is ontologically prior. In Augustine, as in Plotinus, the divine self-intellection is productive of the human self-knowledge which mirrors it. Augustine's conception of subjectivity must be understood in terms of the divine model, but either way, it is a richly developed conception of subjectivity.

Before moving from Augustine, besides his development of self-consciousness and subjectivity, it is worth mentioning an idealist trait in his philosophy. Plotinus, Basil, Augustine in *Confessions* book XI, and Scottus Eriugena, for example, are all idealists about the nature of time.²⁵ For Augustine, time is *distentio animi*. Time exists only in the mind; it is mind-dependent. Elsewhere, Augustine ranks the ideas of things in the mind higher than the things themselves. Putting these strands together, Augustine may be said to be giving an account of mind as governing the material realm in a Neoplatonic manner. The mind possesses interiority and subjectivity, which mark out human nature as the image of the Trinity. Discovery of self-innerness helps to disclose the God within, the God who is present in *memoria*. The soul is the site of the divine presence in the world. What

23. "Itaque mens cum se ipsam cognoscit, sola parens est notitiae suae: et cognitum enim et cognitor ipsa est," *De Trinitate* IX.12.18. Here, Augustine is relying heavily on Plotinus's tractate, *Ennead* V.3.

24. There are clear parallels here with Descartes's argument that the *cogito* gives us knowledge that we are thinking, immaterial beings.

25. See Sorabji, *Time, Creation and Continuum*, pp. 29–32, where Sorabji concentrates on the idealism inherent in Augustine's account of time.

more central place could the account of subjectivity have in Augustine? It is clear, then, that Christian thought in the post-classical period had already developed a rich concept of subjectivity.

THE DENIAL OF MATTER IN CLASSICAL PHILOSOPHY

We have just been discussing subjectivity. Let us now briefly examine its counterpart—the conception of external reality in classical thought. For Burnyeat, as for many philosophers, conceiving of the notion of an external world requires conceiving of a inner world of consciousness, so in a sense realism as well as idealism only explicitly came into view in modern philosophy (the ancients simply had an “unquestioned and unquestioning *assumption* of realism,” Vesey, p. 44). In other words, a developed sense of subjectivity is a precondition for conceiving of the very notion of an *extra-mental* reality (and idealism is the denial of that reality). Burnyeat thinks the ancient Greeks did not have a conception of extra-mental reality in the appropriate modern sense. But, as Richard Sorabji has shown, a denial of the extra-mental existence of matter certainly does occur in the writings of Greek Christian Neoplatonists, for example, Gregory of Nyssa, John Philoponus, and Basil, who develop Plotinus’s conception of material things as actually immaterial substances (*ousiai*) surrounded by immaterial properties, which, when mingled together, give the appearance of materiality and corporeality.²⁶ Corporeality and materiality are consequences of the fallen human perspective on reality. Humans treat the incorporeal qualities of things as if they were actual physical extra-mental properties.

Burnyeat might object that the analysis of things into bundles of properties is not in itself a sufficient mark of idealism. David Hume, for instance, holds a bundle view about substances but is not an idealist.²⁷ However, both Gregory of Nyssa, in the fourth century, and his ninth-century translator and admirer, Johannes Eriugena, hold not just that things are bundles of properties, but that these properties are in themselves immaterial and incorporeal, and are located in the mind and are grouped *around* (*circa*) substances which are also thought of as immaterial. It is less clear that these authors thought of the essences (*ousiai*) of things as existing only in the perceiving mind (they are certainly located in the divine mind), but all *ousiai* are incorporeal and immaterial, and ultimately are nothing other than the unchanging ideas or archetypes in the divine mind. For both

26. Sorabji, *Time, Creation and Continuum*, pp. 287–96. See also, Sorabji, *Matter, Space and Motion. Theories in Antiquity and Their Sequel* (London: Duckworth, 1988), pp. 54–56. Sorabji cites Augustine’s use of the *cogito* in *De Trinitate* XV.12.21 as explicitly refutative of scepticism.

27. Myles Burnyeat has made that point to me in conversation.

Gregory and Eriugena, there are only minds (divine and human) and their modifications. Properties are immaterial and dependent features of the world, in this case, dependent on minds. Here we have evidence of idealism not just in the sense of mind dependence but in terms of the very denial of extra-mental material substances characteristic of Berkeley.

NEOPLATONIC IDEALISM: THE PROBLEM OF PLOTINUS

Burnyeat's refusal to acknowledge the existence of ancient idealism is explained, in part, by his being out of sympathy with Neoplatonism. As he himself admits, he finds later Greek philosophy, especially Neoplatonism, to be somewhat less than "congenial" (Vesey, p. 32). For Burnyeat, Neoplatonism is not properly an idealism not only because of its unresolved dualism, but also because it is not clear that the Neoplatonists see the highest principle as *mind*. Indeed, Neoplatonists such as Plotinus hold that the One (*to hen*) is prior to Mind, and it is unclear whether Plotinus's One can be characterised as mind-like in any way.²⁸ As Burnyeat comments: "A full treatment of Neoplatonic 'idealism' would have to grapple with the further difficulty that Intellect and Soul themselves proceed from an ineffable first principle, the One" (Vesey, p. 31). The precise meanings of Mind (*nous*) and its activities (*dianoia*, *noesis*, *katanoesis*), within the Neoplatonic scheme, are not well understood. There is, however, evidence that the One is at least mind-like in some way. Recently, a number of studies have tried to tease out Plotinus's concept of knowing.²⁹ Although Plotinus says explicitly many times that the One does not think (*Enn.* III.9.9; V.3.13; V.4.2), and that it is "before thought" (*pro tou noesai*; *pro noeseos*, V.3.10), it is arguable that the One has some kind of self-knowing, some kind of direct contact with itself (he uses a term from Epicurus, *epibole* at *Enn.* VI.7.3.8–9).

28. Burnyeat comments: "They [The Neoplatonists] have been classified as idealists because they hold that the world proceeds from Intellect (Nous) and Soul. The problem is that whether this is in any interesting sense an idealist view depends on how the cosmic creation is conceived, and about that, as about much else, Plotinus and his successors are notoriously obscure. Berkeley was content to cite evidence that 'the Platonists' believe that all nature is alive, and is made and governed by an eternal mind. But that is hardly enough. Even if it can be said that in Neoplatonism the real, in so far as it is real, is in some sense spiritual, it remains that matter is not" (Vesey, p. 30).

29. See especially Eyjólfur Emilsson, *Plotinus on Sense-Perception: A Philosophical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P. 1988), and John Dillon, "Plotinus, the First Cartesian?," *Hermathena* 149 (1990): pp. 19–32. See also Sorabji, "Myths about Non-Propositional Thought," in *Time, Creation and Continuum*, pp. 137–56, who argues that the contact with the One cannot be construed as a form of thought (p. 155).

It can be argued that there is in the One a form of thinking above *dianoia* and *noesis*. Rist argues that Plotinus's denial of thinking in the One only means that the One does not think *as we do*. There are some passages where Plotinus appears to indicate that the One has a kind of thinking though not of a kind which indicates a doubling of thinker and thought. The One has a kind of self-intellection, 'hyper-thinking' or 'supra-Intellection', *hypernoesis* (*Enn.* VI.8.16; *katanoesis*, *Enn.* V.4.2), and even Burnyeat concedes that "[i]t is possible that the One does in some obscure and unfamiliar sense have knowledge of itself" (Vesey, p. 31). But he does not think this admission leads to the conclusion that Plotinus is an idealist because he adds two further qualifications: (1) the ultimate monism at the level of the One does not rule out that "some form of duality remains at every other level" (Vesey, p. 31) and (2) that since the One is higher than and somehow absorbs *Nous* in itself, it would be misleading to call the monism of the One a "monism of mind" (Vesey, p. 32). Burnyeat's argument falls if we remove from idealism the requirement that it be a strict Parmenidean type of monism. Idealism requires (even on Burnyeat's first general definition) that everything be *ultimately* explicable in terms of mind, this type of monism does not require that all levels of reality collapse into mind *tout court*. For Plotinus, all reality telescopes into the One, in the sense that from the point of view of the One all is one, but the *emanation* (*proodos*) is undeniably also real and even eternal. All we need for idealism is that all reality be generated by a process which is best understood in terms of self-generating self-consciousness, and hence that all things are mind dependent but not necessarily that they have no existence whatsoever. There are, as it were, varieties of mind dependence, and varieties of what it is to be mind, at least in the Neoplatonic tradition. The crucial point is that Plotinian idealism thinks of the highest unity in terms of complete self-coincidence, for which self-conscious intellection is the closest available model. In the One, the self-intellection of *Nous* turns completely into Being. That self-knowing is a kind of being is the very kernel of this idealism.

Burnyeat also claims that postulating the One as the highest principle means that absolute priority cannot be given to mind. This is countered by the Plotinian recognition of the role of the human mind in the return, in *henosis*. Burnyeat fails to take into account that for Plotinus the human soul possesses within it a spark or ingredient which in fact belongs with the One and is never completely separated from it. The human mind, therefore, can range through the hierarchies of reality up to the highest, the One; and the One is able to accommodate within it in some inexplicable manner the highest intellects of all humans. Becoming one with the one does not signify a complete destruction or annihilation of the self as in Buddhism, but rather a form of self-purification and self-expansion whereby all limitations to self-knowledge are removed and the self spirals into an infinite cycle of self-knowing and self-unifying so that it becomes inseparable from the One

which is its inner principle of self-unification. The boundaries between self and One are overcome.

IDEALIST ASPECTS IN ERIUGENA'S *PERIPHYSEON*

I shall concentrate in the remainder of this essay on Johannes Scottus Eriugena and specifically on his major work, the dialogue *Periphyseon* (c. 867), more usually, but inaccurately, known under the title *De divisione naturae* (*On the Division of Nature*).³⁰ The setting for Eriugena's idealism is a Platonism received indirectly through the Church Fathers, both Greek and Latin, through the Latin encyclopedist tradition (including Macrobius and Martianus Capella), as well as through Calcidius's commentary on the *Timaeus*. Eriugena is a committed Platonist with regard to the material world. True reality is the intelligible realm as opposed to the shadowy, sensory world which is perpetually in flux:

For all things which vary according to place and time, and which are subject to the corporeal senses, should not themselves be regarded as truly substantial existents [*res substantiales vereque existentes*] but as transitory images and verifications [*quaedam transitoriae imagines et resultationes*] derived therefrom. We may take as an illustration of this the voice and its image which the Greeks call *echo*; or bodies and the shadows [*umbrae*] which they throw either in the pure air or in water or in any other medium capable of producing them. All such can be shown to be not themselves real, but false images [*falsae imagines*] of the real. So just as the echoes of voices and the shadows of bodies do not subsist of themselves because they are not substances [*quia substantia non sunt*]; neither can sensible bodies, which are an image of substantial things, subsist of themselves [*per se subsistere*]. (*Periphyseon* V.914a)

The truly real things are the eternal *ousiai*, which have *per se* subsistence and are incorporeal and eternal. In *Periphyseon* book I, Eriugena distinguished five ways of speaking about being and non-being. The fourth mode expresses this Platonism:

The fourth mode is that which, not improbably according to the philosophers, declares that only those things which are contemplated by

30. The *Periphyseon* is here cited according to the following editions: I. P. Sheldon-Williams, ed., *Iohannis Scotti Eriugena Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae)*, book one (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1968), book two (Dublin, 1970), book three, with John O'Meara (Dublin, 1981). For book four I have used the new edition of E. Jeuneau (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1995). For book five I have used the Latin text of *Patrologia Latina* Vol. 122 and the English translation of I. P. Sheldon-Williams and J. J. O'Meara, published in J. J. O'Meara, ed., *Eriugena. Periphyseon* (Dumbarton Oaks/Montréal: Bellarmin, 1987).

the intellect alone [*solo intellectu*] truly are [*vere esse*], while those things which in generation, through the expansions or contractions of matter, and the intervals of places and motions of times are changed, brought together, or dissolved, are said not to be truly [*vere non esse*], as is the case with all bodies which can come into being and pass away. (*Peri.* I.445b-c)

Only those things contemplated by the intellect alone truly are, whereas mutating things in space and time are not. True being belongs to the intelligible world of timeless essences or *ousiai*. These substances are incorporeal: “*ousia* is incorporeal and the object of no sense” (*Peri.* I.478d). Furthermore, Eriugena, adhering to the move made by Philo and Plotinus, locates these first substances or *ousiai* in the divine mind.

Crucially, the primary *ousiai* are not just ‘intelligible’ (*intelligibilis*), they are also ‘intellectual’ (*intellectualis*), that is, they are united with mind so as themselves to possess intelligence in some way. Perhaps because of its obscurity, this claim has been neglected by commentators. The precise manner of their intellectual status is not clear, but, in general Neoplatonic terms, involves a close reconciliation of subjective and objective states. It requires that the higher ontological principles are not only intelligible (that is, can be penetrated by mind), but that they are also intellectual (they act as minds)—a claim developed by Plotinus *Ennead* V.3 and Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* XII.10.21. The Neoplatonic hierarchical scale of reality requires that all things be subsumed into the categories of life and intellect, before becoming one with the One. This is deeply Neoplatonic, and also, of course, deeply Christian.

The key to Eriugena’s metaphysical outlook is that creation is modeled on divine self-intellection. Eriugena understands God as a transcendent nothingness or non-being “above all that is and is not,” whose first act is his own self-explication or creation, his moving from superessential non-being into manifest being. Thus in *Periphyseon* book III Eriugena repeats the notion that the divine nature *creates* itself:

the divine nature is seen to be created and to create—for it is created by itself in the primordial causes [*creatur enim a se ipsa in primordialibus causis*], and therefore creates itself [*ac per hoc se ipsum creat*], that is, allows itself to appear in its theophanies, willing to emerge from the most hidden recesses of its nature in which it is unknown even to itself, that is, it knows itself in nothing [*in nullo se cognoscit*] because it is infinite and supernatural and superessential and beyond everything that can and cannot be understood; but descending into the principles of things and, as it were, creating itself [*ac veluti se ipsam creans*], it begins to know itself in something. (*Peri.* III.689a-b)

God creates himself by manifesting himself in being. Creation is in fact defined as ‘manifestation in another’ (*creatio, hoc est in aliquo manifestatio*

I.455b), which in this case means manifestation of oneself in another. God's self-creation is his self-externalization, his overcoming of his own transcendent darkness to become the principle of being and of light. God's self-creation gives rise to God's self-knowing, and likewise it is God's self-knowing which generates his manifest being. While the divine self-creation is itself not an explicitly idealist thesis, it is expressed in Eriugena in idealist terms, terms adapted from Saint Augustine's account of self-knowledge: the move from non-being to being is a movement which the mind itself makes when it creates itself in its attempt to come to self-knowledge.

God's self-creation is one with the creation of all things other than God. Creation as a whole and the actual being of all things is a product of the willings of the divine mind (*theia thelemata, divinae voluntates, Peri. II.529b*). These willings are divine apparitions or theophanies. Eriugena constantly cites Dionysius's *Celestial Hierarchy* chap. iv. 1 (PG III 177d) to the effect that the "being of each thing is the superbeing of the divinity" (*esse omnium est superesse divinitas, Peri. I.443b*). God's being is the essence of all things. The true nature of all things is their immaterial essence in the divine nature. Reality is the self-manifestation of the divine thought. God is 'all in all' (I Cor. 15:28, *Deus erit omnia in omnibus*).

This divine intellect gathers the ideas and seeds of all things in itself. The individual nature and substances of things (*ousiai, substantiae*) are their ideas which are contained in the perfect mind of God understood as Logos or *verbum*. But Eriugena makes it clear that humans and angels can share in and be one with the divine Logos. Human knowledge is in fact the knowing of things in the mind of God. In so far as it has knowledge, the human mind participates in this divine intellection. In its ideal unfallen state, it is identical with the divine mind, and manifest reality is in fact co-produced by the human and divine minds acting together. Creation is theophany, and theophany is revelation to minds.

ERIOGENA'S CONCEPT OF SUBJECTIVITY

In keeping with this dynamic cosmology, Eriugena has a developed concept of subjectivity, one built around the idea of self-understanding as self-manifestation, understood in terms of the generation of multiple perspectives or *theoriae* on infinite reality. This account of self-knowing combines aspects of the thought of Augustine and Maximus Confessor. Eriugena's resulting *cogito* is radically existential; the mind knows its own existence even as it cannot comprehend its own nature. Eriugena's version of the *cogito*, '*intellico me esse*' (*Peri. I.490b*) is deeply Augustinian; our mind, its self-knowledge and its operations, are part of our being an *imago dei*, and specifically an

imago Trinitatis.³¹ However, Eriugena offsets this Augustinian conception of the mind's knowledge of itself with Maximus's conception of the mind's self-ignorance because of its transcendent, unbounded nature. Following Maximus Confessor, Eriugena asserts that we always know *that* we are but not *what* or *who* we are. Just as the divine mind does not know *what* it is but only *that* it is (*Peri.* II.590c), the human mind too has both ignorance and knowledge of itself. We can assert our own existence with absolute certainty, but we cannot know our own essence.

The human mind defines all other things below it but it cannot define itself or any other subjectivity (*Peri.* I.484d). To define means here to circumscribe, delimit, or comprehend. Human minds cannot comprehend God since God is greater than the human mind. Similarly, the human self cannot comprehend itself. To comprehend oneself would mean that one was simultaneously the object and the subject of an act of comprehending. In this state, the mind would both be completely circumscribed by itself, and yet also be this circumscribing mind. Eriugena rules this out as impossible. The self does not objectify itself in self-knowledge, rather it is identical with itself and its knowing is really a form of ignorance. The mind knows infallibly only *that* it exists, for if it did not know, it would not exist. It grasps its naked existence (*esse* or *existentia*) but not its own nature. The mind knows itself immediately, but is not completely transparent to itself, not through a defect but because non-objectifiable subjectivity is ontologically higher than objecthood.

Eriugena uses the terms *nous*, *intellectus*, *animus*, *spiritus* (II.574b) to refer to mind. Furthermore, although he differentiates between the divine, angelic, and human minds, he more usually speaks, in typical Neoplatonic manner, of 'mind' in a general, undifferentiated way. For Eriugena, the essence of human nature is pure mind. Just as God's being is identical with His actions (I.518a), so too Eriugena understands the mind to be identical with its acts. We are identical with our acts of understanding: "for we ourselves are not other than our intellects" (*Non enim aliud sumus, aliud noster intellectus, Peri.* IV.780c). The mind has faculties or powers which Eriugena refers to in traditional terms as 'motions': "For the essential being of the soul is not other than her substantial motion" [*Non enim aliud est animae essentialiter esse et substantialiter moveri*] (II.574b), here following Maximus's *Ambigua* which itself is repeating a Proclean and Plotinian tradition.

For *nous* and *ousia* denote the highest part of our nature [or rather its highest motion. For as you yourself understand it is not one thing for our nature to be and another thing for it to move.] . . . Therefore the essence of our soul is the intellect which presides over the totality of human nature. (*Peri.* II.570a–b)

31. See Brian Stock, "*Intelligo me esse*: Eriugena's *Cogito*," in R. Roques, ed., *Jean Scot Erigène et l'histoire de la philosophie* (Paris: CNRS, 1977), pp. 327–34.

There are three motions in the mind, referred to by the Greek terms *nous*, *logos*, and *dianoia* (see II.570c); or, in Latin, *intellectus*, *ratio*, and *sensus interior*: “For in that language [Greek] intellect is called *nous*, reason *logos*, and sense *dianoia*; (but) this (does) not (mean) exterior but interior (sense) (*Peri*. II. 569c).”

For Eriugena all three faculties belong to the essence of the soul or mind, whereas exterior sense (Latin: *sensus exterior*; Greek *aisthesis*, II.569c) is created by the mind as a kind of foil or wrapping, associated with the possession of the body: “for when the body perishes and life departs it (exterior sense) disappears entirely” (*Peri*. II.569a). Eriugena states that the essence of human nature is the mind and its three operations, everything else, body and the five senses is superadded as a result of the Fall.

Minds communicate with and contemplate one another in a mutual recognition (*per reciprocam cognitionem*, IV.780b). Minds can enter into and become the other in acts of understanding, but they can never encompass or objectify the other. Thus when a man understands an angel he is made in the angel in a certain way and vice-versa, as Eriugena states explicitly in book IV:

If you look more closely into the mutual relation and unity [*reciprocam copulationem et unitatem*] which exist between intelligible and rational natures, you will at once find that not only is the angelic nature established [*constitutam*] in the human but also the human is established in the angelic. For it is created in everything of which the pure intellect has the most perfect knowledge and becomes one with it . . . Moreover the angel is made in man, through the understanding of angel which is in man, and man is in the angel through the understanding of man which is established in the angel. For, as I have said before, he who has pure understanding is created in that which he understands. (*Peri*. IV.780a–b)

Earlier, Eriugena had explicitly confirmed that anything which is known by the intellect or reason or sense can be created and brought about (*creari et effici*, IV.765c) in the knower. To understand something, then, is to be able to create that entity in oneself, to have a species of it in the mind. Eriugena follows Augustine’s *De Trinitate* IX.11.16 in holding that the incorporeal species in the mind are of a higher nature than the species found in the bodies (IV.766a–b). As Augustine says and Eriugena repeats: “*Melior est tamen imaginatio corporis in animo quam illa species corporis, in quantum haec in meliore natura est, id est in substantia vitali, sicut est animus*” (*De Trinitate* IX.11.16, quoted at *Peri*. IV.766a). Furthermore, Eriugena argues that things really are identical with their intelligible essences grasped in the perfect understanding (which both human and divine mind possess). The real *ousiai* of things are spiritual and immaterial and mental. How then do we explain the appearance of materiality? The external characteristics of

things are merely a conglomeration of accidents that come together to form what appear to be visible, corporeal bodies. Qualities which are themselves eternal, invisible, and incorporeal come together to give the appearance of corporeality.

For by the action of the soul, which cements together [*conglutinante*] the incorporeal qualities [and] takes [from quantity] as it were a kind of substrate [for these qualities] and places it under (them), it creates for itself [*corpus sibi creat*] a body in which she may openly display her hidden actions (which) in themselves (are) invisible, and bring (them) forth into sensible knowledge [*inque sensibilem notionem*]. (*Peri.* II.580.a–b)

Here Eriugena very clearly states that soul itself ‘creates’ (*creat*) the body. Although elsewhere he says that the soul ‘made’ (*fecit*) the body, like Augustine, Eriugena frequently employs the verb ‘*facere*’ as synonymous with ‘*creare*’. Eriugena will claim that the mind ‘creates’ the body in the sense of manufacturing it:

we do not doubt but that the trinity of our nature, . . . is not only created out of nothing but also creates the senses which are subjoined to it, and the instruments of the senses, and the whole of its body—I mean this mortal (body). For (the created trinity) is made from God in the image of God *out of* nothing, but its body it creates [itself], though not out of nothing but out of something. (*Peri.* II.580a–b)

It is true that Eriugena also speaks of God as creating the human body, but he understands this almost as a kind of coincident occasionalism: God acts and the human mind acts. Both the human and divine minds share the same act of self-externalization whereby minds themselves generate or create their own bodies. The mind’s extrusion of the body from itself is not *ex nihilo* creation, but involves bringing to light what was hidden. The material from which the mind makes the body is not matter but qualities and quantities it finds within its own intellectual nature. Furthermore, we *have* bodies, but we are not identical with those bodies:

We are our substance, which is endowed with life and intellect [beyond our body and all its senses and its visible form]. Ours but not our own self, is the body which is attached to us and composed of a quantum and a quale and the other accidents, and is sensible [mutable, dissoluble, corruptible]. (*Peri.* I.497c)

Surely this passage is sufficient testimony, *contra* Burnyeat, that the human body had been externalized to a mere object in the world. The body and the lower functions have been added to our essence as a result of sin (571d) but do not belong essentially to us. The body, then, is a product of

mind and depends on a certain (fallen) mental outlook. Even if God is seen as creator of the body, it is because God anticipates this mental outlook. God and the mind then create the body, but furthermore, as we shall see, the mind creates itself.

THE MIND CREATES ITSELF

As we have seen, the mind knows that it is, and for Eriugena, this self-knowing is a form of self-manifestation. This self-manifestation of the mind parallels that of the Godhead which manifests itself through the divisions of nature. The Godhead too is both unmanifest and manifest, uncreated and created. God is initially hidden in the highest darkness but he manifests himself in all things as those things themselves, Eriugena states forcefully in book III:

It follows that we ought not to understand God and the creature as two things distinct from one another, but as one and the same. For both the creature, by subsisting, is in God; and God, by manifesting Himself, in a marvellous and ineffable manner creates Himself in the creature, the invisible making itself visible and the infinite finite and the uncircumscribed circumscribed and the supratemporal temporal. (*Peri.* III.678c ff)

Just as God creates by self-manifesting in things, so too the mind creates itself by its own self-manifestation. Here, Eriugena uses the Augustinian idea that the mind gives birth to its own understanding:

For the human mind begets (*gignit*) from itself as a kind of offspring of itself the knowledge by which it knows itself, and the knowledge of itself is equal to itself because it knows itself as a whole. (*Peri.* II.603b)

The mind then, for Eriugena, in a certain sense, creates itself. Its self-creation allows it to move from a kind of hidden non-being to a manifest being where it signifies itself in signs and words. Moreover, just as God's self-creation is thought as the creation of all things, so also the mind's self-creation gives the mind a knowledge of all things.

THE MIND CONTAINS THE ESSENCES OF ALL THINGS

The mind contains the *logoi* of all things. For Eriugena, mind is considered to be 'higher' (*altior*) than, and consequently 'better than' (*melior*), material, corporeal, sensible reality. There are several reasons adduced: (1) "that

which understands is better than that which is understood" (IV.766b); (2) "that which contains is one thing and that which is contained is another" (I.478b); (3) what knows is, generally speaking, greater than what is known. According to Augustine and Eriugena, as we have seen, the mental idea or image (*phantasia*) of a thing is better than that thing itself, since it is immaterial and mental and belongs to the mind's vital substance. The species or fantasm in the mind is of a superior nature to any body since it is made of living mental substance. When the mind understands something, it possesses the species or fantasms of those things in itself, and there in the mind they possess mental substance and are in a way identical with the mind itself. The mind possessing knowledge of things is also possessing the spiritual essences of those things. This is why Eriugena lays such a stress on the mind as containing the knowledge or definitions of all things.

Furthermore, Eriugena explicitly says, following Plotinus, that, at the level of *intellectus*, knower and known are one, the understanding of all things constitutes the essence of all things, for example: "the intellection of all things is the being of all things [*intellectus enim omnium essentia omnium est*]" (II.559ab; see also II.535cd; III.632d; IV.786b). Thus, not only does the mind know all things, but this knowing of all things is the very *being* of those things. Eriugena often cites this from Dionysius: "the knowledge of the things that are is the things that are [*cognitio eorum quae sunt ea quae sunt est*]" (II.559b). Of course, it is traditional to invoke the *verbum*, or Christ, as the container of all things. Thus, in Eriugena, Christ's knowledge of things is said to be *the* knowledge of things: "Christ who understands all things is the understanding of all things" (*Christus qui omnia intelligit, immo est omnium intellectus*, II.545a). Christ is the form of all intelligible life (*forma omnis intellectualis vitae*, II.548c), and in him are hidden the storehouses of the knowledge and wisdom of all things (*in quo sunt thesauri scientiae sapientiaeque absconditi*, *Peri.* V.864c; V.981c). Indeed, Christ's knowledge of things constitutes their being, since God's knowing is His willing and His willing is His making, for God there is no separate action required to create: "For the understanding of all things *God is the essence of all things*" (*Peri.* II.559b). God's self-manifestation as the *verbum* is at the same time the creation or 'eruption' (*Peri.* II.540a23, *erumperet*) of all things in the *verbum*, and the *verbum* itself has complete knowledge of and identity with the beings which are created in it.

In relation to the possession of this knowledge of things, however, Eriugena does not make a distinction between an eternal divinity and temporal humanity of Christ. The two are eternally conjoined. Christ is essentially, and hence eternally, both God and man: "Christ was both in paradise and at the same time in the world" (*Peri.* II.539c). His humanity is timeless and placeless, and is not located in a corporeal, sexed body but in a spiritual, sexless body.³² Christ is both a perfect human ("the perfec-

32. Eriugena clearly thinks of the post-resurrection body as a spiritual entity rather than as a sexual, corporeal body, see II.539a.

tion of man is Christ," II.541c, *vir autem perfectus est Christus*, IV.743b8–9), and also exemplifies the essence of the whole of humanity in that the whole of humanity and all other things too are consummated in Him (*in quo omnia consummata sunt*, IV.743b9). It is therefore clear that, for Eriugena, the *human* intellect of Christ—and not just the divine intellect—knows all things, “for to the human intellect which Christ assumed all the intellectual essences adhere” (*Humano enim intellectui quem Christus assumpsit omnes intellectuales essentiae inseparabiliter adhaerent*, II.542a).³³ The timeless essence of humanity, perfect human mind as exemplified by Christ and identical with Him, remains a temporal possibility for fallen humans. In its true timeless essence, human nature knows all things and contains in itself the knowledge of all things. The knowledge of each thing is its essential definition and for Eriugena that is identical with the essence of the thing itself.

It is clear from such passages that Eriugena is maintaining that the essences of all things are to be found not only in the divine but also in the human mind. It might be argued that Eriugena is referring only to the essences existing in the divine mind, and thus read Eriugena as utterly traditional and orthodox, as always recognizing the unbridgable gulf between human and divine reality.³⁴ However, this objection neglects Eriugena’s emphasis on the *timeless* identity of Christ’s humanity and divinity. In the divine plan, human nature itself will be deified and unified with the Godhead; to put it more accurately, human nature is already timelessly one with the Godhead but humans through willful ignorance do not understand this and mistake the accretions which they have added to perfect human nature to be the true human nature whereas it is really a false cloak hiding the true nature.

For Eriugena, paradise is not a place but is perfected human nature. There never was a time when humans were in paradise, nor will there be a time when they return, but time itself is the fallen condition from which right intellectual understanding liberates us. While this is rather difficult to articulate, it is clearly at the core of Eriugena’s concerns. Paradise and the inhabited globe have one and the same *ratio* (*Peri.* II.538b34). The unification of the whole of creation would have taken place in man had he not sinned (*Peri.* II.537c). Now it takes place in Christ who after the resurrection is pure essence of humanity, no longer male or female (II.537d). Christ ‘recapitulates’ the whole of nature, he reunites and dis-

33. This is added to Rheims. Here, he is strongly influenced by Maximus. Michael Strasser has questioned the meaning of Eriugena’s use of ‘*adhaerent*’ here, pointing out that Eriugena usually uses it to refer to the manner in which accidents or qualities cluster around their subject.

34. See Michael Strasser’s review of Dermot Moran, *Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, *Nous* 26 (1992): 509–13, where he argues (p. 512) that the reference to all things being in Christ refers to all things being ‘in God’.

solves the oppositions of male and female, soul and body, earth and heaven.³⁵ For Eriugena, developing Maximus's statement, "God and man are paradigms of each other." God manifests himself in man, and the very essence of human nature is to be one with God, and the very best humans will be deified in *theosis* with God.

Eriugena's definition of human nature is thoroughly idealist, rejecting the common medieval understanding of human beings as microcosms or as rational animals. Rather: "man is a certain notion eternally made in the mind of God [*homo est notio quaedam intellectualis in mente divina aeternaliter facta*]" (*Peri.* IV.768b).³⁶ Man is an idea in the mind of God. In like manner, all things are ideas in God's mind. This definition of human nature is most puzzling since it does not appear to individuate humans from any other created thing whose idea is also contained in the divine mind. The definition of human nature does not more than point out that a human being both contains all things and somehow mirrors the divine nature exactly.

The perfect human mind in a certain way remains unfallen, as for Plotinus. That is, Mind in itself remains in communion with the One. Rather than itself falling into imperfection, the mind is clouded around with the fantasies of sense and cannot reach itself, as it were, until it engages in philosophical *theoria* and begins the return to itself. Humans have the possibility of a *duplex theoria*—seeing things temporally or eternally, carnally or spiritually, materially or mentally. Only the eternal, spiritual intellectual vision is truly real. The other *theoria* is nothing but a private *phantasia*.

Furthermore, if humans had not fallen they would rule over this creation in the manner in which God does.

For if man had not sinned he would not be ruled among the parts of the universe [*inter partes mundi*] but would himself rule the whole of it as his subject: and he would not employ for that purpose these corporeal senses of the mortal body, but would govern eternally and faultlessly the whole and the parts of it in accordance with the laws of God, without any physical act in space or time, but solely by the rational apprehension of its natural and innate causes and by the easy use of

35. See Carlos Steel, "Lost Simplicity: Eriugena on Sexual Difference," in *Mediaevalia, Textos e Estudos*, 7–8 (1995): 103–26, and E. Jeuneau, "La division des sexes chez Grégoire de Nysse et chez Jean Scot Erigène," in Beierwaltes, ed., *Eriugena. Studien zu seinen Quellen* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitäts verlag, 1980), pp. 33–54.

36. See Dermot Moran, "*Officina omnium* or *notio quaedam intellectualis in mente divina aeternaliter facta*: the Problem of the Definition of Man in the Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena," in C. Wenin, ed., *L'Homme et son univers au Moyen Age*, 2 vols. (Louvain-la-Neuve: Editions de l'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1986), 1:195–204.

right will [*solo rationabili contuitu naturalium et interiorum eius causarum, facillimo rectae voluntatis usu*]. (*Peri.* IV. 782b16–c24)

CORPOREAL BODIES ARE ACTUALLY IMMATERIAL AND INCORPOREAL

Eriugena, following late antique thought, conceives of the physical world as bounded by the categories as given in the Aristotelian tradition.³⁷ Just as the human corporeal body is really a concatenation of accidents, all other corporeal things are similarly produced by a commingling of quantity, quality, and the other accidents, gathered around the original unseen essence (*Peri.* I.495d–96a). Furthermore, Eriugena says *ousia* or substance is unknowable in itself and is known by its *circumstantiae* (*Peri.* I.471b34), *circunstantes* (I.471c7), or *periocai*, *periokhai*. These are not strictly speaking accidents—because they are ‘outside’ (*extrinsecus*) the essence, and yet they cannot exist apart from it. Not only is *ousia* unknowable in itself, but, at *Peri.* I.478c, Eriugena says that none of the categories is accessible to sense. *Ousia* itself transcends the senses and the other categories are either in or around *ousia* so that they also in themselves are not known to the senses. The argument is simple, if *ousia* is incorporeal, then its accidents must also be incorporeal since they inhere in it or stand around it:

You are aware, I think, of the fact that none of the aforesaid ten categories which Aristotle defined, when thought of by itself, that is, in its own nature, in the light of reason, is accessible to the bodily senses. For *ousia* is incorporeal and the object of no sense, while the other nine categories are about it or within it. But if the former is incorporeal, surely it must be apparent to you that everything which is either attached to it or subsists in it [*omnia quae aut ei adhaerent aut in ea subsistunt*] and cannot exist apart from it is incorporeal? Therefore all the categories are incorporeal when considered in themselves. (*Peri.* I.478c)

Eriugena goes on to explain that some of these categories ‘commingle’ (the term he uses is *coitus*) with one another to produce the effect of corporeality.

Some of them, however, by a certain marvelous commingling with one another [*earum tamen [quaedam] inter se mirabili quodam coitu*], as Gre-

37. For a fuller account of Eriugena’s conception of the physical world, see Dermot Moran, “Time, Space and Matter in the *Periphyseon*: An Examination of Eriugena’s Understanding of the Physical World,” in F. O’Rourke, *At the Heart of the Real. Philosophical Essays in Honour of Archbishop Desmond Connell* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1992), pp. 67–96.

gory says, produce visible matter, while some appear in nothing [*in nullo apparent*] and remain for ever incorporeal. For *ousia* and relation, place, time, action, passion are not reached by any bodily sense, while quantity and quality, situation and condition, when they come together and constitute matter, as we said just now, are normally perceived by bodily sense. (*Peri*. I.479a)

Eriugena, then, sees not just human bodies but all material bodies as made up of a congruence (*concurus, conflucus, coitus*) of accidents.³⁸ Materiality is understood in terms of accidents clustering around a primary accident, quantity, but the key idea is not that matter is *res extensa*, but that it is sensuously grasped, it appears as sensible. Here, Eriugena is drawing on Gregory of Nyssa, who, in his *De hominis opificio*, chapter xxiv (PL XLIV.212d), argued for the immateriality of bodies.³⁹ When we think of a body, according to Gregory, we can formulate different ideas about it—that it is two cubits long, heavy, etc., these ideas can be separated from the body itself and from each other. When they are all removed no subject of predication, no *hypokeimenon* is left.⁴⁰ Each of the qualities on its own is grasped as an intellectual idea that is incorporeal (we can for example distinguish the idea of color from the idea of weight). For Gregory, these qualities are ideas independent of one another and independent of any substratum, it is only when thought together that we get the idea of materiality. When all the ideas are withdrawn, the idea of body itself dissolves. Presumably, Gregory inherited this idea from Plotinus who, in *Ennead* VI.3.8, argued that sensible

38. The terms he gives to this congruence are varied: *concurus* (*Peri*. I.498b23, I.503a4), *contemeratus coitus* (I.498b26–7), *armonia* (I.501b9), *conflucus* (III.713c19), *conventus* (III.714a31), *synodus* (III.714a33). The most generally occurring terms are *concurus* and *coitus* (e.g. III.712b7). Eriugena is committed to the view that all nature acts harmoniously, so this coming together of qualities to form bodies is not chaotic or disordered. Many of Eriugena's terms suggest an analogy with the sexual act. Through an act of congress, things are produced. This notion would reappear in later writings of the medieval alchemists.

39. There is a similar idealistic passage in Gregory's *De anima et eius resurrectione*, which however appears to have been unknown to Eriugena. See M. Cappuyns, "Le *De imagine* de Grégoire de Nysse traduit par Jean Scot Erigène," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 32 (1965): 205–62. See also, Philip Levine, "Two Early Latin Versions of St. Gregory of Nyssa's *peri kataskeues anthropou*," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 63 (1958): 473–92. This work, which bears the Greek title *Peri Kataskeues Anthropou*, was written in 379 to supplement his brother Basil's *Hexameron*, and gives an account of the creation of man on the Sixth Day. It was an important work and was translated into Latin four times between the sixth and the sixteenth century, the earliest translation being that of Dionysius Exiguus who entitled it *De conditione hominis*, whereas Eriugena called it *De imagine*. It is translated by W. Moore and H.A. Wilson in *Gregory of Nyssa. Selected Works and Letters*, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Erdmans, 1972), pp. 387–427. A new Greek edition of Gregory of Nyssa's text is in preparation by Carlos Steel of the University of Leuven.

40. R. Sorabji, *Matter, Space and Motion*, p. 53.

substances are a mere ‘conglomeration’ (*sumphoresis*) of matter and qualities. Matter is understood not as a real principle but as “a shadow upon a shadow, a picture and an appearance.”⁴¹ Matter is appearance to sensibility. Plotinus in this passage is an immaterialist, but, more importantly, the Christians who read him were able to import this theory into their system without leaving any residue of matter as any kind of second principle, as in Plato’s indefinite dyad. Eriugena explains that the *ex nihilo* out of which things are made is really God himself, *ex nihilo* means *ex Deo*. God is the sole source of all things and all things are really identical with their immaterial eternal ideas in God’s mind. This is an extremely radical idealism.

PLACE AND TIME ARE IN THE MIND

Finally, let us look briefly at two of the ten categories, the categories of place and time, since these are crucial to understanding the manner in which the physical world is constituted by mind in Eriugena. Eriugena’s theories on place and time, moreover, attracted the attention of the early German Idealist commentators who, not unjustly, compared Eriugena favorably with Kant’s transcendental idealist doctrine of space and time as the *a priori* pure forms of sensible intuition. Eriugena argues that place is definition and definition is in the mind, therefore place is in the mind. Aristotle in *Physics* book 4 chapter 4 (212A20) defined place as “the primary motionless boundary of that which contains.” For Aristotle, place is the inner containing surface by which one body enfolds another body, and Eriugena agrees with Aristotle: “place is nothing else but the boundary by which each thing is enclosed within fixed terms [*Nil aliud est locus nisi ambitus quo unumquodque certis terminis concluditur*]” (*Peri*. I.474b). Place is boundary, that is, definition: “place is constituted in the definitions of things that can be defined” (*Peri*. I.474b). Knowledge aspires to definition. The definitions of all things are contained in the knowledge (*scientia*) of the liberal arts; therefore, the liberal arts are the places of things which can be defined. All things find their place in the arts. Eriugena concludes from this that place is in the mind, since the arts are in the mind. His argument proceeds as follows:

(1) “What contains is other than what is contained [*Aliud est enim quod continet et aliud quod continetur*]” (*Peri*. I.478b26–7).

(2) “Bodies are contained in their places, therefore place is not a body [*Corpora continentur locis suis; aliud igitur est corpus et aliud*”

41. See R. Sorabji, “Bodies as Bundles of Properties,” *Matter, Space and Motion*, p. 51. See Plotinus, *Ennead* VI.3.8, 19–37. The term *sumphoresis* itself comes from Epicurus.

locus]" (*Peri*. I.478c27–29). That is, body belongs in the category of quantity, whereas definition is in that of place.

(3) "Place is definition [*locus omnis quia diffinitio est*]" (*Peri*. I.475b17).

(4) "Definition exists in art and every art is in the mind [*Si enim diffinitio omnis in disciplina est et omnis disciplina in animo, necessario locus omnis, quia diffinitio est, non alibi nisi in animo erit*]" (*Peri*. I.475b15–17).

(5) "Place exists only in the mind [*non erit nisi in animo*]" (*Peri*. I.475b17).

Actually Eriugena is running together several claims: (1) definition involves placing a thing in the sense of locating it in the fixed scheme of science, from which he draws the conclusion that (2) definition is place. He then makes the more problematic statement that since place is definition, and definition is in the mind then place is in the mind. Eriugena is hereby extending to the concept of place what Augustine and Plotinus say of time—that it exists 'in the mind' (*in animo*), and that it is through it that the mind measures things. The true place of everything is its essential definition, which is changeless and which as a *logos* or rationale is preserved in the mind. Whose mind? Clearly, Eriugena means the human mind, since he has just been talking about the liberal arts as containing the definitions of all things. The human mind has the power to define, hence all things which it defines are set in their proper places. Of course, the human mind, since it transcends definition and place, cannot define itself, and hence it is located in no place. Furthermore, since the Word is the true knowledge (*cognitio*) of all things, then the true definitions are contained in the Word, but there is no suggestion that the human self which contains the knowledge of all the arts is any less omniscient than the Word, indeed Eriugena explicitly says that perfect human nature is omniscient.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I believe I have amply demonstrated that idealism did exist, indeed flourished, before modernity, and that Eriugena is an idealist in several senses of that term. Indeed, Eriugena is an idealist both in the Berkeleian immaterialist sense and also in the more developed sense of German Idealism. Eriugena has a sophisticated and developed concept of a self-aware and self-productive subjectivity, a pure mind that is a subject (*subiectum*) that both comprehends all things below it. Furthermore, the mind is actually responsible for the creation of the human material body and also for the apparent corporeality of all material things. But, the key

point is that Eriugena is an idealist for Christian Neoplatonist reasons, that is, he wanted to do justice to the understanding of creation according to the principle that like comes from like, and he wanted to think through the proximity between the human and the divine minds in terms of the dynamics of self-knowledge. From Gregory of Nyssa, Eriugena emphasizes that the corrupting temporal flow and apparent restricting spaces of this world are not part of God's original design, but are forced on our human world through the self-ignorance that constituted the Fall. Furthermore, in the manner in which Eriugena thinks of reality as constituted by communicating minds, both divine and human, he is articulating an insight which becomes fully developed in Hegelian idealism: the primacy of self-consciousness. A more general consequence of these investigations is that we are required to rethink the dawn of subjectivity in philosophy normally assumed to begin with Descartes, leading to a reevaluation of the medieval concept of mind. A corollary is that idealism arising from considerations of the meaning of creation may be intimately linked with theism (a position Hegel affirmed), and those who want to distinguish theism from idealism must reconsider the nature of the act of creation.