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From Eriugena to Dostoevsky: Christian 'Universalism' in Hiberno-Latin Contexts and its Continued Significance

Source studies, an important approach for modern medievalists, has often implicitly assumed passivity in the reception of Latin sources by early Insular literatures. But the active synthesis of Latin, Greek, and Irish texts and backgrounds in the work of the ninth-century Irish philosopher John Scottus Eriugena shows the creativity operating within early Irish letters. Eriugena's work exemplifies the rich Hiberno-Latin literary contexts, including engagement with source texts, that Charles D. Wright's scholarship illuminates on a larger scale.[1] In fact, Eriugena's synthesis of Greek and Latin texts in an Irish context, unpacking ideas and texts by earlier writers — including Sts Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine of Hippo, Ambrose of Milan, Dionysius the Areopagite (or works attributed to him), and most notably Maximus the Confessor — affords an intervention in a centuries-long and multicultural conversation on Christian soteriology. This takes on renewed significance today amid recent debate over Christian universalism in the patristic era.[2] Eriugena's distinctive synthesis of sources resonates, too, with Christian existentialism in modern times, by placing a premium on freedom and choice in earthly life, rather than assuming that Christian faith must look mainly to the afterlife. However, modern assumptions about freedom and individualism make it difficult to discern nuances in Eriugena's Hiberno-Irish synthesis today. This essay attempts to unpack some of these nuances using the context of Eriugena's sources and his work's relation to them.

1 Exemplified in his *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature*.

2 Most notably resulting from the philosopher David Bentley Hart's *That All Shall Be Saved*. See p. 66 for his explication of a thread of patristic influences, including Maximus, which he argues supports his thesis that universalism was a norm of early Christianity.

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Eriugena and Universalism

Universalism teaches that God (or some power) will save all, sooner or later in the afterlife, from punishment in hell, and from eternal judgement and damnation. As a Christian heresy, it was condemned (and thus excised from orthodox teaching) in texts related to the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553, which referred to it under the name *apokatastasis* (from a term in Acts 3. 21 translated 'restitution'), referring to the restoration of all things to God.[3] St Maximus, a prime Greek source for Eriugena's work, became known for expanding upon the Fifth Council's emphasis on theopaschism, the suffering of God the Word as the 'hidden God' on the Cross in Byzantine liturgical phrasing.[4] According to Christian tradition the Wise Thief beside Christ went to paradise because he recognized the 'hidden God' during the Crucifixion, whereas the Foolish Thief reviling him did not and was damned.

The otherworldly yet cosmologically engaged emphasis on the God who suffered as a human in Maximus's Greek writings, meshed with Eriugena's background in Irish monastic literary culture that famously featured the trope of an 'otherworld' landscape overlaying the physical Irish landscape.[5] From that background, the Hiberno-Latin writer's distinctive approach (drawing in part on Maximus) emphasized a return of all things to God: a Creation based in the active flow of the uncreated energies of God, a *theophania entis*, or 'theophany of being' in which otherworldliness permeated earthly living, as distinct from a more rationalistic *analogia entis* or more cerebral view of salvation.[6] Eriugena's view also stressed individual freedom, and divine judgement based on an individual's embodied life on earth, a continual choice between the divine energies or grace and a false objectification or idolatry of matter that led to death. Maximus and Eriugena both sought to show the writings of St Gregory of Nyssa overall to be orthodox despite his suspect emphasis on *apokatastasis*. By articulating a combination of universal return to God and potential individual damnation, they attempted to situate St Gregory's earlier writings in a more orthodox framework. Eriugena's rethinking and reframing of the work of both Maximus and Gregory demonstrate his highly active engagement with sources.

Eriugena's synthesis, in turn, becomes a source for further thinking on universalism as well as a point of contextualization for other uses of the work of Maximus and Gregory. Today, renewed philosophical interest in universalism, engaging ancient Christian views of salvation from the other side of the nineteenth-century universalist movement in liberal Protestantism,

3 On this issue and the council, see Price's extensive 'General Introduction'.

4 On Maximus and the council, see Price, 'General Introduction'. For the liturgical phrase, see *The Lenten Triodion*, trans. by Mother Mary and Ware, p. 589.

5 On the Irish context to his work, see Siewers, 'Eriugena's Irish Background'.

6 On this distinction in a philosophical context today, see Siewers, 'Song, Tree, and Spring'.

looks to the works of Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus in a different way. But Eriugena's further articulation in his *Periphyseon* of the paradoxical overlay of individual freedom and judgement with a universal return to God actually stands opposed to modern senses of universalism, despite recent efforts to excavate sources for that view in the patristic era. Eriugena, as a prime source for the later medieval German-Latin writer Nicholas of Cusa, in fact indirectly influenced Russian philosophy and modern Christian existentialism, which itself offers an approach to universalism different from that of many modern Western thinkers, by emphasizing individual freedom in the present moment. In that context also, the significance of the Eriugenan synthesis can be understood as of continuing relevance today.[7]

Modern Reception of Patristic Universalism

One challenge in retrospectively understanding Eriugena's uses of his sources and specifically the nuances of soteriology in Eriugena's Hiberno-Latin synthesis of Greek and Latin views is the modern secular 'horizon of expectation' for ideas of universal salvation. It involves what philosopher Charles Taylor has called the 'buffered self', a modern 'hard-shelled' sense of individualism, as opposed to a 'porous self' of cosmic interconnectedness familiar to non-modern and pre-secular audiences and cultures.[8] This also includes a different emphasis on freedom. For Eriugena, following Maximus and the Fifth Ecumenical Council, freedom lay in a voluntary choice to serve Christ, identified as truth. Universal salvation would work against such freedom and make life's end purpose more deterministic in the view of philosophers like Eriugena. Theopaschism, and the overlay of a hidden spiritual unity in Christ with individual human experience, empowered freedom in his view. But to the 'buffered' self of modernity, freedom is seen as a state of individualized choice, as finding one's self rather than losing one's self, involving a cosmic moral framework that is non-judgemental and ultimately embracing of a self-directed life trajectory. This view accepts a more deterministic 'playing field' of universal salvation, but paradoxically on the individual's own terms.

Ideas of the self in modernity tend towards a teleology of self-assertion rather than self-emptying. They include divergent views of whether 'salvation' (in terms of 'self-realization' in a secular if not religious sense) ultimately involves an individual or universal focus. However, both sides in modern

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7 S. L. Frank, a Russian Orthodox Christian existentialist in exile in the twentieth century, drew on Nicholas of Cusa's works, which were deeply influenced by Eriugena as a direct source, for his work *The Unknowable*. Its translator, the eminent scholar Boris Jakim, calls the work 'arguably the greatest Russian philosophical work of the twentieth century', by an author whom 'some authorities […] consider […] to be the most outstanding Russian philosopher of any age' (p. iii).

8 Taylor, 'Buffered and Porous Selves'.

debates on universalism tend to derive from that individualistic idea of self described by Taylor, which equates the individual with being. Thus, the anti-universalist derivations of Puritan predestination tended over time to emphasize a particular exceptional destiny for each person. These evolved to overlap an exceptionalist ontology of the individual with modern Unitarian-Universalist ideas, emphasizing an individual destiny free from predestination. Thus, in American religion, Unitarian-Universalism as a movement evolved out of Puritan Congregationalism, a seeming paradox. Ralph Waldo Emerson famously began his public career in one such community as a Unitarian minister, before helping to found the Transcendentalist movement. Emerson's essay 'Self Reliance' is an important foundational text of popular American individualistic 'New Thought' spirituality in later generations.[9] In that modern trend, each individual came to be seen as making his or her own destiny, without restriction in this life or after, a type of universalism different from that articulated by Eriugena or his sources a millennium or more before.

On both sides of modern universalist 'debates', the modern West came to equate a self-imagined individuality with being, which became a basis of Martin Heidegger's critique of modern Western ontology as fundamentally nihilistic.[10] Thus, notions as disparate as ideas of American exceptionalism and 'manifest destiny', Western utopianism through scientific progress, and the 'prosperity gospel' coexisted in a culture in which the particular of 'Western man' became universal. Each person is urged to follow their dream, in styles inspired by sources ranging from religious fundamentalism to Disney films, all embedded in secularized individualistic culture. That framework differs significantly from the basis of Eriugena's ninth-century work, and what is sometimes termed his universalism. The latter involves a more complex meld of Latin, Greek, and Irish Christian traditions. Studying Eriugena's work in this light uncovers both his rich contribution to understanding and shaping earlier Christian views and their endurance in often hidden but significant genealogies of embodied Christian existentialist spirituality. In this, a sense of the unity of soul and body in early Christian thought, still in embodied Christian existentialism today, remains key. It differs from the deep-structural emphasis, in modern Western technologically enhanced anthropology, on individual will as ecstatically (beyond mortal and embodied limits) shaping destiny.

9 On the emergence of American Unitarianism as a cultural movement, see Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience*.

10 The controversial Russian philosopher Alexander Dugin effectively tracks Heidegger's critique of the modern West for identifying Being with the individual. See Dugin, *Martin Heidegger*, pp. 60–61.

Eriugena's Synthesis

Distinct from modern proponents of individualism, Maximus, as amplified by Eriugena in his Hiberno-Latin contexts, offered an integration of personal and networked aspects of life, which modern Russian philosophy terms *sobornost*, meaning 'a hidden spiritual unity'. This ontological idea prefigures in some respects Deleuze and Guattari's postmodern idea of life as 'rhizomic' (using patterns of hidden grassroot networks as a metaphor). Following patristic origins in Russian Christian tradition, the network of *sobornost* also takes root 'arboreally' or transcendentally in Christ. This is how, for example, Fyodor Dostoevsky, operating in a later Russian Orthodox adaptation of the Greek traditions that influenced Eriugena, overlapped ideas of freedom and providence. In his famous novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky's character Elder Zosima asserts a unity of responsibility of each person for each other's sins. But at the same time, for Dostoevsky cosmic interconnectedness overlaps with individual freedom and its repercussions in the afterlife. Therefore, characters are instructed by Elder Zosima not to live a lie about themselves or others, because that will prevent them from learning to love and thus finding salvation. A theme of the novel is that not to believe in God or the afterlife means that 'everything is permitted', a view that is criticized when identified with the intellectual Karamazov brother. But the coexistence of freedom in the context of a hidden spiritual unity in the novel still brings into question modern Western ideas of individual rights and justice. It seeks to establish individual guilt in the face of communal responsibility for sin, while still highlighting the need for individual repentance and self-emptying in Christ. This unresolved paradox or mystery underlines the need for an existentialist Christian emphasis on choices made in each moment of a person's earthly life.

In his *De Divina Praedestionae Liber*, Eriugena offered a refutation of double predestination as advanced by Gottschalk of Orbais. In this work Eriugena develops a critique of the Augustinian emphasis on predestination that would later find its most extreme expression in Calvinism's notion of the elect. 'The conclusion is, then, that foreknowledge and predestination are metaphorically applied to God on the basis of a similitude to temporal things', Eriugena wrote.[11] This contrasts with the Western Latin emphasis on predestination. Predestination was a literal mistaken interpretation of a metaphor, given that God existed beyond time or in non-time. With regard to eternal punishment, Eriugena explains, 'So it comes about that all bodies are made glorious by that very same fire by which punishment will be heaped up from outside upon souls damned from within by their own wickedness […]. It is neither substance not its qualities that are to be tormented by the fire of

11 Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, 6. 7, trans. by Brennan, p. 63.

hell, but […] it is the bodily sense of the sufferer and his recalcitrant spirit that will wrestle with eternal misery'.[12]

Eriugena offers an early version of Dostoevsky's Christian existentialist view at the start of his main work, the *Periphyseon*. He opens his main work with this declaration: 'Nature, then, is the general name, as we said, for all things, for those that are and those that are not'.[13] The idea of a spiritual unity encompassing the fallen physical everyday world of human beings permeates his work, offering the opportunity for choice along with enveloping grace. It is in that interaction of worlds that human freedom plays out, while still governed by a sustaining providence, which for Eriugena ultimately will return all things to God, following Maximus. But Eriugena also makes clear that this will not eliminate eternal punishment for souls that did not learn fully to love in this life, but achieved what is in effect a self-inflicted death in objectification of themselves and others.

A key to Eriugena's active synthesis of his sources is the Irish context of his philosophy of nature. It offers in effect a kind of theoretical basis for the contemporary Irish poetics of what has been called the Otherworld in vernacular writings. Those stories are not explicitly religious, but likely were written down in monastic contexts.[14] Their presentation of an overlay of worlds, otherworldly and everyday physical dimensions intersecting normatively in human experience, parallels the articulation of the 'hidden God' and hidden spiritual unity of *sobornost* in Christian traditions, stemming especially from the Fifth Ecumenical Council in Maximus's writing, as well as from texts about desert fathers, such as Athanasius's *Life of St Antony*, that had been so influential on Irish monastic ascetic culture. Irish texts such as Adomnán's *Life of St Columba* use a Latin term for 'desert' to indicate 'sea', for example. The sea of the Irish archipelago, in texts such as the *Voyage of Bran* and the *Voyage of St Brendan*, is described with an otherworldly dimension, as is the terrestrial landscape of Ireland in the Ulster Cycle and other works.

Writing a couple centuries after Maximus, Eriugena was considered one of the few scholars in the Latin West with the facility for Greek to be able to translate works by Church Fathers such as ~~the~~ Maximus the Confessor and Dionysius the Areopagite. Eriugena's scholarly abilities appear to have been trilingual, involving early Irish as well. John J. Contreni and Pádraig P. Ó Néill have studied biblical glosses with Old Irish vocabulary that they attribute to Eriugena's earlier career before 860, and of the 660 glosses now attributed to Eriugena, 79 use Old Irish.[15] Eriugena's 'familiarity with rare and unusual

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12 Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, 119.3–4, trans. by Brennan pp. 126–27.
13 Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, I, PL, col. 441a; Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, ed. by Jeauneau, I, p. 1.
14 The stories include the so-called Ulster Cycle and tales of early Irish kings. See Siewers, 'Eriugena's Irish Background'.
15 Eriugena, *Glossae Divinae Historiae*, ed. by Contreni and Ó Néill. Their conclusions on the authorship of the glosses can be found on pp. 17–29. I am also indebted in this discussion to their section on the Irish backgrounds of the glosses, especially on pp. 50–55.

sources' in writings across his career is seen in the glosses, reflecting the rich early Irish intertextuality explored by Wright.[16] Evidence of Greek sources in the glosses also suggests that Eriugena began study of Greek texts early in his teaching career.[17] Most Carolingian-era scholars of Greek had Irish educational backgrounds, with evidence suggesting at least some study of Greek occurring in early Irish contexts.[18]

Contreni and O'Néill note how the collection of Eriugena's glosses reflects a rich early medieval tradition of glossing Scripture and other Latin works, which arguably was most developed in Irish contexts in the West. Based on evidence from extant texts, early Irish biblical exegesis emerged in the mid-seventh century in Latin biblical commentaries that continued to be used into the ninth century. These may well have formed a primary background to Eriugena's work, which culminates in the *Periphyseon*, essentially an exegesis of the account of the days of creation in Genesis. This subject was a focus of earlier Irish exegesis in the hexameronic genre to which the *Periphyseon* may be appended.[19] The Genesis account of Creation in Books III, IV, and the first part of V, provides the core of the book and the framework for Eriugena's descriptions of the final return of nature to God with the Second Coming and Final Judgement. Eriugena had translated some of Maximus's texts, including relevant sections of *Ambigua*, and sought in the *Periphyseon* to synthesize the Greek Christian articulation of cosmology, and related eschatology and soteriology, with that found in Latin commentaries, especially those of St Augustine of Hippo. So, one of the four phases of nature described in the *Periphyseon* was focused on the primordial causes, Eriugena's version of Augustine's seminal reasons or *rationes seminales*, synthesized with Maximus's *logoi*, the Dionysian 'divine willings', and the developing Greek doctrine of the uncreated energies of God. When modern universalists label Augustine as the chief of what philosopher David Bentley Hart calls the 'infernalists' (foes of the early 'universalists'), they may claim Maximus as an ally, while overlooking the significant Eriugenian reception melding the terminologies of both in the Hiberno-Latin *Periphyseon*, a synthesis that highlights early ideas of universalism in a way that is distinct from modern understandings of it. Source study in this case highlights both Eriugena's intellectual reshaping of others' work and the degree to which that reshaping yielded an articulation of 'patristic synthesis' distinct to Eriugena and his historical-cultural moment.

Eriugena, like Maximus, articulated a model of Creation and its return to God whose focus emphasized a *theophania entis*, or theophany of being,

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16 Eriugena, *Glossae Divinae Historiae*, ed. by Contreni and Ó Néill, p. 29. Jeffery, 'Eastern and Western Elements in the Irish Monastic Prayer', p. 100. See also the first chapter of Wright, *The Irish Tradition*.

17 Eriugena, *Glossae Divinae Historiae*, ed. by Contreni and Ó Néill, p. 35.

18 Moran, 'Greek in Early Medieval Ireland', discusses evidence of Greek study in early Ireland, including some adaptive reuse of earlier bilingual Greek-Latin approaches.

19 I examine Eriugena's Irish backgrounds in more detail in 'Eriugena's Irish Background'.

rather than (following more in Augustine's emphasis) the Scholastic *analogia entis* (a term coined by Aquinas, another villain in Hart's historiography of 'universalism vs. infernalism').[20] Eriugena saw the theophanies, or receptions of divine revealings, as in effect expressing Maximus's *logoi* of God, from which material causes of Creation emerge, and on a spectrum together. Bradshaw has described the *logoi* and the divine energies as overlapping in significance but distinct — the *logoi* being meanings for life, a way of cosmically reading Creation up into the Logos, Christ; the divine energies being divine activities or grace, which the *logoi* manifest in Creation.[21] Those two meanings establish a dynamic identity with one another. Indeed, Maximus referred to the *logoi* as energies. The terms *logoi* and energies indicate the integrated need for both a participatory 'reading' of Creation and for activity on the part of man, which again highlights the mystery expressed in Eriugena's writing of a providence that will eventually return all to God, while the individual person retains the freedom to choose a life of service to Christ or a self-willed independence leading to damnation.

Maximus as a Context for Eriugena

Fr. Demetrios Harper, in his recent study of Christian ethics in Maximus's writings, observes how, in Question 35 of the *Ad Thalassium*, the Confessor compares the *logoi* of visible things both to virtue and to the flesh of Christ — that virtues, like *logoi*, must be participated in to be part of Christ's body. 'Virtue and logos imply one another, as the participation in the former implies the realization of the latter', Harper summarizes. 'As such, the virtues would seem to be the phenomenological manifestation of *logoi*'.[22] The *logoi*, in turn, for Maximus form the perceptible manifestations to human beings of the divine energies or grace, constituting the eschatological return to God discussed by both Maximus and Eriugena at great length in their writings. The relation between transfigurative virtues, the divine *logoi* or willings, and the divine energies of God ground the eschatological discussions of both writers. This shared theological, soteriological, and anthropological-cosmological groundwork illuminates how their sense of an ultimate universal reconciliation of Creation and Man with God differs from the modern sense of universal salvation. The relation of Eriugena's work to its core source, Maximus's writings, is essential to understanding the complexity of the relationship of their ideas and the nature of Eriugena's synthesis. Without such nuance, provided by source study, his work can and has been on the one hand dismissed as pantheism, and on the other absorbed into modern ideas of universalism, through a lack

20 For more on *theophania entis*, see Siewers, 'The *Periphyseon*, the Irish "Otherworld"'.

21 Bradshaw, 'Nature as a Manifestation of the Divine'.

22 Harper, *The Analogy of Love*, pp. 172–73.

of full context needed to garner its meaning. Thus further examination of Maximus as an adapted prime source of Eriugena is needed.

Maximus's most famous discussion of eschatological free will, an issue key to modern arguments for universalism, is in *Ambigua* 7, as David Bradshaw notes.[23] Maximus states that after death 'our free will […] will have surrendered voluntarily and wholly to God, and perfectly subject itself to His rule' and goes on to say 'for in that state nothing will appear apart from God, nor will there be anything opposed to God that could entice our will to desire it, since all things intelligible and sensible will be enveloped in the ineffable manifestation and presence of God'.[24] Just as, Maximus argues, the sun renders stars invisible, so wilful movement of all kinds after death will cease in God, placing an existentialist Christian urgency on the choices of human beings in the present on earth, and their ascetic struggles and acts, accepting God's grace here and now to support them, or not.

But the damned, Maximus argues in *Ambigua* 65, situate themselves in this life in opposition to well-being. So God justly renders to them in the afterlife eternal ill-being: 'They have absolutely no motion after the manifestation of what was sought, by which what is sought is naturally revealed to those who seek it'.[25] This is elsewhere explained as meaning not that God punishes per se, but that the damned experience God's presence as torment, although it is bliss to the blessed. As Dostoevsky put it, 'hell is not being able to love', *contra* Sartre's 'hell is other people'.

In *Ambigua* 42, Maximus describes how it is the lack of participation with God that leaves the damned in eternal torment: 'For those who participate or do not participate proportionately in Him who, in the truest sense, is and is good, and is forever, there is an intensification and increase of punishment for those who cannot participate, and of enjoyment for those who can participate'.[26] God may be an object of desire for all in the end, but if there is not participation with God opened up during life here and now on earth, Maximus argues that the resulting attempted objectification of God will in effect be an objectification of self and a lack of salvation. The alternative position, of participation in God, is through his virtues as manifestations of his *logoi* expressing his energies or grace.[27] Bradshaw concludes,

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23 In this section, I am indebted to philosopher David Bradshaw's extensive scholarship on Maximus, summarized on these topics recently in two essays: 'Is There No Repentance after Death?' and 'No Repentance after Death'.

24 Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 7. 11, I, pp. 89, 91–93.

25 Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 65. 3, II, p. 281.

26 Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 42. 15, II, p. 149.

27 Bradshaw considers the *logoi* and uncreated energies of God to be distinct but on a continuum with the *logoi*, in effect being how the energies are manifest or become knowable to human beings, although other commentators interpret Maximus's identification of the two as more absolute.

> We can see now how Maximus can allow that many of those who perished in the Flood, the Tower of Babel, and so on were ultimately saved. It is quite likely that many of those who perished had sought the good in the best ways known to them, and so received the preaching of Christ in Hades with joy and a sense of recognition. As mentioned earlier, they had to repent only in the weak sense of disavowing actions done in ignorance. A much stronger form of repentance is required to turn around a character that has been shaped by repeatedly and stubbornly rejecting the known good.[28]

In other words, contrary to the idea that traditional Christianity is oriented primarily to the afterlife, in at least an ethical sense it is very much oriented to 'this world', by placing a premium, at least in the traditions represented by Maximus, on what we do here and now, each moment. Thus, too, spiritual elders advised against, for example, killing a robber who enters your home, because you would be sending him to death in the midst of a sin without time for repentance — unless self-defence is absolutely necessary to protect the vulnerable or perhaps one's own life for future service to others, in Christ. Bradshaw finds similar views of the afterlife to those of Maximus in the writings of St John of Damascus (a key eighth-century expositor of orthodox faith) and in the eleventh-century St Symeon the New Theologian.

Theosis and Nothingness

Tied up with these teachings of the afterlife is the dogma of *theosis*, as the ultimate realization of human being in God. *Theosis*, articulated early among Church Fathers by St Athanasius the Great following the apostle Paul, involves the potential participation of man in ultimate union with God's uncreated energies (though not with his essence) through a synergy of grace and ascetic struggle. The opposite of *theosis* for Maximus is, in a sense, what he describes in *Ambigua* 20 and 21 of the state of eternal damnation, a kind of 'virtual nothingness', or trajectory towards non-being, 'for infinite ages […] a mode of existence that in fact did not exist'.[29] This, crucially for the issue of universalism, does not involve annihilation of the human nature, made according to the image of God (on which point we'll see more in Eriugena), but what Bradshaw terms a misuse of God-bestowed powers, an identification with what Eriugena calls a self-fantasy. This comes through perverse movement or 'mis-growth' (as in the Greek term *amartia* for sin, 'missing the mark'), contrary to the *logoi* of God that are essential to realization of human being in *theosis*. This is the ontological state of the 'chaff blown away', a diminished and fragmented consciousness, amid and constituting what Maximus described

28 Bradshaw, 'Is There No Repentance after Death?'.

29 Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua*, 21. 12, 1, p. 439.

as eternal torments of hell, abiding with the company of the demons, the haters separated from the One Who Loves.[30]

In this it is important to recall how in Genesis 1. 26, God says, 'let us make man according to our image and likeness', and then in Genesis 1. 27, 'so God made man in His image'. The likeness was regarded by a consensus of Church Fathers as a type of fulfilment of human nature, to come through the synergy of grace and ascetic struggle, not immediately from the original Creation. That fulfilment was identified with *theosis*, in which lies the restored realization of human nature fully. Otherwise, the type of self-fantasy mentioned above does not achieve that realization.

Bradshaw suggests how Maximus's teaching should be framed by eschatological changes in temporality, which I would like to expand upon here briefly, before proceeding to Eriugena's reception of Maximus's eschatological teachings. As I have discussed elsewhere,[31] patristic biblical commentators indicated four different senses of temporality and non-temporality in accounts of Creation: (1) natural time of the seasons and stars; (2) human time of individual and social cycles; (3) eternal time of created immortals (angels and demons, human nature as immortal); and (4) the non-time or beyond-time of the divine uncreated energies, in which deified man participates. The damned are excluded from the latter by their own opaqueness or self-objectification as it were, in an eternity that is still created time. Created time nonetheless will disappear with the old and fallen Cosmos, which is made new or transfigured in the *logoi* manifesting the divine energies. But the damned are stuck in what Eriugena termed the fantasy of a disappearing dimension, like the Dwarves unable to perceive Aslan's country at the end of C. S. Lewis's Christian fantasy-allegory *The Last Battle*. This situation remains, in apophatic theological terms typical of the Greek Fathers, a mystery, to be known through experience of holiness, rather than by abstract cognition in the limited realm of human speculation. The teaching, common to the Church Fathers, that prayers for the dead may ease the state of those in Gehenna until the Final Judgement, or even perhaps in special cases move them towards salvation in that ultimate judging, undoubtedly relates to a sense of different temporalities at work, but still does not equate with universalist soteriology in the modern sense discussed earlier.

Eriugena's Eschatology

Maximus emphasized that man had the potential for *theosis* because of the two distinct natures of Jesus Christ, human and divine, embodying that

30 Maximus the Confessor, *Epistle* 1, col. 389A–B; trans. by Daley, in 'Apokatastasis and "Honorable Silence"', pp. 334–35, also n. 107.

31 Siewers, 'The Ecopoetics of Creation', p. 65.

union in one Person. To Maximus, Christ offers through the Incarnation and Resurrection-Ascension grace to the struggler to overcome binaries of objectified fallen human life: created and uncreated, intelligible and sensible, heaven and earth, paradise and the inhabited world, male and female. These divisions are to be overcome in salvation, but they depend on the *trope* or mode of each man coming into accord with his *logos*. There will be a cosmic return to God at the Second Coming and General Resurrection, but individuals will be in a position of reading that 'text' and participating in those energies depending on their growth in grace as an intertwined reader and participant. Eriugena derived from Maximus's writings the sense of simultaneously reading the *logoi* and participating in the divine energies as fundamental to realizing full human growth and salvation. In this humans can become gods, not in essence, but by a oneness of virtues with the divine energies. In the first book of the *Periphyseon*, dealing with the return of Creation to God, and the interweaving of freedom and grace, Eriugena describes Divine Nature in this way:

> Haec igitur nomina sicut et multa similia ex creatura per quandam diuinam metaphoram ad creatorem referenutur [...]. Diuina natura [...] dum omnia creat et a nullo creari nesciat, in ominbus quae ab ea sunt mirabili modo creatur, ut, quemadmodum mentis intelligentia seu propositum seu consilium seu quoquo modo motus ille noster intimus et primus dici possit dum in cogitationem, ut diximus, uenerit quadamque phantasiarum formas acceperit deindeque in signa uocum seu sensibilium motuum indicia processerit, non incongrue dicitur fieri — fit enim in phantasiis formatus qui per se omni sennsibili caret forma — ita diuina essentia, quae per se subsistens omnen superat intellectum, in his quae a se et per se et in se et ad se facta sunt recte dicitur creari, ut in eis siue intellectu si solummodo intelligibilia sunt, siue sensu si sensibilia sint, ab his qui eam recto studio inquirun cognoscatur.

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(Therefore these names, like many similar ones also, are transferred from the creature by a kind of divine metaphor to the Creator [....]

> (although it creates all things and cannot be created by anything, [...] Divine Nature [...] is in an admirable manner created in all things which take their being from it; so that, as the intelligence of the mind or its purpose or its intention or however this first and innermost motion of ours may be called, having, as we said, entered upon thought and received the forms of certain phantasies, and having then proceeded into the symbols of sounds or the signs of sensible motions, is not inappropriately said to become — for, being in itself, without any sensible form, it becomes formed in phantasies —, so the Divine Essence which when it subsists by itself surpasses every intellect is correctly said to be created in those things which are made by itself and through itself and in itself [and for itself], so that in them either by the intellect, if they are only intelligible, or by the sense, if

> they are visible, it comes to be known by those who investigate it in the right spirit.)[32]

Eriugena identifies names of God with the divine and cosmic continuum of primordial causes, theophanies, and material effects, parallel to the continuum of Maximus's *logoi* and virtues, or Dionysius's willings in a divinely energized cosmic hierarchy — the *logoi* again being identified by Maximus also with energies. Theophanies in Creation for Eriugena are images of eternal causes and are identified with names or words, which iconographically can be experienced as thickening into images, as embodied virtues and categories of place in grace-sustained and dynamic cosmic hierarchy.[33] Following this, the ultimate iconic symbols, the names of the Trinity, express relationship rather than essential nature.[34] One meaning of *logos*, 'harmony', undergirds Eriugena's discussion of connections between a musical sense of the cosmos as harmony, linking natural law and biblical principle, by evoking 'the harmony of nature',[35] seen also in his stress on the importance of the liberal arts including music as means for experiencing grace-filled cosmic hierarchy. There is always an incarnational context to his discussion: He identifies place with definition and with naming, and place also with metonomy, a type of physically based metaphor, paradoxically incorporeal and transfigurative at the same time, symbolically embodied, not simply materialistic, but meaningful.[36] He relates the similar trope of synecdoche to scriptural word-images, entwined with a divinely energized reality, echoing the Incarnation of the Word made flesh.[37] In all this, Eriugena draws on Maximus's texts, along with the Dionysian apophatic writings, and synthesizes them with a framework of cosmological landscape that arguably reflects Irish hexaemeral interest and otherworldly narratives.

Damnation and Salvation

For Maximus and Eriugena, Creation is not based in static ideas or concepts 'in' God or a fixed natural law, but rather is effectively an active overflow of the divine, which flow is equivalent to the uncreated energies of God. Although the terminology of the energies goes back to Pauline records and began to be more articulated by the Cappadocians and backgrounds the work of Maximus, it was more fully unpacked in later centuries in Greek by writers such as

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32 Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, I, PL, cols 453B, 454C, 454D; Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, ed. by Jeauneau, 19 and 21, V, pp. 39–41.

33 Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, I, PL, col. 448B.

34 Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, I, PL, col. 447A.

35 Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, I, PL, cols 637A, and 638D; III, PL, col. 722C.

36 'Place' occupies a large swathe of the discussion in Book I of the *Periphyseon*. On 'place' as definition, see for example Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, I, PL, cols 485C–D, 486A. On 'place' and metonymy, see Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, I, PL, col. 480B–C.

37 Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, I, PL, col. 559A; IV, PL, col. 859C.

St Symeon the New Theologian and St Gregory Palamas, and the so-called Eighth and Ninth Ecumenical Councils of the Greek world, and reflected on later by Nicholas of Cusa in Latin. In this genealogy, the 'natural' in the ultimate sense becomes equivalent with grace, in a more mystical sense of natural law than the Latin Scholastic sense of natural law as a created pattern.

This, of course, had ramifications, too, for articulation of issues of salvation and damnation. The more 'mystical' pre-Scholastic and non-Scholastic sense of the *theophania entis* or *energeia entis* developed by Maximus and Eriugena integrated sensibilities that by late Scholasticism had become divided between the realist and nominalist approaches of Duns Scotus and William of Ockham. The earlier undifferentiated fusion of an integrated reality of 'universals' and 'particulars' indicated the soteriological approach by which the return to God of man and Creation at large could be distinguished from the existence or mode, the *tropos* in Maximus's terminology, of the individual, which equates with the yet-to-be-fulfilled 'likeness' of man's becoming, as interpreted from Genesis. This did not involve a modern universalist sense of salvation. The mystery of God's plan could be discerned as mystery, allowing for his omnipotence potentially acting beyond human ken, while also still including an element of human freedom.

Eriugena referred to the primordial causes as created, following Augustine, but he also implied that this terminology depended on one's perspective on their continuum with theophanies, and that the primordial causes were eternally in God, as the theophanies were a revelation of the divine manifested in Creation. He must have been aware of Maximus's own identification of the *logoi* with the energies of God. There is a direct 'sparkling' of God's energies in Creation indicated in Eriugena's central use of the terminology theophanies. Eriugena indeed defines Nature as including 'that which is' and 'that which is not' with the latter including the divine, in the basic model of Creation-and-Return he shares with Maximus, though with garnishes from Augustine's writings.

Despite or because of shared emphases on a universal return of all beings to God, Maximus and Eriugena also both maintained similar views on the reality of eternal torment for the damned. This ultimately related to their shared cosmological-eschatological model already discussed. While the modern universalist Hart sees in Maximus (as others have seen in Eriugena) a receptivity to universalism because of the emphasis on the universal return to God at the end of time, the devil is in the details, so to speak. A careful reading of both Maximus and Eriugena illumines the basis for that combination of Return with hell-for-the-damned, which both apparently saw as redeeming any perceived heretical tendencies in their beloved St Gregory of Nyssa's discussion of *apokatastasis* or patristic universalism. Indeed, the Maximian-Eriugenan synthesis came to undergird the ongoing consensus of Church Fathers across centuries, rather than Hart's somewhat conspiratorial postulation that Augustine and Aquinas were 'infernalists' holding a universalist consensus at bay. Eriugena's own critique of Augustinian tendencies towards

predestination, coupled with his own emphasis on the sparkling of theophanies in nature, shaped the presentation of free will in his writing. This highlighted the importance of free will in the embodied presence on earth which would sustain his legacy as an influence on Nicholas of Cusa and future Christian existentialist encounters with new abysses of modernity.

Conclusion

As previously mentioned, Book V of Eriugena's *Periphyseon* primarily focuses on the eschatological Return of all things to God. In it, Nutritor tells his often impatient protégé Alumnus:

> We had settled our differences and come to a complete agreement that all evil and every evil man, all impiety and every impious man, all wrongdoing and every wrongdoer shall by the most just decree of that divine judgment be abolished like stains that have to be wiped away and completely removed from the face of nature […].
> But the empty imaginations of men in the phantasies of temporal things shall abide forever in the souls of those who, though they shall regain the perfection of their nature, shall not be changed into glory; and shall burn with a tardy remorse, as with an inextinguishable fire, for the things which in this life they coveted in their unruly and incontinent lust.

Alumnus's response indicates that he now can 'distinguish between that which shall be totally destroyed and that which shall be subject to eternal punishment':

> I can: for I see that while sin and the occasion for sin shall be totally abolished from nature, the phantasies of those temporal things by which imperfect souls are seduced while they live in the flesh shall remain and be subjected to the everlasting fires of punishment, so that in them may be tormented the evil desires of evil men.[38]

The two then continue to discuss the distinction between phantasy and that which is false and thus contrary to truth. 'Phantasy' becomes further defined in this context of the damned as 'shades' of 'false and fictious bodies of unclean spirits', because theophanies can be termed 'true phantasies'. Nutritor explains further: 'I did not say that the phantasies themselves were to be tormented with punishments, but the irrational impulses of the perverted will which are contained in them'. Falsity of nature will be removed but not evil wills. The Theophany of Truth will in the end be fully manifest to all, 'and in all the unrighteous it will only be their unrighteousness that shall be punished and

38 Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, v. 36, PL, cols 961A–B; trans. by Sheldon-Williams, pp. 642–43.

abolished, while their nature, purged and chastened shall abide and ascend by those same steps by which it had fallen into sin'.[39]

Eriugena's Nutritor adds in further explanation: 'The general punishment of all the wicked will consist in the sorrow and lamentation caused by the absence and loss of those things in which in this life they delighted; they shall have the phantasies of them forever, as it were, before their eyes, but ardently desiring to grasp them they shall be unable to do so, for they are nothing'.[40] Prayer for those damned in the afterlife is useless, he adds, if they did not express love in true mercy in this life, and the torments they endure will include shades of wild beasts and other sensible memories of terror. Saints will attain deification with theophanies of divine energies, Nutritor adds. Others will find salvation though not full deification, 'in whom only the integrity of their nature will be restored, while the lust of the flesh and the incontinence of their life will be condemned to eternal torment'.[41] In a mystery, redeemed human nature and Creation will be restored to God, but the sinners' identity will be eternally tormented, in what he calls the blindness of evil wills absented by their self-twisted nature from the Redeemer. Near the end of the book, Eriugena describes how saints will be on clouds at levels according to their attainment of the truth of being. Meanwhile the never-ending torments of the damned relate to how, without time, they will be situated in a prison of despair, existing 'only in phantasies and the least substantial of dreams'.[42]

The distinction between the purged and chastened nature of man and the abolition of the unrighteous will involves again the distinction between the situation of the individual and that of human nature and Creation at large, which in one sense are joined and in another distinct. An analogy from modern Christian existentialist philosophy in line with the Maximian-Eriugenan synthesis can help illustrate this, namely the earlier mentioned term *sobornost*, describing a hidden spiritual unity. *Sobornost* in adjectival form provided the fourteenth-century Church Slavonic gloss on the Greek term for 'catholic' in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. While the term 'catholic' from Latin tradition carries a primary meaning of 'universal', with a spatial tone, *sobornost* provides more of a sense of hidden intercommunion, a solidarity situated in the intersection of mystical hierarchy and conciliarity in the Body of Christ, the Creator God. This is reflected, for example, in Fyodor Dostoevsky's idea that we all bear responsibility for each other's sins, and in the modern Russian exile-philosopher Ivan Ilyin's idea that we all bear responsibility for resisting evil in others, because of such communality in primordial 'legal consciousness' of society, and also in the Russian existentialist Christian

39 The discussion runs through Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, v. 36, PL, cols 964A; trans. by Sheldon-Williams, pp. 644–45.

40 Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, v. 36, PL, col. 977A; trans. by Sheldon-Williams, pp. 660–61.

41 Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, v. 36, PL, cols 977D and 978A and B; trans. by Sheldon-Williams, p. 662.

42 Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, v. 36, PL, col. 971B; trans. by Sheldon-Williams, p. 654.

writer S. L. Frank's idea that *sobornost* rather than any 'social contract' forms the basis for social community.[43]

Each of those writers had connections with patristic-era or patristic-derived texts paralleling the Maximian-Eriugenan synthesis: Dostoevsky in one of his favourite writers, St Isaac the Syrian; Frank in his close reading of his mentor Nicholas of Cusa; and Ilyin in his own use of patristic texts. Their views relate to what Eriugena describes (with Maximus) as a unity of human nature spiritually coupled with individual freedom. Indeed, *sobornost* can form a shorthand for the Maximian-Eriugenan synthesis, neither simply universalist nor simply individualist in a modern sense. *Sobornost* denotes Dostoevsky's notion of responsibility to others, Frank's emphasis on freedom as voluntary service to Jesus Christ, and Ilyin's sense of a shared spiritual demand to protect the vulnerable. It indicates the agency in *synergeia* of grace and ascetic struggle that modern universalism's determinism downplays. An analogy mentioned earlier in the twentieth-century fiction of the Anglican Christian writer C. S. Lewis, himself a student of patristic and early literatures, highlights Dwarves who, while situated in the midst of the return of the Christ-symbol Aslan, seem unable to perceive the unfolding spiritual reality around them, while still caught up in their myopic grievances and hates.[44] Closer to the era of Maximus and Eriugena, St John of Damascus wrote of how eternity for angels was of grace and not nature. The fallen angels lacked receptivity to that grace to experience heaven after their moment of choice for opposing God in the interest of power. So, too, eternal human souls, in their own distinct temporality of embodiedness, needed that open receptivity in their window of choice.[45]

In a modern echo of this, Ivan Karamazov in *The Brothers Karamazov* famously questions why God allows children to suffer, a question implicitly extended into the issue of suffering in the afterlife as well. The answer provided lies not in a logical response, but in the love and practical care of Ivan's brother Alexei for children who are suffering in the here and now: his community care, so to speak, coupled with his own self-emptying. Similarly, based on ideas of mystical love (the lack of which is identified with suffering in hell), Eriugena, from interwoven strands of Latin, Irish, and Greek meanings, described a non-modern meld of universalism and individual judgement, very much related to man's embodied state in current experience on earth. This incarnationalism reflected the findings of the Neo-Chalcedonian Fifth Council that Eriugena's source Maximus amplified, rather than what might be termed a tendency towards a more logic-centred analysis of self and salvation developed over time from Latin emphases on a more interiorized sense of individuality.

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43 Expressed in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and in Ilyin's *On Resistance to Evil by Force*; see also S. L. Frank's *The Spiritual Foundations of Society*.

44 Lewis, *The Last Battle*.

45 John Damascene, *The Orthodox Faith*, 2. 3, p. 206.

The intertextual cross-cultural perspectives on salvation in the entwined writings of Maximus and Eriugena help illumine how their view of salvation involved a Christian existential dimension of freedom often missed by modern universalists. Hart, for example, needed to enlist Maximus for his thesis that first-millennial Christianity was essentially universalist in a modern sense, because of Maximus's key influence in the era and the extent to which his writing can be parsed in that direction in modern contexts. However, Eriugena's explication of his source material underscores something more nuanced and complex at work, found in Maximus's writings themselves, but elaborated on in the theophanic emphasis of the Hiberno-Latin writer's work on nature. Hart appears to offer a more up-to-date contextualizing of Maximus. But careful co-reading of the Greek and Irish patristic-era writers reveals their underlying sense of freedom as grounded in significance of life lived each day on earth in a framework of mystery, a view that continues to have relevance today. Such comparative reading of primary texts shows once again what Charles D. Wright's work has always highlighted: late antique and early medieval studies never fail to surprise.

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