

Eriugena on the Spiritual Body

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Abstract. This article discusses the development of John Scottus Eriugena's teaching on the spiritual body. In his early treatise *De praedestinatione*, as well as in the *Periphyseon*, John Scottus understands the spiritual body as ethereal or aerial. This conception tacitly assumes that men and angels are connatural. Moreover, Eriugena's angelology and demonology compel him to localize Hades in the air—a teaching in which he follows a well-established ancient and Christian tradition. John Scottus is influenced by ideas of Origen and Gregory of Nyssa in maintaining that there are two different kinds of human bodies; the interpretation of the biblical “coats of skin” as the earthly human body plays an important part in this. According to Eriugena, the soul in a sense creates an earthly body for itself. In later passages from the *Periphyseon*, he abandons the idea of individual subtle bodies, accepting a complete transformation of body into spirit at the resurrection. However, he remains ambiguous on this point as his position would contradict Christian doctrine. The *Periphyseon* culminates in a paraphrase of a section from *Ambigua ad Iohannem* XXXVII. In the light of the latter text, the nature of the eight gradual unifications from the epilogue of the *Periphyseon* becomes clear.

I*ntroduction.* The concept of the spiritual or risen body plays an important role in Christian eschatology and soteriology. Church doctrine teaches that the human being consists of body and soul (Platonists, on the contrary, believe that the human being is the soul alone). Thus, the issue of the resurrected body becomes very important. Christian philosophers of the third through fifth centuries raised the question concerning the characteristics of such a body: to what extent, or in which of its parts, can a mortal body be changed into a new eternal one? What would be its nature after such a transformation? What ensures its identity or—to put it more cautiously—its continuity with the earthly corruptible body? These questions were discussed for centuries. John Scottus's teaching is remarkable not only because of its originality; it is also interesting to see how he assimilated the ideas of his great predecessors. Throughout his career, John Scottus time and again returned to the question concerning the characteristics of the body that the human being is to receive

in the future life. Having started from a quasi-materialistic position, he finally arrived at an almost pure spiritualism.

Eriugena's earliest views were built upon several sources. As a master of the liberal arts, he was familiar with the ideas of the Platonists and of the Stoics: his reading included the works of Cicero, Servius's commentary on Virgil, a compendium by Martianus Capella, and perhaps treatises of the Christian Platonist Marius Victorinus. In the field of Christian natural philosophy, he also knew at least three hexaëmerons, namely, those of Basil the Great, Ambrose, and Augustine (*De Genesi ad litteram*)—and perhaps similar works of Irish origin (*De ordine creaturarum* and *De miraculis*). Moreover, he made intensive use of those works of Augustine in which philosophical reasoning prevails, including those marked by an Origenian influence (such as *De Genesi ad litteram*). Bede's computational works (*De rerum natura* and *De temporum ratione*) were available to him as well, together with more than ten of Origen's works in Latin translation.

John Scottus's mature views were deeply influenced by Greek theology. He translated several of the most difficult texts into Latin—the complete *Corpus areopagiticum*, Maximus the Confessor's *Ambigua ad Iohannem* and *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, and (important for anthropology) Gregory of Nyssa's *De hominis opificio*. Eriugena quoted these translations in his own writings, as well as Basil the Great's *Hexaëmeron*, Epiphanius's *Ancoratus*, and the works of Origen. It is possible that he used at least one section from John the Damascene's *Expositio fidei*.

I.

The Spiritual Body as Ethereal and Aerial. At the end of his *De praedestinatione* John Scottus proposes a strange thesis, which at first sight seems to be completely absent from the writings of his predecessors. According to this thesis, after the resurrection the bodies of the saints will become ethereal, whereas those of the wicked will turn aerial.¹ Eriugena never explains this idea in detail; therefore, we need to explore its context and background in order to understand it correctly.

In discussing the risen body, medieval theologians of both West and East frequently quoted Christ's own words: "when they shall rise from the dead, they . . . are as the angels which are in heaven" (Mk. 12:25); and, "they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain this world, and the resurrection from the

¹See *De praedestinatione* 19, 2, 18–22 (437A), ed. Goulven Madec, *Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis* [CCCM] 50 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1978): "corpora sanctorum in aetheream mutabuntur qualitatem . . . , impiorum uero corpora in aeream qualitatem transitura."

dead . . . they are equal unto the angels" (Lk. 20:35–36). These passages were read in conjunction with the words of St. Paul: "it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:44). But what are the properties of angelic bodies, and what is a "spiritual body"? The latter cannot be a purely intelligible substance; it must be a real yet somehow subtle body. In accordance with the principles of ancient natural philosophy, therefore, John Scottus interprets this "spiritual" body (*spirituale corpus*) as an aerial or ethereal one. For he considers ether the highest and most tenuous kind of air.²

Eriugena maintains that human nature is similar to air and will be transformed into spirit.³ He deems air and, even more so, ether to be "spiritual."⁴ Thus, for John Scottus spirit is not an incorporeal substance but rather something that resembles the corporeal pneuma of the Stoics. In fact, Scottus describes spirit as a subtle body throughout his career, from the early *De praedestinatione* to the final pages of his major treatise, the *Periphyseon*. It is only under the influence of Gregory of Nazianzus that he would, late in life, come to the conclusion that the resurrected body will be changed not merely into a spiritual one but that it will first be transformed into an incorporeal soul and then into pure spirit. He added a special remark to that effect to the text of the *Periphyseon*: "and not into that spirit which is called ether, but into that which is called Intellect."⁵

Men and Angels as Connatural. Why do the physical properties of the spiritual body correlate to the moral state of the risen human being? In other words, why do the wicked receive aerial bodies, whereas the righteous rise in bodies of ether? This theory makes sense only if we admit that John Scottus's reasoning is based on another principle, one which he does not discuss explicitly. Although Christ's words about the likeness and even equality obtaining between the risen saints and the angels do not necessarily imply an identity of their physical bodies,

²See *Periphyseon* II, 727–28 (549C), ed. Édouard A. Jeuneau, CCCM 161–165 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996–2003): "Inferior enim pars a terra usque ad lunam aer dicitur (hoc est spiritus), superior uero . . . aether (id est purus spiritus)." For Eriugena the bodies in the proper sense are water and earth; see *PP* III, 3165–68 (695B): "omnia ista corpora ex catholicis elementis composita, maxime etiam terrena et aquatica . . . , nil aliud in eis inuenitur praeter corpus omnino et corporeum."

³See *PP* V, 3956–63 (948AB): "humanam naturam in regeneratione ejus . . . omnino in spiritum conuersa, diuersarum tamen qualitatum capacem fore. . . . Ut enim aer iste, ex quo similitudinem quandam humanitatis accepimus, aethereos desuper splendores, deorsum uero concretas ex terra et aqua recipit fumigationes."

⁴See *PP* V, 3919 (947B): "spiritualis natura aeris"; 3926–27 (947C): "aer enim dicitur, id est spiritus, ideoque simplex ac spirituale corpus a physicis uocatur"; 3907–09 (947A): "ipse autem aer in omnibus suae semper subtilitatis et serenitatis immobilem custodit qualitatem."

⁵*PP* V, 5784–96 (987BC); 4097–4104 (951AB); 4164–72 (952CD).

John Scottus considers men and angels to be connatural.⁶ This theory had no predecessors in the Latin Christian tradition. Augustine once raised the question of such connaturality between men and angels but immediately confessed that he had never found a statement to that effect in the canonical books.⁷ Gregory the Great, for his part, clearly stated that the nature of angels greatly differs from that of men.⁸ It is the influence of John Scottus's Greek sources—namely, Origen,⁹ Gregory of Nyssa,¹⁰ and Maximus the Confessor¹¹—that oriented him toward the connaturality thesis.

The Faithful Angels Dwell in Ether, the Fallen Ones in Air. It was a common belief among both early Christian authors and pagan philosophers that the angels endowed with ethereal bodies are located in the upper air whereas the demons, with their aerial bodies, populate the lower atmosphere.¹² There was a strong tradition to localize Hades in the air. The origin of this theory was probably Hesiod's story about the Titans, who were cast down from heaven into the dark aerial (*ἠερόεντα*) Tartarus.¹³ In Homer, too, Zeus threatens the other

⁶See *PP* II, 1532–36 (575A): “Quod enim post resurrectionem omnium generaliter de omnibus hominibus dominus dicit *Erunt sicut angeli Dei in caelo* (Mk. 12:25) *non de condignitate naturae . . . intelligendum arbitror*” (I think we should follow version III in which *non* was erased by hand ²). See also *PP* IV, 1567–71 (780AB): “angelicam essentiam in humana, et humanam in angelica constitutam. . . . Tanta quippe humanae naturae et angelicae societas fuerat—et fieret, si primus homo non peccaret—ut utraque unum efficeretur”; V, 6062–64 (994A): “resurrectionis tempore . . . homines aequales angelis erunt”; V, 6605–07 (1005D): “nullus angelicus ordo est, cui humana natura post restaurationem suam iuxta intelligibiles gradus non interseratur.”

⁷See Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* VII, 23 (PL 34: 368); X, 5 (411).

⁸See Gregory the Great, *Moralia* IX, 66 (PL 75: 916A–B): “angelorum atque hominum longe sit natura dissimilis.”

⁹See Origen, *De principiis* I, 8, 4, 146–49: “animae hominum, ex quibus per profectum etiam in illum angelorum ordinem quosdam uidemus assumi, illos uidelicet, qui filii dei facti fuerint uel filii resurrectionis”; idem, *Com. in Matth.* XVII, 30, 51–59.

¹⁰On the Greek *ἰσάγγελοι* see Gregory of Nyssa, *De hominis opificio* XVII (PG 44: 188C10 and 189C11). Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 22, 3; *Stromata* VI, 13, 105, 1; VII, 57, 7, 4. Gregory also says that the dignity of man is equal to that of the angels, “*ἡ πρὸς τοὺς ἀγγέλους ὁμοτιμία*” (*De hominis opificio* XVII [PG 44: 189A5 and 189D10] and XXII [205A4]). See Eriugena's expression *condignitas naturae* in *PP* II, 1532–36 (575A). Gregory also calls angels the elder brothers of man (*De vita Mosis* II, 47; II, 51–53).

¹¹When Maximus the Confessor speaks of the “identity” between men and angels John Scottus translates this word as “similitude”; see *Ambigua ad Iohannem* XXXVII, 52–54: “*τὴν πρὸς ἀγγέλους ταυτότητα*,” translated as “*ipsam angelis . . . similitudinem*.” But he preserves Maximus's words on the equality of man and angel, rendering *ἰσότητα* by the *aequalitatem*.

¹²See Plotinus, *Enneads* III, 5, 6, 40–42; II, 1, 6, 6, 54; IV, 3, 9, 3–9; Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpta ex Theodoto* I, 12, 2; Basil the Great, *In Isaiam* [dub.] X, 237, 21–22.

¹³See Hesiod, *Theogony* 720–21.

gods to cast them from heaven into the aerial Tartarus.¹⁴ These stories firmly established a tradition that understood the location of punishment in the afterlife as the realm of air.¹⁵ The same idea is evoked in Pseudo-Apollodorus's *Library* (from the first or second century A.D.), where Uranus, the god of the heavens, binds his children and casts them down into Tartarus.¹⁶ St. Peter furnishes us with a Christian parallel to this story in 2 Pet. 2:4: “God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment” (*σπλαῖς ζόφου ταρταρώσας παρέδωκεν εἰς κρίσιν τηρουμένων*). Together with Eph. 2:2 (which speaks of “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience”) this passage was interpreted in the sense that the fallen angels had been cast down from the upper ethereal heavens into the lower layer of foggy turbulent air, where they remain imprisoned until Judgment Day. That this idea became commonplace is evidenced in references to it that occur in Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, Jerome, Augustine, John Cassian, and later in Bede.¹⁷

A vivid account of these theories can be found in the writings of Origen or, rather, in the writings of his doxographers. Origen believed in a correlation between the quality of the bodies of living creatures and their moral dignity; moreover, he held that the latter determined the environment the creature was sent to in the hereafter.¹⁸ For him, the difference between rational beings—angels, men, and demons—was not substantial: all of them share the same nature, differing only in the direction of their will, which can be turned either to good or to evil.¹⁹ As creatures pass from one moral level to another,

¹⁴See Homer, *Ilias* VIII, 13–16. Cf. *ibid.* XV, 18–21 and 191–92; *Hymni homerici. In Mercurium* 256.

¹⁵For an explanation of this idea on the basis of natural science, see Plutarch, *De primo frigido* 948F.

¹⁶See Ps.-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* I, 2, 1–4.

¹⁷See Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* IV, 26; Tertullian, *De anima* 54 (PL 2: 742AB); Origen (in Jerome's translation), *Homiliae in Ezechielem* IV (PL 25: 721BC); Jerome, *In Epistolam ad Ephesios* I (PL 26: 466A), III (PL 26: 546BC); John Cassian, *Collatio* 8, 12 (PL 49: 740–1); Augustine, *De civitate Dei* VIII, 22; *Epist.* 102 (PL 33: 378), *Sermones de tempore* 222 (PL 38: 1091); Bede, *Hexaëmeron* I (PL 91: 26CD), *De natura rerum* 25 (PL 90: 244A–246A).

¹⁸See Origen, *De resurrectione* (according to Methodius) *apud* Epiphanius, *Panarion* 64, 12–16 (GCS II, 424, 4–11). Also see Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* 1, 8.

¹⁹See Jerome, *Ep.* 124, 4: “angelum, sive animam, aut certe daemonem, quos unius adserit naturae, sed diversarum voluntatum”; *ibid.*, 14: “omnes rationabiles naturas, id est Patrem, et Filium at Spiritum Sanctum, angelos, potestates, dominationes, ceterasque virtutes, ipsum quoque hominem secundum animae dignitatem, unius esse substantiae. . . . Ex quo concluditur, Deum et haec quodam modo unius esse substantiae.”

the bodies they possess are replaced accordingly.²⁰ The bodies of the demons are aerial, occupying the air.²¹ Origen also maintained that the earthly human body could be changed by the Creator into the subtlest and purest one.²² Such bodies dwell in the ether, which constitutes the nature of the creatures living there, being the purest state that corporeal nature can attain.²³ After the resurrection the bodies of the righteous will become ethereal and luminous as the bodies of the angels.

John Scottus may have had access to Origen's ideas both directly (in Latin translation) and indirectly, through other sources indebted to Origen. Augustine may have been such a source.²⁴ Moreover, a Hiberno-Latin treatise entitled *De ordine creaturarum* (ca. 680–700) offers the same teaching.²⁵ Another Hiberno-Latin work, the alphabetical hymn *Altus prosator* attributed to St. Columba of Iona, depicts the fall of the devil and his servants, who are now kept in an aerial prison, so that the air is filled with invisible spirits. Alluding to 1 Thes. 4:17, the hymn states that on Judgment Day, when a raging fire will devour the enemies of God, the righteous will fly off to meet Christ in the air. The saints will be turned into ethereal souls and return to their

²⁰See Jerome, *Ep.* 124, 3: “qui nunc homo est, possit in alio mundo daemon fieri, et qui daemon est, si neglegentius egerit, in crassiora corpora religetur, id est, homo fiat . . . omnes rationabiles creaturas ex omnibus posse fieri, non semel et subito, sed frequentius: nosque et angelos futuros et daemones si egerimus neglegentius, et rursus daemones, si voluerint capere virtutes, pervenire ad angelicam dignitatem”; *ibid.*, 8: “homines, id est animas fieri posse daemones, et rursus daemones in angelicam redigi dignitatem”; *ibid.*, 10: “vel ex angelis daemones, vel ex daemonibus angelos sive homines futuros esse contestans, et e contrario ex hominibus daemones, et omnia ex omnibus.”

²¹See Origen, *Hom. in Ez.* IV, 1, 85–86: “Aer quoque animalibus plenus est.”

²²See Origen, *De principiis* III, 6, 4, 100–25 (cited in *PP* V, 3153–58, 930B).

²³See Origen, *De principiis* II, 9, 3; I, 6, 4; Jerome, *Ep.* 124, 9: “Divinitus habitaculum et veram requiem apud superos aestimo intelligi, in qua creaturae rationabiles commorantes antequam ad inferiora descenderent, . . . antiqua beatitudine fruebantur.”

²⁴See Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* III, 9–10. On the influence of this work on John Scottus see J. J. O'Meara, “Eriugena's Use of Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram* in the *Periphyseon*,” in *Studies in Augustine and Eriugena*, ed. Th. Halton (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 269–86.

²⁵See M. C. Díaz y Díaz, *Liber de ordine creaturarum. Un anónimo irlandés del siglo VII*. Monografías de la Universidad de Santiago de Compostela 10 (Salamanca: Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 1972), VI, 5, 37–38; VI, 6, 42–44; VI, 7, 51–58; VI, 8, 52–53. The anonymous author says that the space between the firmament and the earth is divided into two parts. The upper layer (*excelsum spatium*), which is the purest and thinnest one, had served as an abode to the wicked spirits and their prince before they fell. The same area is said to be allotted as a temporary habitation to the souls of the saints that are waiting for their future resurrection. The angels that sinned were cast down into the lower area of foggy and turbulent air, where they received aerial bodies.

deserved dwelling places.²⁶ The aerial abode of the fallen angels is mentioned in Bede as well.²⁷

II.

The Two Bodies of the Human Being. Later on in his career, John Scottus modified his theory of the subtle body, drawing upon ideas by Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. In particular, Eriugena developed his teaching on the two bodies of the soul under the influence of a theory that understood the earthly human body in terms of the biblical “coats of skin” (Gen. 3:21).²⁸ Eriugena believed this theory to be of Origenian origin.²⁹ He explains that human nature put on “coats of skin”—that is to say, mortal bodies—in the first man but that in the second man, it would take off these coats, which were added to it because of its disobedience.³⁰

²⁶See *Altus prosator*, stanzas G, H, T, and Z, in *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery*, ed. T. O. Clancy and G. Markus (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997). Also see Gregory of Nyssa, *De imagine* (in MS. Vatican, Reginensis 195, fol. 61v–62r), as edited by M. Cappuyns O.S.B.: “Le ‘De imagine’ de Grégoire de Nysse traduit par Jean Scot Érigène,” *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 32 (1965), 205–62, at 205–06 n. 1.

²⁷See Bede, *De natura rerum* 25 (PL 90: 244A–246A). Bede says that the fallen angels are cast down into the air; the angels can put on aerial bodies the properties of which correlate with their dignity.

²⁸There existed a well-established philosophical tradition that represented the human body as a garment of the soul. See Empedocles, *Fr.* 126 (Diels-Kranz); Seneca, *Ep.* 92, 13; Plutarch, *De esu carnium* 998C; Plotinus, *Enneads* I, 6, 7, 4–9; IV, 3, 15, 1–7; Porphyry, *De antro nympharum* 14; Aristides Quintillianus, *De musica* II, 17 [86–89]; Proclus, *De malorum subsistentia* 7, 24, 29–31; *Corpus Hermeticum* VII, 2b–3; X, 16, 2–18, 8. This idea was later taken up by some scriptural exegetes, the first of which was Philo; see his *Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesim* I, 53: “Ad mentem vero, *tunica pellicea* symbolice est pellis naturalis, id est corpus nostrum” (Philo Alexandrinus, *Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesim I et II, e versione armenica*, ed. Ch. Mercier, *Les œuvres de Philon d’Alexandrie* 34a [Paris: Cerf, 1979], 120). The similar Gnostic teaching established in the school of Valentinus (2nd century A.D.) influenced Christian authors; see Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* I, 1, 10, 29–39; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* III, 14 (95, 2); *Excerpta ex Theodoto* III, 55, 1, 1–2; Tertullian, *Adversus Valentinianos* 24 (3), 19–21 (PL 2: 578A). Thus, when Origen took up this issue he was far from being the first Christian author to do so. For later discussions see Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 38 (*In theophania*) 12; Didymus, *In Genesim* III, 21 and 107, 4–7 (ed. P. Nautin and L. Doutreleau, *Sources chrétiennes* 233 [Paris: Cerf, 1976]); and others.

²⁹However, after analyzing Origen's extant works H. Crouzel concluded that this interpretation was ascribed to Origen only on the testimony of Epiphanius, and that Origen himself understood the coats of skin as a mortal state and as a consequence of sin; see H. Crouzel, “Les critiques adressées par Méthode et ses contemporains à la doctrine origénienne du corps ressuscité,” *Gregorianum* 53 (1972), 679–716, at 708–09 (reprinted in H. Crouzel, *Les fins dernières selon Origène*, *Collected Studies Series* 320 [Aldershot: Variorum, 1990], chap. VII).

³⁰See *PP* IV, 4121–27 (836D–37A).

In paradise, the Maker of human nature created soul and body together, but this original body was spiritual, incorruptible, and either like or identical with the one that human beings will possess after the resurrection.³¹ This first essential body was universal; Eriugena explicitly says that it was created only in its “reason” (*ratio*). In a similar way, Eriugena considers Adam a general and universal man in whom all men were created together, in potency. From Adam, all individuals were to proceed into distinct substances, where they would have had actual existence in a rational soul and a spiritual body. The latter would have been the only body of man had he not sinned.³²

However, a mortal and corruptible body was added to the spiritual one after the fall. This second kind of body takes its origin not from nature but from sin.³³ Thus, John Scottus distinguishes two human bodies, one of which is spiritual and the other corruptible. Our real body is immortal, spiritual, incorruptible, invisible, and essential.³⁴ This first body currently lies hidden in the secret recesses of human nature, but in the age to come the mortal body will be changed back into it.³⁵ In other words, our bodies will become spiritual again. They will put aside every earthly characteristic and become inapprehensible to mortal sense, as well as free from all limitations of space and time. They will not be defined by corporeal shapes, quantities, or qualities.³⁶ The earthly body, by contrast, was created not out of nothing but out of a kind of earth.³⁷ Foreign to human nature as it was primordially created, this body was added (*additum*) to human nature after sin as punishment for disobedience; it has grown on (*adolevit*) to our nature as a consequence of sin.³⁸

But if God creates only what is incorruptible, the mortal body cannot be the immediate product of the divine work. Eriugena solves this problem by declaring that the Creator allowed the first man to make a fragile habitation after the fall for himself, a mortal mansion taken from earthly matter. Eriugena further explains that the mortal body is being created on a day-to-day basis

by our soul, which he also calls “the trinity of our nature.”³⁹ This is a peculiar theory. Remarkably, the relevant passage of the *Periphyseon* underwent many alterations by hands *i*¹ and *i*². Setting aside extravagant allegorical speculation,⁴⁰ none of John Scottus’s Christian predecessors had taught that the soul created an earthly body for itself⁴¹ (although sometimes Christ was said to have created His human body).⁴² How should we interpret such a theory? It seems that John Scottus developed ideas by Origen and Gregory of Nyssa here. Origen (like some Platonists) thought that souls could assume bodies of various densities on their way from heaven to earth. Foreknowing their fall, God provided them with earthly bodies without which they could not exist in this world. Jerome even maintained that according to Origen the entire material world had been created because of the fall as foreknown by God. Since the fall was a voluntary act of the souls, the latter are consequently said to be the causes of their own earthly bodies. A modified version of this teaching was developed by Gregory of Nyssa, who believed that, foreknowing the fall, God created earthly human bodies characterized by sexual differentiation, by an ever-changing material substrate, and so forth. This theory came to be accepted by Maximus the Confessor. In this scenario, it becomes possible to say that man is himself the cause for the creation of his body.

When John Scottus writes that the soul creates its own body, he is not thinking of an individual soul’s act but of human nature as a whole. In this position, he is closer to Gregory than to Origen. Furthermore, “creation” does not mean a voluntary act on the part of the soul, which fashions a body for itself. Rather—and just as in Origen and Gregory—while the soul is indeed in a certain sense the “cause” of an earthly body, its real Maker is God, who

³⁹PP II, 1718–25 (580AB); II, 1846–53 (583BC); II, 1819–23 (582C).

⁴⁰Such as Gregory of Nyssa, *De vita Mosis* II, 3 (PG 44: 328B).

⁴¹See Plotinus, *Enneads* IV, 3, 9, 20–23. See also G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind* V, A, c: “The individual exists in himself and for himself. He is for himself, or is a free activity; he is, however, also in himself, or has himself an *original* determinate being of his own. . . . This being, the ‘body’ of the determinate individuality, is its original source, that in the making of which it has had nothing to do. But since the individual at the same time merely is what he has done, his body is also an ‘expression’ of himself which he has brought about; a sign and indication as well, which has not remained a bare immediate fact, but through which the individual only makes known what is actually implied by his setting his original nature to work” (trans. J. B. Baillie). For commentary on this passage, see A. Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), 489–92.

⁴²See Epiphanius, *Anconatus*, chap. 77: “Christ became a maker of his own body” (τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ σώματος γεγωνῶς πλάστῆς). Cf. idem, *Panarion* 24 [44]—*Against the Apellians*, chap. 2. According to Apelles, Epiphanius writes, Christ, having descended from heaven, assembled a body for himself from the four elements. Cf. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Carmina dogmatica*, PG 37: 469, 4: “Λόγος δ’ ἑαυτῷ πήγνυτ’ ἔνδοθι βροτὸν.”

³¹See PP II, 1795–1817 (582A); IV, 2446–48 (800B); V, 1090–98 (884C).

³²See PP II, 1812–15 (582AB).

³³See PP II, <127> 520–23 (571CD) (*i*², vers. I-II); PP IV, 3209–11 (817AB). On the two bodies: PP IV, 729–38 (760AB). Cf. Hierocles, *In aureum carmen* XXIV, 54–60, 4 (471a); Clement, *Stromata* II, 20, 112, 1, 1–114, 3, 5.

³⁴See PP V, 1095–98 (884C); IV, 2446–48 (800B); V, 538–41 (872D); IV, 2468–69 (800D–01A); II, 1418–19 (571A).

³⁵See PP II, <151> 609–13 (584C) (*i*¹, vers. I-II); II, 1795–1814 (582AB) (*i*¹, vers. I-II).

³⁶See PP V, 1911–20 (901D–902A); V, 1936–41 (902B); V, 6124–31 (995BC). Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpta ex Theodoto* I, 10, 1, 1–3, 1.

³⁷See PP IV, 1377–83 (775D–76A).

³⁸See PP II, 1414–46 (571AD).

helps the soul adjust to the conditions of exile by means of a new habitation.⁴³ Eriugena explains this idea in his usual manner. God, he says, is immortal and whatever He makes is immortal too. Therefore, everything mortal is either made by ourselves or is permitted to be made thus.⁴⁴

Eriugena offers a fairly detailed explanation of the mechanics that are involved in the process by which the earthly body is made. In this explanation, he applies Origen's idea (present also in Plotinus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus the Confessor) according to which the corporeal emerges as a conglomeration of incorporeal qualities. According to John Scottus, therefore, the soul creates a body for itself by cementing together the incorporeal qualities and taking quantity as a kind of substrate for them.⁴⁵ Ultimately, everything that had grown on to human nature in consequence of sin, or that had been superadded to it, will perish and pass into what was created in the beginning.⁴⁶

John Scottus emphasizes that he does not teach the existence of two natural bodies. In fact, there is only one essential body for the human being, namely, the spiritual one. The mortal superadded body is only a vestment for the real natural body.⁴⁷ John Scottus insists that there is no transformation of the first body into the second; rather, the latter is added on to the former.⁴⁸ For the first body, being spiritual, is not subject to change and corruption. In a passage from another work John Scottus explains that natures are capable only of an "upward" movement, that is to say, one in which material things change into spiritual ones.⁴⁹

⁴³See *PP* II, 1823–25 (582CD); 1867–69 (583D).

⁴⁴See *PP* II, 1846–49 (583B); *PP* II, 1872–83 (584AB).

⁴⁵See *PP* II, 1725–28 (580B). Also see Plotinus, *Enneads* VI, 3, 15, 24–25; Origen, *De principiis* II, 1, 4, 110–14; Gregory of Nyssa, *De opificio hominis* XXIV (ed. Cappuyns, 245, 20–23). See also D. G. Bostock, "Quality and Corporeity in Origen," *Origeniana secunda. Second colloque international des études origéniennes*, ed. H. Crouzel and A. Quacquarelli (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1980), 323–37.

⁴⁶See *PP* II, 1441–43 (571D–72A).

⁴⁷See *PP* IV, 2559–64 (803A).

⁴⁸In this theory, Eriugena follows the Platonists, differing from Origen, who thought such a transformation possible. Indeed, although Origen maintains that the rational nature may wear different bodily coverings, he also teaches that the corporeal nature was made capable of changing, through an alteration of its qualities, into anything that circumstances might require. See *De principiis* IV, 4, 8 (35), 320–26.

⁴⁹*PP* II, 304–05 (535B): "mirabili quadam regressione inferiora semper in superiora transeant"; also see *Iohannis Scoti Eriugena Expositiones in Ierarchiam Coelestem*, ed. J. Barbet, CCCM 31 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1975), II, 3, 686–91 (159B): "Naturaliter quippe materialia omnia in spiritualia transferri appetunt, spiritualia uero ad materialium humilem uilissimamque extremitatem inclinari nolunt, quoniam impossibile est. Possibile namque est inferiora ad superiora ascendere, descendere uero superiora ad inferiora naturali transmutatione, impossibile."

III.

The Transformation of Body into Spirit. In the *Periphyseon* John Scottus rejects his earlier theory of an aerial Hades. He points out that according to some authors (including himself in the *De praedestinatione*) the realms of air and ether are allotted, respectively, to the apostate angels and the impious human beings who resemble them, and to the blessed angels and the human beings who resemble them.⁵⁰ Now Eriugena calls such views false. "When I read of such things in the books of the Holy Fathers," he remarks, "I stagger amazed and horror-struck."⁵¹ Nevertheless, he preserves his teaching on the two bodies of the soul. The essential body is now understood as something purely intelligible. As such, it has no shape, no quality, and no quantity.⁵² John Scottus considers the opinion erroneous according to which the bodies of the saints will shine in such a way that the degree of brightness of each will correspond to the worthiness of the corresponding saint's earthly life.⁵³

At the same time, under the influence of Gregory of Nyssa and of a quotation from Gregory of Nazianzus cited by Maximus the Confessor, Eriugena abandons the notion of the subtle ethereal bodies of resurrection. Instead, he postulates a spiritual, incorporeal existence that will be attained at the time of the universal consummation or recapitulation of all things in Christ.⁵⁴ He explicitly declares that those are wrong who imagine that there is nothing beyond this sensible world.⁵⁵ Sound reason should accept the teaching of Ambrose, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Maximus the Confessor, who state that there will be no change from an earthly into a heavenly body, but rather a complete passing into pure spirit—and not into the kind of spirit that is called ether, but into that which is called intellect.⁵⁶ The sensible bodies of men that have spatial extension and vary through increase and diminution, and their forms, whether common or special, will play no part in the

⁵⁰See *PP* III, 1263–69 (649AB).

⁵¹*PP* V, 5744–45 (986B).

⁵²See *PP* V, 6124–31 (995BC); II, <33> 173–77 (538C) (i², vers. I-II).

⁵³*PP* V, 5817–20 (988A).

⁵⁴An ambiguity remains, however, since for Eriugena the "spiritual body" still means both the ethereal, subtle body and the incorporeal one. On this point, see L. R. Hennessey, "A Philosophical Issue in Origen's Eschatology: The Three Senses of Incorporality", in *Origeniana quinta: Papers of the 5th International Origen Congress, Boston College, 14–18 August 1989*, ed. R. J. Daly (Louvain: Leuven University Press and Uitgeverij Peeters, 1992), 373–80, at 373–4. On the various kinds of *ἀσώματα* in Porphyry, see J. J. O'Meara, "Eriugena's Use of Augustine in His Teaching on the Soul-Body Relationship," *Studies in Augustine and Eriugena* (cited in n. 24), 235–68, at 262–3.

⁵⁵See *PP* V, 5754–55 (986C).

⁵⁶See *PP* V, 5786–95 (987BC); 4097–98 (951A).

resurrection; rather, these bodies will turn into a spiritual nature that cannot be confined by space or time or any particular forms derived from quality or size.⁵⁷

It is a difficult task to explain how body can be transformed into spirit. In order to do so, John Scottus first analyzes the opinions of his authoritative predecessors. He remarks that Augustine denied the possibility of body changing into spirit and quotes from his *De Genesi ad litteram*.⁵⁸ Boethius too rejected the transformation of the corporeal into the incorporeal because, in his view, there exists no intermediate between them.⁵⁹ The Greek, by contrast—that is to say, Gregory of Nazianzus and his interpreter Maximus the Confessor—taught that the flesh would be absorbed by the soul into spirit, and spirit into God.⁶⁰ Ambrose too wrote that we will obtain the communion of body, soul, and spirit at the resurrection so that we, who are now composite, shall be one, and shall be transformed into a single substance.⁶¹ In the attempt to provide rational arguments for such a theory John Scottus introduces an intermediary term between the corporeal and the incorporeal; he calls it “corporal” (*corporale*). Such an entity occurs only in association with bodies, whose attribute it is (just like quality). But the principal elements too may be seen as pertaining to the corporal. Thus, when bodies are dissolved into their elements, they pass from the corporeal state to the corporal, and this opens the way for a purely incorporeal, spiritual state. Nevertheless, John Scottus’s teaching on the interrelation of the corporeal and incorporeal remains ambiguous. He intends to abandon the idea of individual subtle bodies, instead accepting a complete transformation of body into pure spirit. Such a teaching, however, would contradict Christian doctrine. For this reason Eriugena continues to speak of a “spiritual body,”⁶² although the latter becomes almost indistinguishable from incorporeal spirit.⁶³

⁵⁷See *PP* V, 2450–58 (914B); II, 2101–02 (590C); V, 1078–84 (884B); V, 839–43 (879A); V, 610–11 (874B).

⁵⁸See Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* X, 4, quoted in *PP* V, 732–39 (877A); in fact, Augustine states only that no soul can be changed into a body.

⁵⁹See Boethius, *De persona et naturis duabus* VI (PL 64: 1350C–D), quoted in *PP* V, 741–50 (877B). Cf. *ibid.*, 1349CD; 1350B.

⁶⁰See Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* VII (PG 35: 781–84). As quoted by Maximus, the passage is translated by John Scottus in *Ambigua ad Iohannem* XVII, 164–73, and cited in *PP* V, 770–77 (877D–878A). Also see *PP* V, 4164–72 (952CD).

⁶¹See Ambrose, *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam* VII, 192–94 (PL 15: 1751BD), quoted in *PP* V, 798–805 (878BC).

⁶²John Scottus doubts that there can be any substance apart from God that does not have a body of some kind, either intelligible or sensible (“si tamen aliqua substantia est praeter deum, quae siue intelligibili siue sensibili corpore careat”; *PP* V, 927–28, 881A). Cf. Origen, *De principiis* II, 2, 2, 30–32: “numquam sine ipsa [materiali substantia] eas [rationabiles naturas] uel uixisse uel uiuere: solius namque trinitatis incorporea uita existere recte putabitur.”

⁶³Eriugena states that human beings will become pure spirits: *PP* II, 288–90 (535A); 343 (536C); at the same time he continues to speak of spiritual bodies: *PP* V, 1911–12 (901D): “De

The *Periphyseon* ends with a Maximian theme; for the work culminates in the paraphrase of a section from *Ambigua ad Iohannem* XXXVII.⁶⁴ According to this paraphrase, there are no individual bodies and even souls any more. Rather, Eriugena now theologizes in terms of general human nature that is being gathered together and united in eight stages of purification. During the first five unifications the earthly body—together with the vital movement, sensation, and reasoning—is transformed into intellect. In this manner, the composite psychosomatic structure that man was becomes a single intelligible substance (although the inferior parts are said not to be annihilated in their union with the superior ones). After that, the human intellect becomes knowledge (for it now possesses gnostic science of the reasons of all creation) and then wisdom (when it receives the notion of God).⁶⁵ Ultimately, everything merges into God, so that the human being is made everything that God is, though without an identity in essence. For God is the infinite limit and definition of every reason, intellect, and nature.⁶⁶ Maximus, who viewed such unification as existential and

spiritualitate et illocalitate omnium generaliter humanorum corporum post resurrectionem”; 3828–36 (945BC): “impium . . . phantastice patiuntur in inferno spiritualibus corporibus suis receptis . . . E contrario autem iusti patiuntur . . . receptis corporibus.” Moreover, he writes the following about bodies turning into spirits: “resurrectionis corpora ultra omnem sensibilem qualitatem ascendunt, omni mole et localitate absoluta et, ut ita dicam, in spiritum omnino conuersa” (*PP* V, 1936–39, 902B). He believes it possible for a spiritual body not to be confined by place and time; see *PP* II, <33> 173–76 (538C) (i², vers. I-II); and V, 1920–34 (902A).

⁶⁴In *PP* V, 7303–18 (1020D–21A) John Scottus quotes *Ambigua ad Iohannem* XXXVII, 61–73. This very section is incorporated in *PP* II, 155–351 (529D–536D) and is commented upon there.

⁶⁵See Maximus, *Ambigua ad Iohannem* XXXVII, 61–69 (PG 91: 1308AB): “Deinde intelligibilia et sensibilia cum his copulans per ipsam ad angelos secundum scientiam (τὴν γνώσιν) aequalitatem, unificaret creaturam, simul omnem creaturam, non separatam in eo secundum scientiam et ignorantiam, aequali sibi ad angelos indifficenter futura rationum in his quae sunt gnostica scientia (γνωστικῆς ἐπιστήμης), per quam ipsa uerae sophiae (τῆς ἀληθοῦς σοφίας) infinita donorum effusio superueniens, quantum fas est, pure de caetero ipsam circa Deum et immediate dignis praestat incognitam et ininterpretabilem notitiam (ἐννοίαν).” Eriugena points out here that these two stages in the unification of substances—namely, knowledge and wisdom—are performed not in the things themselves but in the intellect alone. It is not the things but their primordial causes and reasons that are gathered into unification. This occurs by an act of intelligence, rather than in the things themselves.

⁶⁶See Maximus, *Ambigua ad Iohannem* XXXVII, 68–78 (PG 91: 1308BC): “Et finis in omnibus his, creatam naturam non creatae per dilectionem unificans . . . unum et idipsum ostenderet secundum habitum gratiae (τὴν εἶναι τῆς χάριτος), totus toto uniuersaliter ambitus (περιχωρήσας) Deo, et factus omne si quid est Deus praeter similitudinem secundum essentiam (τῆς κατ’ οὐσίαν ταυτότητος), et totum ipsum accipiens a seipso Deum, et in ipsum Deum ueluti ascensionis praemium ipsum singularissimum possesurus Deum, utpote finem eorum quae mouentur motionis, et statum firmum immutabilemque eorum quae feruntur in ipsum, et omnis finis et statuti et legis rationisque intellectus et naturae finem ac terminum infinitum et interminatum existentem.”

as not affecting the *logoi* of the natures themselves, distinguished between *λόγος φύσεως* and *τρόπος υπάρξεως*, that is to say, between essence and existence.⁶⁷ This seems to be the thrust of John Scottus's argument as well, although the essence-existence distinction seems to be absent or implicit in the *Periphyseon*. His presentation of the universal unification therefore appears less precise and one may observe in it a tendency toward essentialism.

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⁶⁷See Valery V. Petroff, "Ambiguum XLI of Maximus the Confessor: Its Main Concepts, Sources, and Interpretation," in *Cosmos and Soul: Teachings on the Universe and Man in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. P. P. Gaidenko and V. V. Petroff (Moscow: Progress-Tradition, 2005), 147–224 (in Russian).