

ERIOGENA'S PANTHEISM: BRUCKER, TENNEMANN UND RIXNER'S READING OF PERIPHYSEON

Several interpreters of John Scottus Eriugena's philosophy find some points of resemblance between his thought and the Idealist philosophy.<sup>1</sup> However, Werner Beierwaltes points out that principal exponents of Idealism like Hegel or Schelling did not read Eriugena's *Periphyseon* and, instead, they knew about this medieval thinker through the German histories of philosophy that circulated during that time,<sup>2</sup> some of which had important quotations of Eriugena's works. This means that those histories of philosophy were important channels of transmission of his thought. And this is the reason why it is a necessary step in the history of reception of Eriugena's thought to study how these histories presented the Irish philosopher, in order to correctly evaluate the impact of his philosophy in German Idealism.

In this sense, this article seeks to present how three German historians of philosophy of modern times, belonging to different philosophical trends, present Eriugena's thought in regard to the theme of pantheism, the most important topic pointed out in those historical philosophical works. I chose three historians that quote Eriugena's work in their histories. The three historians of philosophy chosen are: Johan Jakob Brucker (1696-1770), belonging to the German Enlightenment, Wilhem Tennemann (1761-1819), a Kantian historian of philosophy, and Taddä Rixner (1766-1838), a Romantic historian of philosophy. Their respective works are: Brucker's *Historia critica philosophiae* (1742-1744), hereafter "HCP;" Tennemann's *Geschichte der Philosophie* (1798-1819) and *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie* (1812), hereafter "GP" and "GGP;" and Rixner's *Handbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie* (1822), hereafter "HGP."

The article presents two main parts: a) an analysis of the possibility of finding pantheism in Eriugena's *Periphyseon*, and b) a brief presentation of the historians of philosophy chosen and the analysis of the appearance of Eriugena in the histories of philosophy mentioned above.

*I. The Relationship between God and Creature and the Possibility of Pantheism in Eriugena's Periphyseon*

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Werner Beierwaltes: *The Revaluation of John Scottus Eriugena in German Idealism*. In: *The Mind of Eriugena*, ed. by J. O'Meara and L. Bieler (Dublin 1973), 190-99; Gersh Stephen Gersh and Dermot Moran: *Eriugena, Berkeley, and the idealist tradition* (Notre Dame, Indiana 2006); Agnieszka Kijewska: *El fundamento del sistema de Eriúgena*. In: *Anuario Filosófico* 33 (2000), 505-532; Dermot Moran: *The philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena: a study of idealism in the Middle Ages*. (Cambridge 1989). Dermot Moran: *Idealism in Medieval Philosophy: The case of Johannes Scottus Eriugena*. In: *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 8 (1999), 53-82.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Werner Beierwaltes: *Pensare l'Uno*. Trans. Maria Luisa Gatti. (Milán 1992), 312n87.

Three centuries after Eriugena's death, he was associated with two Aristotelian masters of Paris, known in the history of philosophy as heretics – David of Dinant and Amalric of Chartres.<sup>3</sup> The *Periphyseon* was banned for the first time by the Sinod of Sens (1210). Later, Pope Honorius III declared in a bull that this work – *Perifisis* – is a book “full of worms of heretical vice”<sup>4</sup> and, in a letter written to the French Church in 1225, he ordered to recollect and burn all copies. In spite of the papal bull, not all the books have been destroyed, but the heretic fame of the work have reached modern times, as we will see in this paper.

At this stage, I want to remark that in the thirteenth century this condemnation was made in terms of the coincidence between creator and creature. Only in the eighteenth century the term ‚pantheist’ began to be used.<sup>5</sup> For this reason, the pantheistic interpretation of Eriugena's thought is a modern development.

In *Periphyseon*, the neo-Platonic doctrine of the one-whole is present, and this is why we can find a coincidence between creator and creature in some phrases. Thus, since the eighteenth century, Eriugena has been interpreted as a pantheist. Nevertheless, there are several phrases in *Periphyseon* claiming that nothing in the order of creation can be identified with God. Divine transcendence can easily be found in his metaphysics, as well as the immanence or presence of God in every creature. It all depends on where the emphasis is placed. The relationship **between** and creation is complex and cannot be reduced to pre-established historiographical categories. We propose to analyze the most relevant passages where the coincidence between creator and creature is present, in order to evaluate the possibility of calling Eriugena a pantheist.

The main goal of *Periphyseon* Book One is to present and analyze the first specie of nature, that which creates and is not created—God the Creator. Eriugena explains that this nature is the beginning, the middle and the end of all reality. „Therefore He is the Beginning, the Middle and the End: the Beginning, because from Him are all things that participate in essence; the Middle, because in Him and through Him they subsist and move; the End, because it is towards Him that they move in seeking rest from their movement and the stability of their perfection.”<sup>6</sup>

God does not abandon his creation when He finishes creating because He gives the subsistence and the end, to which everything tends. But he goes further when claiming that God not only creates all, but also creates Himself in the creation. Eriugena makes a pun with two Greek verbs deriving from the term ‚theós’. He claims that God can be considered either the viewer of everything

---

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Aquinas discusses David and Amalric's doctrines in his *Summa contra Gentiles*, *Summa Theologica* and *De veritate*. Cf. Dermot Moran: *The philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena: a study of idealism in the Middle Ages*. (Cambridge 1989), 87.

<sup>4</sup> The papal bull reads, „Significasse nuper pontifici Episcopum Parisensem, esse quendam librum, qui *Perifisis* (*Peri phúseos*) tituletur, inuentum tot scatentem vermibus haereticae prouitatis, ideoque ab Archiepiscopo Senonensi reprobratum, se itaque eo quod claustrales nonnulli uiri et scholastici eius lectione se accupent, praecipere, ut ubicumque inueniatur, Roman mittatur ad comburendum, etc”. HCP III, 622.

<sup>5</sup> The term ‚pantheist’ appears for the first time in John Toland's *Socinianism, Truly Stated* (1705) and is clarified by this author in a letter written to Leibniz in 1710, where pantheist, synonym of Spinozist, is a person who does not believe in other eternal being apart from universe.

<sup>6</sup> *Periphyseon* I 451. For the English translation, I use Sheldon-Williams: *Iohannis Scotti Eriugena: Periphyseon. Liber primus, secundus et tertius*, trans. Inglis Patrick Sheldon-Williams (Dublin 1968-1972-1978).

or He who runs through everything, because ,theós' can come from both the verb ,theorô' (,video' in Latin) and the verb ,théo' (,curro' in Latin). In this sense, God is He who, by seeing Himself, sees everything in Him and He who expresses Himself theophanically in all that is real. God is the only essence of everything. In this way, God is He who, by creating, creates Himself: "Therefore it creates all things which it leads forth out of nothing so that they may be, from not-being into being; but it is (also) created because nothing except itself exists as an essence since itself is the essence of all things."<sup>7</sup>

Thus, God is the only essence of all creation, but this does not lead Eriugena to abandon the absolute transcendence of the creative will. In Eriugena's work, there is a tension between divine immanence and transcendence. This tension is also reflected in language. Even though Eriugena states that God is cause of everything and, somehow, is everything, he also asserts that nothing can be properly said about God. In this way, God can be expressed through metaphor, by taking names from the creature to the creator, although the creator is ineffable and incompressible.

„Did we not say that, strictly speaking, the ineffable Nature can be signified by no verb, by no noun, and by no other audible sound, by no signified thing? And to this you agreed. For it is not properly but metaphorically that it is called Essence, Truth, Wisdom, and other names of this sort."<sup>8</sup>

Following Dionysius the Areopagite, Eriugena claims that, when naming God, it is more appropriate to use compound substantives formed by the prefix ,super' (Latin translation of the Greek prefix ,hyper'), such as ,superessentialis'. Once more, Eriugena highlights God's excellence.

Further on Book One, Eriugena contemplates the possibility that God could be before creating all beings. This being the case, the creation would be accidental to God. Hence, the following phrase presents a pantheistic aspect: „I would not believe that there was another thing apart from Him and outside Him. For in Him are all things and outside Him is nothing."<sup>9</sup>

God is simple and, therefore, He cannot admit composition of accidents and essence. He is the limit of all being, those which are and those which are not. He is the harmony of those things that are opposed. Accordingly, Eriugena concludes that God does not exist before creating everything because if not, it would be contrary to what he has said before.

Eriugena asserts that in God there is a coincidence of being and making, as God is the only essence that runs through everything.

„So when we hear that God makes all things we ought to understand nothing else that God is in all things, that is, that He is the Essence of all things. For only He truly exists by Himself, and He alone is everything which in the things that are is truly said to be. For none of the things that are truly exists by itself, but whatever is understood truly (to be) in it receives (its true being) by participation of Him, the One, Who alone by Himself truly is."<sup>10</sup>

This paragraph has a crucial importance, as it is quoted by the three chosen modern histories of philosophy that I study. I must now underline the difference between what it is by participation and what it is by nature, because this can help us understand the difference between God and his creatures,

---

<sup>7</sup> Periphyseon I 454 A.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. I 460 C.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. I 517 B.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. I 518 A.

between a being in proper sense and a being in derivative sense. He who truly is is only God; and, therefore, it is correct to regard Him as *superessencialis* or *superesse*. The creatures have their being because of God and participate of Him. In this sense, all things have a derivative being and depend on this Supreme Being.

Let us continue with *Periphyseon* Book Two, where Eriugena deals with the second specie of nature, that which is created and also creates—the primordial causes. In the opening of this book, Eriugena makes a review of the division of nature in four species presented in Book One. There he proposes a coincidence between the first and the fourth specie, that is, between God as cause and God as end. This unity is what he calls „Creator.” Also, he proposes the union of the second and the third species, the primordial causes and its effects, understood as „creature.” Thus, there are two dimensions of reality: on the one hand, that which is not created; on the other hand, that which is created. Then, Eriugena takes another step when proposing the coincidence between Creator and creature: „But suppose you join the creature to the Creator so as to understand that there is nothing in the former save Him who alone truly is—for nothing apart from Him is truly called essential since all things that are are nothing else, in so far as they are, but the participation in Him who alone subsists from and through Himself-, will you deny that Creator and creature are one? (...) So the universe, comprising God and creature, which was first divided as it were into four forms, is reduced again to an indivisible One, being Principle as well as Cause and End.”<sup>11</sup>

The division of the term ‚nature’ is only a dialectic exercise. Hence, its recollection is a natural part of the same exercise. In this context, the division of nature in fourth species understood as a procession immediately leads to the theme of the *analytiké* science, given that it studies the return of this previously exposed division.<sup>12</sup>

This is not an accidental theme; indeed, it is required by the order of nature. Accordingly, all rational division must return by following the same steps in which the division to multiplicity has been made, until it reaches the first unity, the One that always stays separated in itself, from where division started. In order to understand this, Eriugena uses the etymology of the Greek term ‚analytiké’.<sup>13</sup> He explains that this term comes from the verb ‚analúo’, which means ‚resolvo’ in Latin (to resolve), because the prefix ‚aná’ means ‚re’, and ‚lúo’ means ‚solvo’, that is, „to solve”.<sup>14</sup> From the same verbs comes ‚análysis’, which also means ‚resolution’ or ‚return’. But this term is more frequently used to signify the solution of a problem, whereas ‚analytiké’ indicates the return of the division to its origin. Because all division, which is called ‚merismós’ by the Greeks, seems to be a type of descent from a finite unit to a huge number of individuals,<sup>15</sup> from general to specific, whereas the recollection, understood as a return, from specific to general, is called ‚analytiké’. This analytic science, developed by dialectics, allows the return of multiplicity to unity and this is what man must use in the dialectic reconstruction of reality to its origin. Man, image of the

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. II 528 B.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *ibid.* II 526 A.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *ibid.* II 526 A.

<sup>14</sup> It is difficult to translate this extract accurately, since the Latin verbs *resolvo* and *solvo* have almost the same meaning.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *ibid.* II 526 B.

intellectual principle that is God, also has the guarantee that he goes in reverse through the same path in which unity becomes multiplicity, that is, creation.

Hence, nature, *universitas*, in the sense of totality, contains not only what is, but also what is not, what is created and what is uncreated. Moran asserts that the phrase quoted above (528 B), has been taken as the clearest formulation of Eriugena's pantheism.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, Eriugena does not dissolve all distinction when holding this coincidence between Creator and creature, for he maintains the difference between what truly is and what is by participation in what truly is. The last ground of reality is found in that *superesse*, which is the only essence that runs through all, this infinite from which nothing can escape. Immanence and transcendence must be understood as two sides of the same coin. Further in Book Two, there is another phrase of interest, where Eriugena affirms once again the coincidence between being, understanding and making in God. Following Augustine and pseudo-Dionysus, Eriugena claims: „For the understanding of all things, is the essence of all things. For God did not get to know all after they were made, and—what is more wonderful—all things are precisely because they were foreknown. For the essence of all is nothing but the knowledge of all things in the Divine Wisdom.”<sup>17</sup>

God is the intellectual Principle of all reality. His thought is creative.<sup>18</sup> This can bring the possibility of an idealistic interpretation of Eriugena's thought.<sup>19</sup> He continues in Book Two: „God's knowing and God's making are therefore one. For by knowing He makes and by making He knows. The knowledge does not precede the thing made nor does the thing made precede the knowledge, since all are once and for all co-eternal save for the status of creator and created.”<sup>20</sup>

All things that are, were and will be dwell in God's thought. There is a conceptual unity of reality; the essence of everything is the knowledge of everything in God's spirit. However, Eriugena maintains the difference between God and the creatures, where the former is the creator and the latter are created.

In the opening of Book III, which deals with the third species of nature—that which is created and does not create—Eriugena claims that he must consider some incidental points regarding the primordial causes before focusing on the specific theme of this book. There he revises the concept of *natura* as a totality that includes not only what creates but also what is created and its divisions, where God has the first place. „For in Him are all things immutably and essentially; and He is the Division and Collection of the universal creature, and Genus and Species and Whole and Part although He is neither genus nor specie nor whole nor part of anything, but all these are from Him and in Him and to Him.”<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Dermot Moran: *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena* (Cambridge 1989) 258.

<sup>17</sup> *Periphyseon* II 559 A–B.

<sup>18</sup> See Claudia D'Amico: *Intellectus omnium est omnia. Nota sobre la noción de Principio en el neoplatonismo medieval*. In *Idade Média: Tempo do Mundo, tempo dos Homens, tempo de Deus*, ed. by J. A. de C. R. De Souza (Porto Alegre 2006) 74–82.

<sup>19</sup> Werner Beierwaltes: *Eriugena: I fondamenti del suo pensiero*, trans. Enrico Peroli (Milán 1998) 347-48 and *Werner Beierwaltes: Platonisme et Idéalisme*, trans. Marie-Christine Challiol-Gillet (Paris 2000) 198-99.

<sup>20</sup> *Periphyseon* II 559 B.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* III 621 C.

Eriugena expresses that God is not the origin of a series but that from Him everything emerges and, in this way, in Him everything is contained, just as the monad contains all numbers and the centre of the circle comprehends the entire circumference.

Gustavo Piemonte presents some phrases, some of which are presented in this paper, where it is possible to read pantheism in *Periphyseon* and other books by Eriugena.<sup>22</sup> He pays particular attention to a phrase located in Book Three 650 B, which he considers the most significant example of pantheism in Eriugena. I will now analyze this text.

In the framework, Eriugena reflects on the possibility of falling in false reasoning, which can be avoided by following the Saint Fathers, because it is possible to resume the correct path guided by the light of Wisdom. The path is free of error when the pious truth is humbly searched.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, it is possible to formulate some doubts and keep away from false opinions. For this reason, Eriugena raises the following question: How can eternal beings be created? Because God is not only creator of all things but also created in all things, as he has already stated in Book One. „And incomparably more profound and wonderful than all this seems to me the assertion you made on the authority of St. Dionysius the Areopagite, namely, that God Himself is both the Maker of all things and is made in all things; for this was never heard or known before either by me or by many, or by nearly all.”<sup>24</sup> This allows Eriugena to make some assertions that seem to be wrong: „For if this is the case, who will not at once break out and exclaim in these words: God is all things and all things God!”<sup>25</sup>

Eriugena does not seem eager to refute this assertion; in fact, he supports it, what shows his personal and innovative thought. Following Piemonte, I affirm that Eriugena does not want to revise his statements, which are opposed to the unthinking majority's opinion, but quite the opposite.<sup>26</sup> However, it is important to point out that, together with this kind of assertions, Eriugena usually sets this other kind: *Deus unum est* or *Deus est superesse*. In general, God's transcendence and unity are recognized in *Periphyseon*.

Further in Book Three, tension between transcendence and immanence becomes more intense. Here there is an argument that leads to the principal problem in the concept of creation. God creates by His will; and, therefore, God knows all things He creates in the same way He knows His volitions, because through His volitions He makes the things. Eriugena wonders: Does God see the things in the same way that He sees His volitions?<sup>27</sup> The answer is affirmative but it must be said that God does not see creation in the same way human beings see sensible things through sensibility, or intelligible things through intelligence. God sees both sensible and intelligible things as He sees His

---

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Gustavo Piemonte: *Acerca de la fórmula eriugeniana 'Deus est omnia' y sus fuentes neoplatónicas*. In: *Patristica et Mediaevalia* 13 (1992) 25 ff.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Periphyseon* III 650 A.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 650 C.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 650 D.

<sup>26</sup> Gustavo Piemonte: *Acerca de la fórmula eriugeniana*, op. cit. [note 22] 26 f.

<sup>27</sup> Eriugena alludes to a multiplicity of volitions that coincides with the multiple primordial causes. Nonetheless, this is only a multiplicity from the point of view of creation, for they are all one in the unity of God. *Periphyseon* III 624 A.

volitions.<sup>28</sup> As a result, thinking, creating, willing and seeing are one and the same for God, although they are different for human beings. It is a metaphor because God is beyond everything. Thus, Eriugena states the identification between will and intelligence in God, which gives us the possibility of thinking of Him as an Intellectual Principle, for He creates by thinking the world He wants, seeing it in Himself.

Just before that, Eriugena wonders if divine volitions are different from created things. Here there is a problem. If they are different, the divine vision, which is simple, ceases to be simple; and, if they are the same, God will is created and His volitions are the created things. Nevertheless, God sees created things in the same way He sees His volitions. In consequence, created things and divine volitions are the same because the vision unifies them. This assertion leads to two possible conclusions: God's will separates from God and joins created things, and thus, as God creates His will, God is the creator and His will the created thing; or, God, His will and the created things are one and the same and, consequently, the created things are eternal because they are nothing different from God.<sup>29</sup> Here by „creation” Eriugena indicates the creation of the primordial causes in eternity. From them spatial and temporal things are created as effects.

Due to this argument, Eriugena is ready to accept the eternity of all created things in the divine Verb. „Although, as I think, you have doubts about the Will of God, whether about His volitions or about the ineffable multiplicity of the Divine Unity—for God is a multiple unity in Himself--, as to whether they belong to the simple nature of the Most High Goodness so as not to be anything but it, or whether they do not, yet you do not doubt but that God was not at any time without His volitions.”<sup>30</sup>

Eriugena explains that God has never lacked of His volitions and that they form an ineffable multiplicity in Him, because God is the one-multiple in Himself. His volitions belong to the simple nature of supreme Goodness, so they are not different from It. God possesses everything always and immutably, because nothing is accidental to Him. God always possesses His divine volitions. Thus, His volitions are eternal, because God is eternal.<sup>31</sup>

In this sense, Eriugena asserts that nothing is future to God; He always possesses everything He wanted to do in His volitions, because in God the desire does not precede what He wants to do. Everything that is created and eternal is God, for in His will there cannot be other thing but Himself, His simple nature does not tolerate a being different from itself. Thus, the only God is all in all. „But if of everything He wills to be made He also beholds the making, and if what He wills and beholds is not eternal to Himself but within Himself, and there is nothing within Him which is not Himself, it follows that everything that He beholds and wills should be understand as coeternal with Him, is His Will and His beholding and His Essence are one.”<sup>32</sup>

Everything is in God, nothing is external to Him. Then, Eriugena postulates this assertion, which could be a motive for indignation for opponents to pantheism: “For if the Divine Will and the

---

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 673 B – 673 C.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 673 C – 674 A.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 674 C.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 674 C – 675 A.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 675 B.

divine beholding is essential [and] eternal, [and] in Him to be is not one thing, to will another, to behold another, but one and the same superessential, and reason allows that whatever He comprehends within His Will and his beholding is understood as nothing other than Himself—for a simple nature does not allow within itself that which is not itself--, the declaration that the One God is all things in all things abides without any dispute.”<sup>33</sup>

The conclusion cannot be anything else but that philosophers cannot ignore that all beings are eternal because they exist in God. Now, how can God admit a being that is not coessential, considering all things subsist in Him? Eriugena explains that there is no other nature than that of God and that of creature, and the creating nature does not allow anything out of itself, because nothing is out of itself. Consequently, everything it creates is contained in itself, but in a way that it remains different from creature, since it is always *superesse*.<sup>34</sup> Everything is in God, but inside Him are He and creature, which is not God. Eriugena establishes a distinction inside divinity. In God is also the creature, which is not God but is created by God. This analysis comes through the reflection on the possibility of God’s seeing all things before creating them, even before they exist.<sup>35</sup> This leads to a paradoxical conclusion because, if it is said that God saw in Him the beings that He would create, since there was only God, He could only see Himself. Eriugena states: „And He will be all the things that He made if He made the things which He saw in Himself, and He will be the Maker and the things that will be made.”<sup>36</sup> This phrase is a proof of pantheism for the modern historians of philosophy that I will introduce next.

The other possibility leads to controversial conclusions as well. If God had seen the things He wanted to create before creating them, those things would have been already created. Since God only sees the truth, He has seen what He saw forever.<sup>37</sup> If so, it would be a double comprehension of the creature—the eternal in the divine Wisdom and the temporal in the created world. The Scriptures claim that it is not that God saw some beings in Himself and some others after creating them, but that He saw and created always the same, inside Himself. Otherwise, the simplicity of the divine nature would be in danger.<sup>38</sup>

The aporetic arguments continue to multiply without any possibility of solution. Following Bertin’s interpretation, the conclusion clearly expresses pantheism in *Periphyseon*.<sup>39</sup> God and creatures are not two different realities but one.<sup>40</sup> The problem of creation is the passage from this eternal reality to the multiple, material and changeable world. Eriugena replies to this with the concept of theophany, the appearance of what does not appear, and the concept of sin as a breakdown in eternity.

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 675 B–C.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 675 C.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 676 B – 676 C.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 676 C.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 677 A.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 677 C.

<sup>39</sup> Francis Bertin: Introduction. In: Jean Scot Érigène De la division de la nature 2, Livre III, (Paris 1995) 33.

<sup>40</sup> *Periphyseon* III 678 C.

This is the last assertion of the passage, which shows that the eternal creation is still something to be clarified: „It remains, then, to treat of the eternal creation of all things in God, in so far as the ray of the Divine Power shall permit the keenness of our minds to second into the Divine Mysteries.”<sup>41</sup> The only way human beings can answer these open questions is by being initiated in the mysteries.

In short, some of the phrases here presented favor a pantheistic interpretation of Eriugena’s work, because they highlight the coincidence between God and His creation, for the essence of all things is the divine thought or will. Nevertheless, there are fragments in *Periphyseon* that go in opposition and distinguish God from His creation because, although the essence of everything is in Him, divinity still remains in an unreachable and transcendent level, beyond everything, and is nothing of the creation order.

To conclude, I claim that, even though there are some phrases that allow a pantheistic interpretation, a comprehensive reading of the work lightens this kind of characterizations. Nonetheless, there are still some ambiguities or fissures that lead to interpretative problems, which are typical of this kind of metaphysical system. In any case, I understand the possibility of finding pantheism in Eriugena’s thought, since the reading that the modern historians of philosophy make is slanted and incomplete.<sup>42</sup>

## *II. How the Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Historians of Philosophy Read Eriugena’s Periphyseon*

### A. Brucker, Tennemann and Rixner

Let me briefly present the three historians. Brucker’s perspective is founded on his vision of the role of Christianity in history. From this point of view, he determines the mistakes in the past philosophy, by relating all its themes to the history of Christianity. His last purpose is to liberate human knowledge from those mistakes.<sup>43</sup> This approach to the authors shows Brucker’s belonging to Enlightenment, as he pursues the truth, and his belonging to modern eclecticism, a philosophical trend that pays attention to the multiplicity of past philosophies and their mistakes in the path to truth.

Tennemann attempts to show past philosophical systems as steps in the history of philosophy, which attains its fullness once it reaches Kantian criticism. This is why he uses Kantian vocabulary when presenting past philosophers and pays attention not only to metaphysical themes but also to moral aspects. According to Tennemann, history of philosophy is a particular science and requires the definition of science. Kantian understanding of science asserts that it is an organic system of knowledge according to principles.<sup>44</sup> The principal object of philosophy is the knowledge of the grounds and laws of nature (what is) and freedom (what should be).<sup>45</sup> This concept of philosophy is sufficient for the history of philosophy that shows the gradual realization of philosophy. Then, the

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 678 A.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Beierwaltes: *Platonisme et Idealisme*, 191.

<sup>43</sup> HCP I, 21-22.

<sup>44</sup> GP I, xvi-xv.

<sup>45</sup> GP I, xxvi-xxvii.

matter of the history of philosophy is all that refers to the activity of the reason in order to realize the idea of philosophy.<sup>46</sup>

Rixner moves away from both Enlightenment and Kantian historiography and follows the ideals of Romantic historiography, systematized by Schelling, who understands history analogously to the life of a natural organism. For Rixner, the history of philosophy is the scientific research, communication and exposition of the rise and the temporal evolution of the fundamental science and of the supreme laws of nature and freedom, as well as of the ideas, principles and opinions through which human spirit reveals and expresses its attempt of self-knowledge, besides getting to know totality and divinity. In particular, this historian pays closer attention to metaphysical themes rather than to theological controversies, and is much more worried about the pedagogical dimension of his exposition.<sup>47</sup> These authors' works are important channels for the transmission of Eriugenan thought to idealistic philosophers like Hegel or Schelling, as I stated above.

### B. Eriugena's pantheism

Brucker's *Historia critica philosophia* and Tennemann's *Geschichte der Philosophie* introduce in their presentation of Eriugena's thought the concept of **pantheism** in order to characterize the medieval author. These two histories of philosophy have critical intentions when approaching each philosopher. On the contrary, Rixner's *Handbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie* refrains from making a characterization in these terms and avoids any kind of judgment on Eriugena's philosophy.

Brucker, who links Eriugena to the eclectic Platonism<sup>48</sup> and in particular to pseudo-Dionysios, finds his philosophy full of theological controversies, since it develops an emanative system.<sup>49</sup> According to Brucker, Eriugena cannot be counted as a „precursor of Spinoza“; and, for this reason, he would not fall in an „extreme atheism“.<sup>50</sup> Brucker does not want to accuse Eriugena of atheism, what he actually does with Spinoza, the most famous pantheist in the history of philosophy, because basically their systems are different, as he explains in a footnote. „For this purpose, it is

---

<sup>46</sup> GP I, xxx.

<sup>47</sup> For the historiographical framework see Lucien Braun: *Histoire de l'histoire de la philosophie* (Paris 1973); Giovanni Santinello: *Storia delle storie generali della filosofia*, Vol. 4/I: *L'età Hegeliana. La storiografia filosofica nell'area tedesca* (Brescia 1995); Giovanni Santinello: *Storia delle storie generali della filosofia*. Vol. 3: *Il Secondo illuminismo e l'età kantiana* (Padova 1988); Giovanni Santinello: *Storia delle storie generali della filosofia*. Vol. 2: *Dall'età cartesiana a Brucker* (Brescia 1979). The editions of the histories of philosophy I use are: Johann Jakob Brucker: *Historia critica philosophiae* (Hildesheim/New York 1975); Thaddä Anselm Rixner: *Handbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie: zum Gebrauche seiner Vorlesungen* (Sulzbach 1822-23); Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann: *Geschichte der Philosophie*, (Leipzig 1798-1819); Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann: *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie: für akademischen Unterricht*, (Leipzig 1812).

<sup>48</sup> See Johannes Ulrich Schneider: *Das Eklektizismus-Problem der Philosophiegeschichte*. In: Jacob Brucker (1696–1770): *Philosoph und Historiker der europäischen Aufklärung*, ed. by W. Schmidt-Biggemann and T. Stammen (Berlin 1998) 135-58.

<sup>49</sup> Brucker was the first historian of philosophy to use the term „system of philosophy“. See Leo Catana: *The Concept ‚System of Philosophy‘: The Case of Jacob Brucker's Historiography of Philosophy*. In: *History and Theory* 44.1 (2005) 72–90.

<sup>50</sup> HCP III, 622: “Quamuis enim inter Spinozae praecursores eum numerare nolumus (cum nunquam Spinoza emanationis systema elegerit) et fortasse causa sit, cur ab Atheismo directo Scotum absoluamus.”

helpful the distinction of the being pointed out at the beginning, which establishes a kind of distance between God and the things that progress from God, the way the emanative systems do.”<sup>51</sup> The reason why Eriugena is not characterized as an atheist seems to be his adoption of the emanative system, which contemplates a progress of creatures from God and thus states a difference between God and things, even though it is considered pantheism. Brucker does not claim such thing of Spinoza, in whom immanence prevails over transcendence because everything is nature. Eriugena belongs to another philosophical trend, the neo-Platonic one, which postulates a gradation of beings and not simply immanence.

It should be noted that in the neo-Platonic Eriugenan statement, the only cause contains all effects and is the only essence of all; but, in spite of this, it is nothing of creation, it is beyond everything, it transcends all orders. Accordingly, Eriugenan god is unreachable and unknowable.

An unprepared reader can get confused because of the similarity in the language Eriugena and Spinoza use. Spinoza speaks of *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*<sup>52</sup> as two aspects of either universe or nature. The former is the active and productive aspect, which are God and his attributes; the latter is the product of the former, which are and subsist in the being owing to this aspect. These are the finite modes of the attributes. In summary, there are different manners of understanding the same nature. Eriugena deals similarly with the division of nature in four species, because this is a dialectic mode of understanding the cosmic unfolding.

Brucker considers both of them pantheists, but Spinoza unlike Eriugena is an atheist. It is not difficult to realize that Eriugena is a Christian, who does not doubt God’s existence. Although Eriugena is original for his time, which Brucker finds sometimes heterodox, the Irishman follows the Bible. For this author, religion is philosophy because philosophy is mainly the search for God, and this God, although present in creation, transcends all.

In short, Brucker claims that Eriugena is a pantheist, although not an atheist as Spinoza: „Nevertheless, he must be counted among pantheists and fanatic philosophy pupils, whose entire philosophy is based on an impious and shameful enthusiasm and on certain deification (let me use this barbaric phrase from a barbaric argument): although he himself did not hesitate in naming his philosophy *divine*.”<sup>53</sup>

Once again, Eriugena is associated with pantheism, which is considered a fanatic philosophy. Brucker criticizes the enthusiasm for this philosophical trend, which promotes mysticism in the search for *deificatio* and infects the Church by proclaiming itself as „divine philosophy.” Brucker considers this a calamity; it is the victory of Dionysius’s dark mysticism which turns Christian religion into a fanaticism that ruins it.

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. note b: “Militat pro eo distinctio entium in limine notata, quae inter Deum et res ex Deo progressas more systematis emanatiui quoddam discrimen ponit. Translations of the histories of philosophy are my own.”

<sup>52</sup> Spinoza: Ethics. I prop. XXIX.

<sup>53</sup> HCP III, 622: “inter pantheistas tamen et fanaticae philosophiae alumnos referendus est, quorum tota philosophia nefario pudendoque Enthusiasmo et deificatione quadam (sit uenia uerbo barbaro de barbaro argumento) nititur: quamuis ipse philosophiam suam diuinam appellare non sit ueritus.”

For Brucker, a proof of this misfortune is the historical fact of the thirteenth-century condemnation of *Periphyseon*. He exposes Pope Honorius III's bull, which states that the book *Perifisis*, as the Eriugenian work is called, is full of worms of heretical vice.<sup>54</sup> Again, Brucker relates all the negative points in Eriugena's thought to the entry of Eastern mysticism, that is, pseudo-Dionysius's work, in the West. Here Brucker points out this relation between mysticism and pantheism: „It must also be judged the huge damage that Scotus brought to the Church by offering pseudo-Dionysius's books in disguise of Latin robes, full of impiety, and by introducing in this way this impure mystic theology, which filled all things with pantheism and enthusiasm and whose roots have not even today dried up.”<sup>55</sup>

Brucker understands that the ingress of pseudo-Dionysius's work in the West has as consequence the dissemination of pantheism in Latin territory, a fact that affected Christianity even in his time.

Further in his book, Brucker insists on the connection between Eriugena and this fanatic philosophy because he presents the errors of Amalric of Bena and David of Dinant.<sup>56</sup> Brucker cites Gerson's *De concordia metaphisica cum logica* (1426) and asserts that Amalric makes God coincide with creatures in phrases like „*Deus est omnia*”. In Brucker's opinion, the sources for this kind of phrases are found in Platonic and Aristotle's works. Among the former works, Eriugena's philosophy and the dissemination of pseudo-Dionysius are the strongest influence on Amalric.<sup>57</sup>

Brucker crystallizes the historiographical link between Eriugena and Amalric by quoting Henry of Segusio, Martin of Poland and Gerson, Even though this connection is not proved, it is established by philosophical historiography and Brucker takes it as a proof of Eriugena's pantheism.<sup>58</sup> The errors that Brucker points out are founded on the union of Aristotelianism with Platonism, that is, neo-Platonism—the non-Eleatic, non-Stoic, non-Spinozistic, but Alexandrian emanative system.

Brucker asserts that the heresy of David of Dinant, Amalric's disciple, has also his origin in the neo-Platonic Alexandrian emanative system. Nevertheless, David is more influenced by Aristotelian philosophy because he believes that God is the raw material of creation, even though in his system there is a progress from God and a return to unity.<sup>59</sup>

In order to reinforce his interpretation of Eriugena, Brucker quotes some phrases of *Periphyseon* and makes this conclusion about the Eriugenian system: „All that is is contained in God, not radically and virtually but essentially, and thus all has progressed and flown out of God since

---

<sup>54</sup> Cf. HCP III, 622.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.: “Ex his autem larga manu datis iudicandum quoque, de ingenti damno, quod Ecclesiae intulit Scotus, libros Pseudo Dionysii ista impietate plenos Latina ueste donando, sicque impuram illam theologiam mysticam, cuius ne hodie quidem radices exaruerunt, introducendo, quae pantheismo et entusiasmo omnia cumulauit.”

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 687–695.

<sup>57</sup> Brucker also cites Thomasius's *Schediasma historicum* and Buddeus's *Elementa philosophiae instrumentalis* in order to highlight the connection with Aristotle.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Paolo Lucentini: *L'eresia di Amalrico*. In: *Eriugena redivivus*, ed. by W. Beierwaltes (Heidelberg 1987), 174–191.

<sup>59</sup> HCP III, 693.

eternity and distinguished in a variety of inferior and superior orders, worse and better, that will finally return to their source and origin.”<sup>60</sup>

The historian recovers Eriugena’s vocabulary of progress, flux and return. In Brucker’s opinion, if everything is essentially in God, there is pantheism, which reflects this is not Spinoza, but the neo-Platonic emanative system. HCP presents a great deal of quotations from *Periphyseon* in order to show this, as the other histories of philosophy that I will analyze do.

Tennemann, like Brucker, considers that Eriugena’s pantheism is linked to Alexandrian neo-Platonism and its emanative system. But this neo-Platonism is joined to the Christian dogma and, for this reason, Eriugena’s philosophy is non-atheistic.

In GP, Tennemann associates Eriugena with pseudo-Dionysius and presents this Irishman as a pantheist that holds an emanative system. In order to demonstrate this, Tennemann gives a synthesis of the Eriugenian doctrine. The historian organizes this presentation founded on some quotations of *Periphyseon*, which he locates in footnotes and for which he provides a German translation. Thus, sometimes this exposition is only a translation of the source. He describes Eriugena’s thought in this way, „God is the only essence of all things, and all fullness of things develops from God and returns to God”.<sup>61</sup> Then he explains: „Scottus mainly starts from the idea of creation and through this he aims to prove that God is the being of all things, God is all and all is God, despite the fact that the variability of phenomena has an eternal existence in God.”<sup>62</sup> Here is the principal idea for which Eriugena can be characterized as a pantheist — God is the being of everything, God is all and everything is God. This is the coincidence between Creator and creature, that is, pantheism. In this way, „*God makes everything* only means that He is in everything, He is the only true being and the reality in which what is is God himself”.<sup>63</sup> This sentence is an effort to reproduce a phrase of *Periphyseon* Book One in German language.<sup>64</sup>

Next, Tennemann reproduces a theme of Book Three, which appears also in Brucker’s and Rixner’s histories and is considered pantheistic—the relation between God and His creation, understood as the relationship of a substance and its accidents.<sup>65</sup> In this way, God contains in Him all His accidents and as is, was and will be always as cause of all things. Everything He creates from Him

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 621: “omnia quaecumque sint, in Deo non radicaliter modo et virtualiter, sed essentialiter contineri, atque adeo omnia ex Deo ab aeterno progressa esse, et fluxisse, inque varias classes inferiorum et superiorum, deteriorum meliorumque entium distincta tandem in fontem originemque suam reditura esse.”

<sup>61</sup> GP VIII–I, 81: „Dass Gott das Wesen aller Dinge sei, und alle Fülle der Dinge sich aus Gott entwickle und in Gott zurück fährt.“

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 84: „Das zweite erhellt daraus, dass Scottus hauptsächlich von der Idee des Schaffens ausgeht, und dadurch beweisen will, dass Gott das Sein aller Dinge, Gott Alles, und Alles Gott ist, und ungeachtet der Veränderlichkeit der Erscheinungen eine ewige Existenz in Gott hat.“

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.: „Gott macht Alles, heisst also nichts anders, als er ist in Allem, er ist allein das wahre Sein, und die Realität in dem, was ist, ist Gott selbst.“

<sup>64</sup> *Periphyseon* I 518 A.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. III 634 A-D

is in Him as all numbers are unity.<sup>66</sup> He adds: „He always is, was and will be the cause; the creation always subsists, subsisted, and will subsist in its cause.”<sup>67</sup>

Through these quotations, Tennemann asserts that God creates Himself in everything He creates, by creating, because God is all the things He creates: „If God makes all and is the true being, then He is made in all.”<sup>68</sup>

Immediately thereafter, the historian presents the topic of *creatio ex nihilo*, since Tennemann considers that the ground for a pantheistic interpretation of Eriugena’s thought can be found in this theme. GP presents here a quotation of *Periphyseon* Book Three where it is said that the nothing of creation is God, but understood as nothing by excellence, not by privation.<sup>69</sup> Thus, GP translates the consequences of this conception: „For it can be thought in its existing nature as being, because it surpasses everything. While it, through an inexpressible descent to everything that is, confronts its look in everywhere, thus it finds that it is, was and will be truly alone in all.”<sup>70</sup>

Tennemann aims to link different themes in Eriugena’s work, in order to highlight the organic structure of the Irishman’s thought.

In GGP, he does not use the term ‚pantheism’, as he does in his major work. Nevertheless, he points out the heresy which would be the consequence of the influence of Eriugena’s thought.<sup>71</sup> In this sense, further in his book, Tennemann briefly presents the two thirteenth-century thinkers<sup>72</sup> who are accused of pantheism and are linked to Eriugena—Almalric of Bena and David of Dinant. There Tennemann asserts that both of them teach a kind of pantheism inspired in Eriugena. In order to prove this assertion, he refers to Gerson’s *De concordia metaphisica*.

Rixner presents Eriugena’s philosophy in ten points, grounded on the concept of theophany. There is no doubt whatsoever that at least one of these points makes reference to the expression „God is everything”, that is, the coincidence between creator and creature that modern philosophers call „pantheism,” a term which is not used by this historian. Thus, Rixner does not consider this concept a fundamental point in the presentation of the Irishman’s philosophy. Nevertheless, when reading quotations from *Periphyseon* in HGP, it is surprising that these are the same that Brucker and Tennemann select, that is, phrases that permit thinking of a pantheistic aspect in Eriugena’s work.

In this sense, the fifth point in this systematic presentation expresses that things are manifestations of essentialities, that is, primordial causes, which are God’s first products. Rixner states: „The ideas of divine understanding are the principles and forms of everything (*causa omnium rerum primodiales*), things themselves are not anything else but the representations of these essences,

---

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 639 B–D.

<sup>67</sup> GP VIII–I, 84: „Immer ist, war und wird er die Ursache sein; das Erschaffene subsistiert, subsistierte und wird immer in seiner Ursache subsistieren.“

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 85: „Wenn Gott daher alles macht, und das wahre Sein ist, so wird er in Allem gemacht.“

<sup>69</sup> Cf. PE III 680 C.

<sup>70</sup> GP VIII–I, 85: „Denn sie kann in seinem existierenden Wesen als seiend gedacht werden, weil sie Alles übertrifft. Indem sie aber durch ein unaussprechliches herabsteigen in alles, was ist, dem Blick allenthalben begegnet, so findet es sich, dass sie allein wahrhaft in Allem ist, war und sein wird.“

<sup>71</sup> GGP, 200–201.

<sup>72</sup> Tennemann also includes Simon Turnacensis but does not relate him to Eriugena. GGP, 352.

which are God's first productions."<sup>73</sup> Rixner takes some texts from *Periphyseon* that explain the nature of the primordial causes to support his assertion but does not mention a coincidence between creator and creature.

The sixth point deals with the theme of the world as a product of God, that is, as a divine manifestation: „God is not time but, conceptually, is prior to totality, for totality is His eternal revelation."<sup>74</sup> In logical terms, God is previous to creation, because He is creator. Rixner reproduces a text from *Periphyseon* Book Three, also presented by Brucker and Tennemann, which expresses that God contains totality in Him.<sup>75</sup>

The next point is directly related to the theme of coincidence between creator and creature, for it deals with *creatio ex nihilo*. Here there is an assertion that makes possible a pantheistic interpretation of Eriugena's thought where creation is understood as the manifestation of the divine essence: „For which every visible or invisible creature can also be named as a true manifestation of God."<sup>76</sup> Rixner reproduces the text of Book Three, where Eriugena explains his conception of God as nothing by excellence.<sup>77</sup> But this author never states that this is proof of Eriugena's pantheism, even though it is the same text that the other historians, Brucker and Tennemann, reproduce in that sense.

The eighth point in HGP also presents phrases where it is possible to read the coincidence between creator and creature in *Periphyseon*. Rixner makes reference to the topic of the return of all things to unity in God. He expresses that the creative essence will return to its origin. This return is the dialectic passage from one species to another until reaching the end in the forth species, which is the nature that does not create and is not created. Rixner explains about God: „But also now and in all times God is and was, in fact, all in all, because He is essentially and solely total essence, because all that is anywhere and anytime and seems to have a true being is especially He himself."<sup>78</sup>

All is God himself. Rixner reinforces this with a quotation from *Periphyseon* Book Three,<sup>79</sup> where it is explained that everything will return to God, like the illuminated to light, and God will be all in all. The knowledge of all will be for those who are illuminated, which does not deny that God is all in all.

### III. Conclusion

---

<sup>73</sup> HGP II, 13: „Die Ideen des göttlichen Verstandes sind dann auch die Principien und Formen aller Dinge (causa omnium rerum primordiales); die Dinge selbst aber sind nur Darstellungen dieser Wesenheiten, welche die ersten Erzeugungen Gottes sind.“

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 14: „Gott ist also auch nicht der Zeit, wohl aber dem Begriffe nach, früher als das All, denn dieses ist seine ewige Offenbarung.“

<sup>75</sup> PE III 639 B–D.

<sup>76</sup> HGP II, 14–15: „dagegen diese nämliche, unendliche und unbegreifliche Wesenheit in ihrer Einbildung (informatio) in Alles, was da ist, gerade Alles, und das allein wahrhaft –Seiende in allem Seienden ist; weswegen dann auch jede sichtbare und unsichtbare Kreatur eine wahrhafte Erscheinung Gottes genannt werden kann.“

<sup>77</sup> *Periphyseon* III 680 C.

<sup>78</sup> HGP II, 15: „Aber auch jetzt schon, und in der Tat zu allen Zeiten, ist, und war Gott Alles in Allem, weil er wesentlich und allein das Allwesen ist: den Alles, was irgendwo und irgendwann ist, und ein wirkliches Sein zu haben scheint, ist zumal Er selbst.“

<sup>79</sup> HGP II, 15–16. Cf. *Periphyseon* III 683 C.

Through a comparative analysis of the great deal of quotations the historians present, which I cannot present here due to lack of space, there are both coincidence and distinctive features, depending on each author's philosophical orientation. Brucker is very synthetic, Tennemann chooses longer texts because he places them in footnotes, and Rixner presents the same quotations but with a different aim. All of them occasionally make some variations in the source in order to enlighten their expositions.

In summary, Brucker emphasizes Eriugenian pantheism as the consequence of the emanative neo-Platonic system. In historical terms, this author understands that this leads to the thirteenth-century condemnation and is a result of the contact Eriugena had with pseudo-Dionysus's work. According to Brucker, Eriugena's major thesis asserts that all is essentially in God and that all beings are created by a flow from God. This distinguishes Eriugena from the atheist Spinoza, who has never sustained an emanative system. In spite of that, the emanative system has negative consequences for the history of Christianity as well.

Tennemann also affirms that Eriugena is a pantheist, although he is not concerned about the fate of Christianity, unlike Brucker. Besides, he understands this pantheism as a result of Eriugena's emanative system derived from Alexandrian neo-Platonism; and, as this system is combined with Christian dogma, it does not lead to atheism. Tennemann expresses that, for Eriugena, God is the essence of all things—all is in God and God is made in all.

Unlike Brucker and Tennemann, Rixner does not use the term 'pantheism' and explains that in the Eriugenian system the world is a divine manifestation because everything is contained in God, to Whom everything returns. Rixner is interested in these themes as a follower of Schelling's philosophy but, above all, as a Romantic. Thus, this historian is more concerned with the concepts of primordial causes and theophany, which allow the distinguishing of a hierarchy in the Eriugenian system. In particular, Rixner does not treat Eriugena as a pantheist nor does he understand the tension between immanence and transcendence as pantheism. This is possible due to his Schellingian orientation, which permits paying attention to metaphysical themes rather than theological controversies.

After analyzing these books, I would like to highlight the difference in tone when treating this topic and the gradual abandon of a negative connotation of pantheism associated with Spinoza in its origins. Even though the historians can have a negative view of Eriugena's thought, they present his system, reinforced with a great deal of quotations from the principal source, through which they keep Eriugena's philosophy alive, to the extent that their books become source for philosophers like Hegel when dealing with this medieval philosopher.