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From Dionysius to Eriugena. A Bridge for Voluntarism of "Divine Freedom" ?

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FROM DIONYSIUS TO ERIUGENA[1]
A BRIDGE FOR VOLUNTARISM
OR "DIVINE FREEDOM"?

John KING-FARLOW

RÉSUMÉ : Le style émouvant et les échos apparents d'un platonisme vraiment chrétien expliquent qu'on ait longtemps tenté d'identifier les œuvres du Pseudo-Denys l'Aéropagite à des écrits quasi autorisés d'un ami de saint Paul. Ce dernier aurait réellement vécu des siècles auparavant. Des siècles plus tard, le génie de Jean Scot Érigène puisait copieusement dans le Pseudo-Aéropagite, Platon, les Écritures, etc., produisant un système éblouissant de philosophie et de théologie. Si ces systèmes retrouvent maintenant l'intérêt moderne, leur caractère ontologi-quement moniste et leurs tentatives confuses de soutenir la toute-puissance de Dieu et autres perfections en absorbant leurs créatures, leur méritent la réprobation analytique. Le libre arbitre et le pluralisme ontologique appartiennent à la métaphysique de la Bible. On espère réintroduire les visions de deux hérétiques souvent négligés.

SUMMARY: The moving style and apparent echoes of truly Christian Platonism left the works of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite long tempting to identify with nearly authoritative writings by a friend of Saint Paul. The latter would have really lived centuries before. Centuries later the genius of John Scotus Eriugena drew copiously on the Pseudo-Areopagite, Plato, the Scriptures, etc., to provide a dazzling system of philosophy and theology. While these systems are now recovering modern interest, their ontologically Monist character and their confused attempts to uphold God's omnipotence and other perfections by absorbing creatures, merit

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1. Bibliographical Footnote: if one wishes to delve seriously into Eriugena's thought, the following books and articles prove to be among those of value. (A) John SCOTUS ERIUGENA, Periphyseon (division of nature), edited by John P. O'Meara and I.P. Sheldon-Williams; (Montréal and Washington: Bellarmin and Dumbarton Oaks, 1987). (B) Joannis SCOTI ERIUGENAE, (Oxonii; E Theatre Sheldoniano, Anno MDCLXXXI). (C) Johannis SCOTI ERIUGENAE, Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae), Liber Primus, editor I.P. Sheldon-Wil-liams, [Facing English and Latin texts with 47 pages of notes]. (Dublin Institute for advanced Studies, 1968) [Liber Secundus, 1972]. (D) John the SCOT, Periphyseon/On the Division of Nature; edited and translated by Myra L. Uhlfelder with summaries and comments by Jean L. Potter. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976 — includes 42 pages of Introduction; a complete translation of Book I; summaries and excerpts to cover Books II-V). (E) "Eriugena, John Scotus." Article by Eugene R. FAIRWEATHER. See Volume III, pp.44-45 of Paul Edwards, (editor), The Encyclopedia of Philosophy. (New York: MacMillan and Free Press, 1972 edition). (F) Dominic O'Meara, (editor), Neo-Platonism and Christian Thought. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982). See especially Chapters 7, 9 and 10. Footnote 11 cites further works on Pseudo-Dionysius and Eriugena.

analytical reproof. Free Will and ontological Pluralism belong with the metaphysics of the Bible. It is hoped to re-introduce the visions of two often neglected heretics.

INTRODUCTION

In his striking Aquinas Lecture of 1961, *Metaphysics and Historicity,* Emil Fackenheim declared:

> The concept of self-making occurs not only in a relatively brief period of modern metaphysics. It is basic to the whole metaphysical tradition which rivals the major Western tradition in metaphysics. The major tradition asserts that *operatio sequitur esse*. But there is also a minor tradition which asserts that, at least in the case of God, *esse sequitur operationem*. This tradition hails back possibly as far as to John Scotus Eriugena and, passing through such thinkers as Jacob Boehme and Schelling, finds a contemporary representative in Nicolas Berdyaev. In the major tradition, God is understood as Prime Being, and in substantial strands of that tradition as creating the world *ex nihilo*. In the minor tradition, God is understood as Pure Freedom who, creating *ex nihilo*, Himself passes *ex nihilo in aliquid*.[2]

In a footnote Fackenheim tells us to look at Aquinas' sayings at *Summa Theologiae* I, Q. 73 and at *Summa Contra Gentiles* II, 21 and III, 42 for paradigmatic statements of the major tradition. He adds: "For the principle *esse sequitur operationem* one can only cite with hesitation John Scotus Eriugena, *De Divisione Naturae* I, 72. ('*Deus ergo non erat, priusquam omnia faceret*'; '*cum audimus Deum omnia facere, nihil aliud debemus intelligere quam Deum in omnibus esse, hoc est, essentiam omnium subsistere.*')" But Fackenheim rapidly assures us that a typical saying of Boehme's like "*Die Freiheit, als das Nichts, hat in sich selber kein Wesen*," can be cited to illustrate the minor tradition without any hesitation. So, he believes, can Hegel's "the supreme form of Nought as a separate principle would be Freedom" be quoted with the same assurance.[3]

Both Eriugena's ninth century work and those of the writer on whom he draws so heavily, the pseudonymous 'Saint Dionysius the Areopagite' of a much earlier century, hold permanently challenging views which partly resemble Fackenheim's. For they say frequently, that God transcends all Essence and Existence; that He is not *a* being — let alone a being with a fixed nature; sometimes that His creating and His Creation belong with the very Sense and Reference of "God" in the minds of the wise. Fackenheim is quite right, however, to show himself to be wary of resting too much weight on Eriugena.

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2. Emil L. FACKENHEIM, *Metaphysics and Historicity: The Aquinas Lecture*, 1961. (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1961), pp. 29-30.

3. *Metaphysics and Historicity*, pp. 30-31.

One consequence will be stressed above all in this essay. It is that, even if these denials could not destroy Fackenheim's proposed link between God and Freedom, they belong more closely to the cluster of metaphysical ideas which have attracted the titles "Voluntarism" and "Religious Voluntarism."

First I shall seek to clarify the cluster concept of Voluntarism and the meanings of "Voluntarism" which are most relevant to a discussion of the Areopagite's *De Divinis Nominibus* and of the Scot's *De Divisione Naturae*, Books I and III. For these are the texts on which I concentrate. Last, there is a rough guide to the main body of the essay.

I. VOLUNTARISM FOR PURPOSES OF THIS STUDY

Richard Taylor offers a rather vague opening sentence on Voluntarism in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, VIII, 270: "The name 'Voluntarism' (from the Latin *Voluntas*, 'will') applies to any philosophical theory according to which the will is prior to or superior to the intellect or reason." Theological Voluntarists, Taylor holds, include Peter Damian, St. Anselm, Ockham, Kierkegaard and William James. For Taylor believes that each of these figures meets the necessary and sufficient conditions required by his definition. A more promising 'Family' approach to such a concept, stripped of Wittgensteinian mystification, suggests that collections of concerns worth calling *family concepts* do have some *necessary* conditions, but the necessary conditions' joint fulfillment need not add up to a *sufficient* condition for falling under the concept. Games are games whether or not there are any sets of necessary conditions for being a game which also are sufficient.[4]

In her excellent essay "William Ockham: Voluntarist or Naturalist?", Marilyn McCord Adams has shown, in effect, why Ockham should be construed as a kind of Voluntarist by some worthwhile criteria, but not by all.[5] She writes, apparently in the vein just advocated: "Usually in the secondary literature, Voluntarism is set against Naturalism. Both Voluntarist and Naturalist among medieval philosophers believe in mind and nature. But the former will tend to locate his baseline explanation of things in the will and its choices, whereas the latter will ground them in the nature of things. Unlike Aristotelian substances, Voluntarism and Naturalism admit of more of less: between these poles stretches a spectrum of opinions, and philosophers will be identified as one or the other relative to each other." (219) This is largely correct, but "relative to each other" might better be added to something broader like "and relative to many possible rational purposes for thinking and acting in context."

What I call the *Voluntarist Strand* in the Areopagite and the Scot involves allegiance to a form of Religious Voluntarism which usually required the following tenets:

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4. See John KING-FARLOW, *Self-Knowledge and Social Relations*, (New York: Science History Publications, 1978), pp. 145-155, for more systematic examination of these points about Definitions, Conditions and Family Resemblances.

5. See Adams' essay in John F. Wippel (editor), *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, (Washington, D.C.: 1987), pp. 221-247.

(i) The unique and unbounded, transcendentally powerful Will of God is that which alone can determine what wise and Biblically minded speakers must cal *morally good* or *morally evil*. God's Will is the sole arbiter of what is truly right or wrong.

(ii) Since the primary human account of "God" or "Name of God" must be given, as many wise believers have learned partly from Plato and his descendants, in terms of *GOODNESS*, therefore "Goodness" — (or, really "hyper-Goodness") — is the primary Name to be used in praising and worshipping God, or in speaking about the ultimate cause of Creation.

(iii) But modern believers could — at least sometimes — usefully look upon God's Goodness as resembling a logical construction out of His acts of unlimited will. (Someone today could revere most the Modern Masses, but accept that what he revers most is logical construction out of somewhat less ideal elements — modern human individuals who occupy certain kinds of positions in their societies).

(iv) In keeping with the usage and beliefs of many Religious Voluntarists, God's choices or acts of will may in good contexts be illuminatingly called *contingent*. This would be done to bring out the fact that God has no Essence, knows no limits (or even 'limits') at all, and the like. But, since He has neither Essence nor Existence, and since He is not *a* being or individual either, it is usually best to say that He transcends necessity and contingency no less than He transcends youth and age or being odd and being even. (It is like Rylean Category mistake to apply such modal predicates as contingency or necessity to *His* choices.) For His choices are neither contingent nor necessary. Because they are *God's* choices, the very choices of hyper-Goodness, it may be properly said that *if God* chooses and object, then that object will necessarily be good. Yet this does not necessitate that God must choose anything in particular.

The case has now to be made that one has good reason to attribute a sometimes obvious *Voluntarist* strand (of the sort already spelled out) to the Areopagite and the Scot *because:*

First, they both embrace and eschew some form of Pantheist Monism which leaves no room for independent standards of objective values;

Second, they at times tress *power* or *will* such weight and 'atmospheric intensity', as when they tell us how to think and speak of God:

Third, they treat God as transcending Existence, Essence, Values and Ideals, hence they speak of Him as more-than-good, hyper-Good, super-Good, hyper-Wise, and so on. God is said accordingly to be Himself beyond all limits and restrictions, yet the Judge of His creatures. Hence there is good reason to suppose that Dionysius and Eriugena are stating or implying in some passages that the all powerful One may choose arbitrarily ("freely") what is virtue and what is sin in a creature as He prefers;

Fourth, at times they so undermine the possibility of using logic in theology and making almost any intelligible statements about God, that humans look obliged to accept the Bible's commands just because they are the commands of Supreme Power;

Fifth, it is absurd to weaken one's power-worship in the case of celebrating and obeying the Almighty — as opposed to weakening one's dedication to *a* being like a powerful human leader. But expecting God to follow a (Cognitivist) set of moral laws, whether He wholly prefers this or not, *does* weaken the power-worship of the Almighty.

Such premises belong to what may well be valid, (if not necessarily a cogent), form of *Good Reasons* argument. For the premises are meant to supply very good reasons for saying that, if it is true in some passages that they endorse such assertions, then Dionysius and Eriugena have each exposed to us a keenly Voluntarist strand in their own reflections.

Guide to the Corpus Argumentorum: "Evidence for a Voluntarist Strand: Some Language in Common", begins with *examples* which will serve to illustrate important positions held by both. The sections "*Power*-Words and *Will*-Words", then "'*Hyper* (-)', '*Super* (-)', 'Nothing' and 'Divine Names'", both cover linguistic evidence for a Voluntarish strand's clear emergence in some areas of *De Divinis Nominibus* and other Dionysian writings, as well as in the Scot's *De Divisione Naturae*. The role of "hyper (-)", or "super(-)", terms for God, and the used of "Nothing" negatively and "Nothing" positively are considered as tools for Voluntarists. In my final section (on Logic and Ontology), I point out how easily certain doctrines about God's Transcendence may be used to extract God from the 'limits' of logic. Here is another theme with connections to the Voluntarist tradition.

II. CORPUS ARGUMENTORUM EVIDENCE
FOR A VOLUNTARIST STRAND: SOME SIMILAR TERMS

Fackenheim spoke of his minority tradition's going back "possibly as far as John Scotus Eriugena". But if this tradition stands a chance of going back to Eriugena, it may well stand an equal or greater chance of going back far longer in history — at least to Dionysius. In what follows I shall refer both to the section number of Eriugena (in the area of *De Divisione Naturae*, Book III, 619B-690B) and to the page number of John O'Meara's edition. These passages express Eriugena's sense of continuing in the steps of Dionysius.[6]

> *[I] 633A (250)*: "Therefore God is everything that truly is because He Himself makes things and is made in all things as Saint Dionysius the Areopagite says."
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> *[II] 640D-641A (252)*: "St. Dionysius the Areopagite also in his chapter on *The Perfect and the One* says, speaking of God: 'He is called the One because He is universally all things ... for there is not one of the things that exist that is not a participant of the One.'"
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> *[III] 644A-645A (263-265)*: "Hence the great Dionysius the Areopagite in his book, *The Celestial Hierarchy* ... in the fourth chapter, says: 'First of all, that is

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6. Also, John DILLON in "Origen's Doctrine of the Trinity and Some Later Neo-Platonic Theories" establishes the existence of very similar strings and themes in the writings of Origen and Proclus. See Dillon's paper in Dominic O'Meara (editor), *Neo-Platonish and Christian Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982). Note especially pp. 22-23.

a true saying that by universal goodness the superessential divinity has brought forth into being the essence of the things that are by substantiating them'. For this is the property of the Cause of all things: to call into communion with Himself to the limit of the capacity of each of the things that are. All things, therefore, participate in the Providence which flows forth from the Divinity that is super-essential and cause of all things that are." [Compare commentators' talk of "Ema-nationism".]

[IV] 644B (263): "And Dionysius declares this in another place too, saying: ... throughout the transcendence of His loving-kindness, God passes beyond Himself by His providential acts towards all things that are, and as it were cherishes (them) by His goodness and affection and love, and transcends them all and is separated from all things, yet condescends to be in all things in accordance with His mind-surpassing superessential and irreversible *dunamis [power]*."

There are but a very few examples among many that could have been chosen. Next, consider briefly the Oxford Sheldonian edition of the Latin text, (*Anno MDCLXXXI*), of *De Divisione Naturae* and of the Scot's translation from the Greek of Maximus' *Scholia in Gregorium Theologum*. This edition's Index notes eighteen general references in the *De Divisione Naturae* to Dionysius himself. It also lists one specific reference to the Areopagite's *In Amatoriis Hymnis*, twelve to his *De Divinis Nominibus*, one to his *Epistola ad Dorotheum*, one to his *Epistola as Gaium*, one to his *Epistola ad Titum*, six to his *De Hierarchia Celesti*, one to the *Epistola ad Hierotheum*, one to the *De Perfecto et Uno*, and three to the *De Symbolica Theologia*.

Thus there is a total of forty-five or more extant references by Eriugena to Dionysius and his works just in the best known of the Scot's writings. Moreover, glances at a few pages will show one how both philosophers refer to Neo-Platonic and other inspirational sources well before Dionysius — often the same inspirational sources. Fackenheim might have been able to trace embryos or evolutionary ancestors of his 'minor tradition' still further back than the early century, rather than stopping at the ninth.[7] (Origen's thoughts on God's and man's freedom are well worth sifting, for example. Origen cites Eriugena's beloved Porphyry, Origen in turn is cited by Eriugena, while Dionysius' *On the Divine Names*, Chapter II, 7 seems to repeat "*hoion anthè kai hyperousia phôta*" directly from *De Malorum Subsistentia* of Proclus.)

Example [III]'s final sentence shows our two philosophers' strand of common faith in God's utter *Transcendence*, as does [IV]. Examples [I], [II], [III], [IV], also reveal Dionysius' and Eriugena's tendency to be oscillating subtly towards themes suggestive of Divine Immanence, Pantheism and ontological Monism. These conflicting Monist and Pluralist strands need not always *complement* the tension between the Voluntarist and Cognitivist strands!

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7. One may consult Chapter 1, 545B, (twice), 589B, 589D (twice), 593A, 593C, 596B (twice), 596C, 596D, 637B, 681B, 681D, 693B, 701A, 701B, 705A (twice), 705C, 708B, 712A, 713B, 713D, 717C (twice), 720A (thrice), 724C, 725C, 728C, 729B, 729C (thrice), 732B, 733A, 733C, 736B (twice), 817C, 821B, 821C, 868B (twice), 889C (five times), 889D (nine times), 892A (eight times), 892B (five times), 892C (five times), 892D, 893A (five times), 893B (twice), 893C (three times), 908 (twice), 912D (twice), 937B ("omnipotent" — seven times), 953C, 956A, 969C (twice), 981D (last section — twice).

III. POWER-WORDS AND WILL-WORDS:
EVIDENCE FOR A VOLUNTARIST STRAND

If a serious case is to be made for a speaking of a Voluntarist strand in Dionysius' most influential work, the *De Divinis Nominibus*, the text must be given more chance to speak for itself. At 828A the author appears to tip his hand. He speaks of "the God Who is", and this, of course, can be a specially solemn 'Name' in the mind of a Biblical believer. The sentence runs: "The God Who is transcends everything because of His power." Next consider that, in a work of modest length, the Greek word "*dunamis*", ("power"), and close variants in formation or sense, occur around one hundred times. Beside so much use of "*dunamis*" and neighbouring uses of easily associated words like *will, command, preserve, protect, generate, subordinate, superior, notable*, etc., the term "Cause" occurs here dozens of times, often with the flavour of dominance in its 'Efficient' and 'Emanationist' meanings. Most occurrences help to emphasize God's unlimited Power and the exercise of His Powers. Talk of Creation as a *hierarchy* of many levels (at 680C and Elsewhere), then of God's *transcendence* of all creatures, essences, existence, levels, is followed by scores of terms extolling God's Powers. These are such terms as "Sun", "unlimited", "super-natural", "super-essential", "Nothing": one can sense a dramatic author's feeling of awe as he deploys such language. Such striking points about the Areopagite's choices of words suggest that from his table of similes, metaphors and epithets a lavish and distinctively Voluntaristic banquet could easily be served at moment's notice. (His verbiage has provided the right 'atmosphere' for the metaphysical shift.)

But a single strand may be found, even if it is dominant in this or that context, not to be only one among other important strands of Faith. "When we talk of yearning, whether this be in God or an angel, in the mind or spirit or nature, we should think of a unifying and co-mingling power, which moves the superior to provide for the sub-ordinate" (713A). This passage reveals both a Voluntarist strand *and* a rival strand of suggestion that God, (like good angels), must of necessity, being hyper-Good or good, always seek to do good things to the weaker and to establish a firm balance of justice. But the latter theme may well clash with the Areopagite's insistence that God is utterly boundless, beyond essence, etc. Why must God's hyper-Goodness seem to Dionysius to necessitate His doing what are good things according to Biblically trained, but fallible human speakers of Greek in Dionysius' era? Partly because the Areopagite strongly endorses what he takes to be Divine Revelation in the Bible. Partly because a Cognitivist strand of thinking is needed to make much sense of so many passages in the Bible and liturgy about Divine Justice or our "bounden duties" as human creatures.

Terms like "Will", "Power", and "Volition", etc. are richly abundant in Eriugena's *De Divisione Naturae*, Book III. Eriugena, as does Dionysius, offers a lucid form of morally Cognitivist strand in speaking of God's creative activity. How else, one must ask again, could such a treatise have been allowed to survive unburned so long — even when widely neglected? Eriugena still wishes to follow Dionysius with loyalty and awe, although there may be some reasons to speak of the author's Voluntarist

learnings' being more cautiously shown in *De Divisione Naturae*. Let us compare the occurrences of certain terms in Book III, 661C-691A, the end of the latter Book, with the Voluntarist passages chosen from the Areopagite.

In the *De Divinis Nominibus "boulèsis"*, sometimes a fair synonym for the Latin *"volitio"*, occurs only twice. But it does once at a very significant juncture, where clearly it is used to stress the importance of God's benevolent and loving *will*. In Eriugena we find that *"volitio"* ("will", "willing") and *"virtus"* ("strength and other manly qualities") contribute more importantly to the Voluntarist strand than other Latin terms like *"potestas"* or *"potentia"*. Nevertheless, Eriugena often uses expressions here that can be placed grammatically or semantically close to "Will" or "Power". One finds an abundance of cases, where a Will-word or Power-word is used in connection with God or created thing to put readers in a Voluntaristic mood — to create 'atmosphere'.[8]

It seems then, that, whatever his surface-apparent purposes in using such language during his long part of Book III, Eriugena manages to create "atmospheric" conditions in which a Voluntarist can often feel very much at home. His artistic and psychological success in reaching that end — whether or not he is fully conscious of his drift — is strikingly similar to what Areopagite achieved with more repetition and intensity in some stretches of *De Divinis Nominibus*.

Here are some intriguing words from Eriugena's translation of *In Gregorium Theologum* (Cap. II); "But what I had called *rationes*, the Holy Saint Dionysius the Areopagite teaches us to be called God's *praedestinationes* and *divinas voluntates*. [Two other holy men] say they are called *divinas voluntates* by the very Scriptures themselves ... I say that ... therefore, as God knows His own *voluntates*, so He has created the things which exist, from knowledge of what such things are and from will to make them".

The 'evidence' and 'data' from the two men's books surely support the theme that there are notably Voluntarists *strands* in Dionysius' and Eriugena's metaphysical sys-

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8. (i) "... the Divine *will which is limited by no law*" (III, 661D). "*Ultra omnem legem Divina Voluntas quae nulla lege concluditur: Est enim lex legum...*" [A keenly, but not uniquely Voluntarist tone can be discerned].
(ii) Declined cases of "*virtus*", translated as "Power" by O'Meara: 662A (*virtue*); 670B (*Virtuti*): 671A (*Virtutibus*); 677D; 679B; 680D; 681B; 682A; 687D [("the One is multiple *in power*")]; 690A. (Total: 11).
(iii) "subjected", "subject" 662D — (not used in connection with "God", but useful in conjuring up more associations with "compulsion", "limitation", etc.).
(iv) "... Divine *Will* which is *constrained* by no law" (670A).
(v) "The Divine Providence *can* — [has the *power* to] — administer all things not in one way, but in infinitely many" (670A).
(vi) *Vis* is specially strong term, the root of "violence" in English. "Seminal *force*" occurs at 671C; 671D; 672B (twice); 672C (5 times). [One use of "seminal force" is placed beside uses of "*vis feminalis*" and "*vis feminarum*"].
(vii) "Volitions": 673B (four times); 673C (twice); 673D (four times); 674A (four times); 674B; 674C (twice). (Total: 16).
(viii) "*Will*" ("voluntas"): 661D; 673B (three times); cf. "*willed*" (twice); 675B (five times *and* verb "will" "will" five times); (676B) (verb, twice); 676C (verb, once). [Total: 27].
(ix) "For He is *without beginning* and *without cause*, for before Him there is nothing to stand in relation to Him as *beginning or cause*, but He Himself *creates the nature* of all things of which He is Cause and Beginning" (688C). No objectively eternal values and purposes seem to bind Him.

tems. I certainly do not claim that they deserve to be called materials from premises in a crushingly cogent deductive argument with the conclusion: "They are both at all times out-and-out Voluntarists". Eriugena writes like an unreserved Cognitivist at III, 622B ff., of how correctly *De Divinis Nominibus* showed the nature of Divine Providence and the objective order of primodial causes: Supreme Goodness or Goodness-in-Itself; Essence; Life; Supreme and True Reason; the Supreme and True Intellect; the Divine Providence. The literary and psychological crafting may appear there, as often elsewhere in *De Divisione Naturae*, to sparkle with expressions of Cognitivism.

IV. 'HYPER (-)', 'SUPER (-)', 'NOTHING' AND DIVINE NAMES

One should consider next Dionysius' theological impact is so frequently using *negatives* and "hyper" and "super". One is struck by certain kinds of *noun-phrases* and *adjectival-phrases*, and by the *adverbial-phrases* that he tended to underplay. One may usefully try speaking for him by placing his favoured word "unified" before each of the expressions. This is to show that they are terms used *par excellence* by followers of Scripture to talk about the Godhead as a perfect unity. We may find Dionysius' stress on talk of "Unified Names" to be less helpful for the expression of the Divine Simplicity in our time, but a move that was very natural in his own. With profound consequences for medieval philosophers, not least those with a taste for mysticism or Saint Augustine's stress on the expression "the Divine Light", the Areopagite went on to give paradigmatic-sounding examples of 'Unified Names'. He proceeds not by giving a Euclidean type of definition, but by showering the devout reader with examples of hyper-language, such as "The Hyper-Good", "The Hyper-Infinite", "beyond knowing", "beyond-the-intelligible", "The Hyper-God", "The Hyper-Being", "The Transcendentally Wise", and others in great numbers. What seems clear is that these and similar terms must always be applied, according to Dionysius, to the Trinity taken as One. Other terms, which are not so 'unified', pertain uniquely to one Person of the Trinity.

Some light is shed on what Dionysius can strive to communicate by using the preposition or prepositional prefix "hyper (-)" ("over") to evoke some modest human understanding of "God is All-Transcendent". But some light is removed if Transcendence blocks all analogy or likeness with the familiar world.[9]

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9. One possible explanation among others of the apparent contradiction in Dionysius between encouraging ideas of *analogy*, then turning them away with "hyper" is this. J.L. AUSTIN speaks of *perlocutionary* uses of language ones main point is saying something is not conventional communication of the words' meaning, but achieving an unconventionally linked effect. Thus one says "I have a terrible headache" to *make* a loquacious visitor *stop talking*, or to make him aware of his *loquacity*; or to give someone else present a *secret "Pass-Word"*. Dionysius may believe to some extent that only overstatement of lack of analogy may fit the holy task of *overcoming idolatry and anthropocentrism* — such is the fallenness and misguidedness of humans. Something analogous to what he may want at times to *convey* by undermining his own case for analogy might be put like this: God is so minimally like us that no humanly intelligible predicate is consistently illuminating as a predicate, since God is without properties. Only certain complete and extended bodies of sentential utterance, offered in certain contexts, are usually going to inform us at all about God: the predicate is at best like a small nut in a complex machine for vehicles of theological communication. Compare the modern distinction between objectival and Substitional Quantification. In this case Dionysius is like one who meets Gottlob Frege's famous saying that only in the context of a sentence does a work

Let us put our faith for a moment in a lexicon of Liddell and Scott. Often in Homer and Greeks up to Herodotus, "*hyper*" works with a genitive noun-phrase to convey that if X is placed on a *level* above Y's *level* then that X is in a state of *rest*. Yet it is also used in the same period to suggest that X is moving above Y.[10]

Given that there is such a heady semantic mixture for a native speaker of ancient Greek, many so called "unifying numbers" of the Areopagite could be said to activate a host of disambiguations all at once. God is the best possible person among persons we know. God is like such a person, but has risen to a barely comprehensible level of excellence; God has risen beyond understandable excellence. God is so far above human assessment or measurement in any respect that traditionally bowing down and worshipping Him is imperative or *worship* is a primitive, ignorant waste of time. God is utterly greater that the greatest number. God is so far above us in *powers* and consequent *authority* that He may order us to change our number system, to swallow contradictions, to change our words' meanings back and forth as He pleases from His unreachable throne.

One of the most valuable 'Names' for God is thus taken by the Areopagite and the Scot to be "Nothing" — as opposed to "nothing". At III, p.680, Eriugena's *Alumnus* asks for an explanation of Sacred Theology's use of "Nothing" as a name for God. *Nutritor* replies by referring first to an aspect "*ineffabilem et incomprehensibilem Divinae Naturae*", second to God's "*inaccessibilemque claritatem omnibus intelectibus*". God is *super*essential and *super*natural. (Note *super-*'s very mixed grammatical role as prepositional prefix): "*Dum ergo incomprehensibilis intelligitur, per excellentiam NIHILUM non immerito vocitatur*". "How is it, then, that we can talk of this transcendent Nothing of No-Thing", someone would ask? "Revelation, grace, faith, and above all biblical Revelation", Dionysius and Eriugena would reply. It seems, then, that God is a No-thing of which we can begin to talk because of His *powers* to cause many things to happen in our lives: we should be grateful, not skeptical. This is an understandable outcome of adopting unduly harsh or Voluntarist assumptions, then taking excessive recourse to "*hyper* (-)" or "*super* (-)", and finally using "Transcendence" as the ultimate trump card in theological discussions.

V. LOGIC AND ONTOLOGY: ADDED PERPLEXITIES

Much of Book I of *De Divisione Naturae*, crowded with quotations from Dionysius, is devoted to matters of Aristotelian Logic and its applicability or inapplicability to God, Goodness itself, formless matter, Genus, Species and natural individuals. (Compare *De Divinis Nominibus*, Chapter I). Considerable space is given to aspects of Aristotelian categories. Here are some of the more notable conclusions: (i) "All the

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have meaning with the inspirational, perlocutionary reply that only in the context of pious life, Divine light and a thrice-read, five-volume book will many a theological word contribute to proper understanding for humans.

10. Or it can mean that X lies *geographically beyond* Y *in some significant direction* when X and Y are both found on the surface of the earth. More generally X can be said to be acting *for the sake of* Y, for Y's *protection*, for Y's *best interests*. Compare further: *causes* of Y, *reasons* for Y ...

categories are in *Ousia* when considered in themselves" (479A). (ii) "... none of the aforesaid ten categories which Aristotle defined ... is accessible to the bodily senses. For *Ousia* is incorporeal ... while the other nine categories are about or within it" (478C). (iii) "God is none of the things that are predicated literally of Him, as it is just to predicate of God all things that are, but by a kind of *metaphor* because they derive from Him" (480B). (iv) "... the essence of all existing things most fit to have their subject terms associated literally with predicates is local and temporal ..." (481C). (v) "Nobody can define *Ousia* itself or say what it is" (487B). "... only this definition can be predicated of God: that He is He who is More-than-Being". (487B)"

A major problem is set up for the metaphorical-analogical account of Divine Names and human predicates which underpins many of the thoughts in the quotations which have just been given. At 459B, near the very start of Book I, Nutritor had already stated: "If therefore the aforesaid Divine Names are confronted by other names directly opposed to them, the things which are properly signified by them must also of necessity be understood to have contrary opposites to them; and therefore they cannot be properly predicated of God, to Whom nothing is opposed, and with Whom nothing is found to be eternal which differs from Him by nature". The remedy which the Scot puts forward in the same paragraph is to allow that what we really should have in mind when we attribute something to God is a *super*-something. We should use the way of denial and say: "He is good and is not good. So He is not good."

As has been seen, Eriugena now feels happy to exempt God from the Aristotelian Law of Contradiction and the Law of Excluded Middle both when ordinary predicates are metaphorically applied to "God" *and* when hyper-predicates beyond the grasp of secular logicians are introduced. And God is said at times to be One with such curious partners, like Creation, that the Law of Identity can easily obtain and easily break down as well. For God, we are told, can be Form and not-Form, Formlessness or Not-Formlessness, but also be neither one or the other, but only Super-Form. And this is a curious whole- or part-identity for a Deity to be assigned.

At *Categories* 13b 20-35 Aristotle offers two remarks which Dionysius and Eriugena might have served themselves by heeding. On the one hand, the Law of Excluded Middle (like that of Contradiction) carries something resembling Austinian Felicity Conditions: only pairs of contradictories, not contrary propositions may be used as the non-logical kinds of place-holders. On the other hand, the Felicity Conditions also require that some kind of *existential* presupposition be met by the intended referent of the subject term. Aristotle gives the example that "Socrates is ill or Socrates is not-ill" only serves a speaker and listener well if such a person as Socrates *exists* at the relevant time. Thus the way of saving theology's supposedly tenuous spark of meaning with hyper-predicates may be pursued in order to extract the Deity and His subject terms from the demeaning 'limits of Logic', for "God", like "formless matter", cannot be gripped by its Laws. And if metaphorical usage is much too loose or vague, or is brought close to being unintelligible, then the way of metaphor may also serve to spring "God" and Names of God from any inferential trap.

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Such a solution, however, is likely to appeal mainly to those in the tradition of partly anti-logical forms of Religious Voluntarism associated with the reasoning of Peter Damian and Descartes.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Emil Fackenheim sets out rather hesitantly to trace back to Eriugena a *minor tradition* — but supposedly *more valuable* tradition — within Philosophia Perennis. This is a tradition of stressing God's Freedom and Self-Making as his primary features and as those about which humans should meditate most of all. Fackenheim appears vulnerable on several accounts. His hesitation to include Eriugena in the tradition shows that he overlooks or quite surprisingly underestimates the abundant textual support he received from *De Divisione Naturae*. More important, he fails to recognize obvious reasons for following his favoured tradition back into pockets of much earlier Hellenistic thinking — among primarily Biblical believers.

There is a matter more worthy of comments, for purposes of reflection on Philosophia Perennis, (and not just on Boehme's or Eriugena's theological and mystical ancestors). It is the failure of Fackenheim to distinguish conflicting Voluntarist and Cognitivist strands in Eriugena's thinking and to look for similar conflicts in other contributors to his *minor tradition*. Again considerations of God, Meaning, and Logic must be raised in assessing the successors. For what appears in 'Dionysius the Areopagite' may recur as late as in Hegel, and even in some more recent, partly Hegelian believers, who would not really wish to embrace *all* conflicts as dialectically creative. One should finally emphasize that a strongly Voluntarist and meta-ethically Non-Cognitivist strand in Dionysius, Eriugena or some heirs to such a minor tradition is likely to bring harm to the simply popular Faith which they advocate. Such of 'Divine Freedom' and 'Divine Self-Making without Restraints' may serve to undermine people's trust in the relevance of a 'hyper-Good' God to human life. It may undercut any trust in alleged reasons for loving Him and His creatures. And so these ways of speaking about the Divine and the Divine God may eventually serve to disintegration of human commitment to pursuing anything at all that is held to be Good in Itself, to be worth loving for its own sake. Not only holiness, kindness or justice, but even our own human flourishing may seem to have no claims against unfettered caprice.[11] Thank God for the major tradition of those like Saint Thomas.[12]

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11. In pursuing this research I have greatly appreciated the advice and encouragement of my colleague, Martin Tweedale.

12. Those who feel a growing fascination for the Areopagite and the Scot may find it useful to note that contributors to O'MEARA's *Neo-Platonism and Christian Thought* — see Footnote 1 — mention the utility of a number of less accessible works on Pseudo-Dionysius and Eriugena. Especially useful among them are A. VAN DEN DAELE, *Indices Pseudo-Dionysiani*, (Louvain, 1941); R. ROQUES, *L'univers dionyséen*, (Paris, 1954), and *Libres sentiers vers l'érigénisme*, (Rome, 1975); J.M. HORNUS, "Les recherches récentes sur le Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite", *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie religieuses*, 35 (1955), pp. 404-448 and 41 (1961), pp. 22-27; I.P. SHELDON-WILLIAMS, "Henads and Angels; Proclus and the ps.-Dionysius", *Studia Patristica*, (Berlin, 1972), pp. 65-71; N. CAPPUYNS, *Jean Scot Erigène*, (Paris, 1933); T. GREGORY, *Giovianni Scoto Eriugena*, (Florence, 1963); H. BETT, *Johannes Scotus Eriugena*, (New York, 1964); J. O'MEARA and L. BIELER, (editors), *The Mind of Eriugena*, (Dublin, 1973); S. GERSCH, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, (Leyden, 1978); E. JEANEAU, *Quatre thèmes Erigéniens*, (Montréal, 1978).