

[1]. The theological opus of John Scotus truly did not meet with much favour. Not only did the end of the Carolingian era cause his works to be forgotten; a censure on the part of the Church authorities also cast a shadow over him. In fact, John Scotus represents a radical Platonism that sometimes seems to approach a pantheistic vision, even though his personal subjective intentions were always orthodox.¹

[2]. Authority proceeds from true reason, but reason certainly does not proceed from authority. For every authority which is not upheld by true reason is seen to be weak, whereas true reason is kept firm and immutable by her own powers and does not require to be confirmed by the assent of any authority. For it seems to me that true authority is nothing else but the truth that has been discovered by the power of reason and set down in writing by the Holy Fathers for the use of posterity. (*Periphyseon* [= P] I.513B)²

[3]. *Nutritor*. As I frequently ponder [*Saepe mihi cogitanti*] and, so far as my talents allow, ever more carefully investigate the fact that the first and fundamental division of all things which either can be grasped by the mind or lie beyond its grasp is into those that are and those that are not, there comes to mind as a general term for them all what in Greek is called *Φύσις* and in Latin *Natura*. Or do you think otherwise? *Alumnus*. No, I agree. For I too, when I enter upon the path of reasoning, find that this is so. (P I.441A)

[4]. I. Nature which creates and is not created (God as Alpha)
II. Nature which creates and is created (creation in the Word)
III. Nature which does not create and is created (temporal-spatial creation)
IV. Nature which does not create and is not created (God as Omega) (cf. P I.441B-442A)

[5]. The difficulty of this part of our theme [the Return (*reditus*) to God], the conflict and clash of different interpretations, I find so formidable that in comparison to it the first three books seem like a smooth sea upon which, because of the calmness of the waves, readers could sail without fear of shipwreck, steering a safe course. Now, however, we enter upon a voyage where the course has to be picked from the mass of tortuous digressions, where we have to climb the steeps of obscure doctrines, encounter the region of the Syrtes [cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* IV.41], that is to say, the dangers of the currents of unfamiliar teaching, ever in immediate danger of shipwreck in the obscurity of the subtlest intellects, which like concealed rocks may suddenly split our vessel. Nevertheless, with the mercy of God as our captain and steersman and our sails filled with the propitious wind of his spirit, we shall pick through all these dangers the true and safe course, and reach the harbour which we seek, free and unhurt after a smooth voyage. (P IV.743C-744A)

[6]. *Dialektikè* did not arise from human contrivances; but it was first implanted in the nature of things by the maker of all the arts which are truly so-called, and was later discovered there by the sages, and employed for its usefulness toward their diligent scrutiny of reality. (P IV.748D-749A)

[7]. Far from anything preventing us, reason herself, in my opinion (if we could but listen to her more carefully), insists that we should understand the relation which exists between the Sacred Texts and reality. For there are many ways, indeed an infinite number, of interpreting the Scriptures, just as in one and the same feather of a peacock and even in one and the same point of a tiny portion of the same feather, we see a marvellously beautiful variety of innumerable colours. Indeed the nature of things themselves draws the intellect to this [realization]. (P IV.749C)

[8]. Let us spread sails, then, and set out to sea. For Reason, not inexperienced in these waters, fearing neither the threats of the waves nor windings nor the Syrtes nor rocks, shall speed our course: indeed, she finds it sweeter to exercise her skill in the hidden straits of the Ocean of Divinity than idly to bask in the smooth and open waters, where she cannot display her power. For “*in the sweat of her brow is she to get her bread*” [Gen. 3:19] – so is she commanded by the word of God, and to till the field of Holy Scripture, prolific as it is of thorns and thistles, that is to give herself to the narrow density of divine understandings, and to follow with the unflagging steps of investigation the study of wisdom, undaunted by the seeming impassability of the path, “*until she find the place of the Lord, the tabernacle of the God of Jacob*,” [Ps. 131:5] that is to say, until the grace of God leading and helping and aiding and moving her by patient and assiduous study of the Holy Scriptures, she may return and reach again that which in the Fall of the First Man she had lost,

¹ Benedict XVI, “General Audience, Saint Peter’s Square, Wednesday, 10 June 2009”:

https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20090610.html

² John Scotus Eriugena, *Periphyseon (The Division of Nature)*, trans. I.P. Sheldon-Williams, rev. J.J. O’Meara (Montreal: 1987).

the contemplation of Truth; and reaching it she may love it, and loving it she may abide in it, and abiding in it she may there find her rest. (P IV.744A-B)

[9]. [Maximus] says that theophany is effected from no other cause but God, but that it happens as a result of the condescension of the Word, that is, of the only begotten Son Who is the Wisdom of the Father, downwards, as it were, upon human nature which was created and purified by Him, and of the exaltation upwards of human nature to the aforesaid Word by divine love. By condescension I mean here not that which is already taken place through the Incarnation but that which is brought about by theosis, that is to say, the deification of the creature. So from this condescension of the Wisdom of God upon human nature through grace, and the exaltation of the same nature to that same Wisdom through love, theophany is brought about. (P I.449A, modified; cf. III.678B-679A)

[10]. For everything that is understood and sensed is nothing else but the apparition of what is not apparent, the manifestation of the hidden, the affirmation of the negated, the comprehension of the incomprehensible [...], the body of the bodiless, the essence of the superessential, the form of the formless, the measure of the measureless [...], the materialization of the spiritual (*spiritualis incarnatio*), the visibility of the invisible. [...] And we can acquire a hint of this from examples from our own nature. For our own intellect too, although in itself it is invisible and incomprehensible, yet becomes both manifest and comprehensible by certain signs when it is materialized in sounds and letters [...]. And there are many other examples that in a marvelous and ineffable way can be evoked from the nature that was made in the image of God. But these are enough to illustrate by example the diffusion of the Divine Goodness through all things from the highest downwards, that is throughout the universe that was established by it; and this diffusion both makes all things and is made in all things and is all things. (P III.633A-D)

[11]. Not that even now God is not all in all, but after the sin of human nature and its expulsion from the abode of paradise, when, that is, it was thrust down from the height of the spiritual life and knowledge of the most clear wisdom into the deepest darkness of ignorance, no one unless illuminated by divine grace and rapt with Paul into the height of the divine mysteries can see with the light of true understanding how God is all in all. (P III.683C)

[12]. Visual forms, whether in the nature of things or in the holy sacraments of the Holy Scriptures, are not revealed to us for their own sake, but are rather the embodiment [*imaginatio*] of invisible beauty. By means of these forms divine providence recalls the human mind to the pure and invisible beauty of the Truth itself, which loves all, and toward which all that loves moves, whether consciously or unconsciously. (*Expositiones in Ierarchiam coelestem* [= IC], ed. J. Barbet, ch. I, 510-518)³

[13]. O Lord Jesus, I ask of you no other reward, no other happiness, no other delight than to understand, purely and without any error of false speculation, your words which were inspired by your Holy Spirit. This is the sum of bliss for me and the end of perfect contemplation: for even the purest rational soul will find nothing beyond this, since there is nothing beyond this. As you are sought nowhere else more suitably than in your words, so you are found nowhere else more clearly than in them. There you live, and there you bring those who seek and love you; there you prepare for your elect spiritual banquets of true knowledge and, passing through [*transiens*], you minister to them.

And what, O Lord, is that passage [*transitus*] of yours but an ascent through the infinite steps of your contemplation? – for you ceaselessly make your passage [*transitum*] within the intellects of those who seek and find you. You are sought by them always, and are found always, and are always not found. You are found indeed in your theophanies, in which in many different ways, as though in certain mirrors, you encounter the minds of those who understand you in the way in which you allow yourself to be understood – not what you are, but what you are not, and that you are. But you are not found in your superessentiality, by which you surpass [*transis*] and excel all intellect wishing and ascending to comprehend you. You give to your followers your presence in an ineffable manner of appearing; you pass beyond [*transis*] them by the incomprehensible height and infinity of your being. (P V.1010B-D, modified)

[14]. It is not only in parables, but in many other scriptural passages as well that the divine nectar flows forth in forms of speech of this kind, and the contemplations of the mystical discourses afford an easy way of interpretation to those who study them. We can see that the text of the holy prophets has not one but many meanings, not only from the use of very many transitions (*transitus*) – through periods and sentences and subdivisions – from various senses to various others and from those back again to the same through hidden and frequent returns. Error or extreme difficulty of interpretation are experienced by those who adopt a single species of exposition without allowing for transition to various allegories [*transitu in diuersas figuraciones*]. For the text of Holy Scripture is all interrelated, and is a tissue of indirect and oblique allusions worthy of Daedalus. But the Holy Spirit did not ordain this to spite our understanding – let no man think that – but to exercise it and make it worthy of the reward of its effort and ingenuity: the reward of those who labour in the study of the Holy Scripture, which is a pure and perfect understanding. (P V.1010A-B)

³ W. Beierwaltes, “*Negati affirmatio*: Or the World as Metaphor”, *Dionysius* 1 (1977), 127-159.