The Platonist Christian cosmology of Origen, Augustine, and Eriugena

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The Hellenic philosopher Plato presented a cosmogony in his work *Timaeus* that would exercise immense influence on Christian thought. According to Plato there is a fundamental distinction between the eternal or intelligible world and the physical or sensible world. The intelligible world is immutable and the sphere of being, while the sensible world is mutable and the sphere of becoming. The universe was created by a god, or more precisely a demiurge, who fashioned the physical world according to the forms of the eternal world. Since the demiurge also created a world-soul to animate the world, the world is a living being. This latter teaching of Plato stands in clear opposition to the materialistic view of the earth as a lifeless object, to be exploited and polluted and its life-forms dominated and exterminated by humankind.

The Platonist cosmogony was transmitted to the early Christian Church through the Jewish thinker Philo of Alexandria, who strove to reconcile Hebrew theology with Hellenic philosophy. This influence also pertains to Philo's teaching on the divine Word, or Logos, who holds together the various levels of being that comprise the cosmic hierarchy (Chadwick 1967). In the New Testament the Logos was identified with Jesus Christ by St John the Evangelist, thereby laying the foundation for the Logos Christology of the early Church.

In this essay we will discuss the teaching on the creation of the world and humankind by three of the greatest Christian thinkers of the first millennium. Two of them came from North Africa and one from Ireland; two wrote in Latin and one in Greek. All three were devout Christians who would after their lifetimes be misunderstood and/or condemned. We will also touch upon the compatibilty of their thought, if any, with evolutionary theory.

Origen

One of the most profound thinkers of the early Church was the much-maligned Origen (ca. 185-254), the founding father of Christian systematic theology. Such was his intellectual brilliance that at the age of eighteen he succeeded Clement of Alexandria as head of the great North African city's catechetical school. Years later Origen was expelled from Alexandria by

the local patriarch for having been ordained as priest without patriarchal permission. Thereupon he relocated to Caesarea Maritima, where during the persecutions under the Emperor Decius he was tortured for days on end without renouncing his faith, being almost 70 years old at the time. Origen never recovered from the injuries inflicted on him and died within two years of his ordeal.

Origen was said to have written or dictated several thousand works. This included the first systematic exposition of Christian doctrine in a voluminous work called *Peri Archon* (*On First Principles*). It was also intended as a comprehensive refutation of the Gnostic dualism of Marcion and his followers, being the main threat to orthodox Christianity at the time. In all his works Origen strove to establish scriptural support for his views, interpreting the Bible by means of the allegorical method of which he was a pioneer. He is regarded as the founder of the Alexandrian theological tradition of the early Church (Walker 1959).

Origen was much influenced by the Hellenic philosophers Pythagoras, Plato and Plotinus. As a good Platonist, Origen accepts that the sensible world is a reflection of the intelligible world, both being created by God on account of his goodness. Origen held further that the Word, or Logos, is eternally generated from God and subordinate to God. Through the Logos, which is the world soul, God creates the divine Spirit. The Logos is the mediator between the Creator and created nature (Chadwick 1967). We thus find a descending hierarchy of Father, Son and Spirit in Origen's theology, similar to the Neo-Platonist hierarchy of the One, the Logos and the World Soul. The Alexandrian master would later be condemned for this subordinationist teaching, but in his defence it should be pointed out that the doctrine of the equality of the three divine hypostases was only defined in 325, a century after Origen's lifetime, during the first ecumenical council at Nicaea.

More orthodox is Origen's insistence that everything outside God was created by Him. Therefore, there is no uncreated matter as taught by the Hellenic philosophers - only God is uncreated. Origen became the first Christian thinker to unequivocally teach the doctrine of creation out of nothing (Latin *creatio ex nihilo*), more so than any of his predecessors (with the possible exception of Irenaeus). He emphasised that God creates the world not out of relative non-being, but out of absolute non-being (Chadwick 1967). However, Origen believed in the eternity of created being, since it would be against the nature of the divine goodness to be inactive (*On First Principles*, III.5.3). This aspect of his thought would later

be amended by the Cappadocian theologians in the Greek Church and Augustine in the Latin Church, with their distinction between the eternity of God and the temporality of creation.

For Origen the goodness of God is paradigmatic. Because there is no injustice in the divine nature, God had in the beginning created every soul in a purely spiritual state and all on an equal footing. However, some of the souls later assumed material bodies due to a misuse of their free will. In other words, all intellectual natures (souls) were created equal, and their subsequent inequality is due to differences in volition. Hence we find a hierarchy of created intellects (souls) consisting of angels, stars (believed to be animated), men, and demons (*On First Principles*, I.7). Interestingly, Origen believed that this hierarchy of souls is not fixed, since their use of free will might one day cause a reversal of roles. The human destiny is not to perfect an inherent divine nature (which Origen rejected), but to realise an image of God (Moore 2001).

Since there was a time before the present age when souls exercised their freedom of will, Origen had to posit his famous teaching on the pre-existence of souls. This became another aspect of his thought to be condemned three centuries later. However, some commentators have suggested that Origen might have been misunderstood in this regard (Bouteneff 2008). The reference to 'pre-existent souls' could better be understood as referring to the foreknowledge and providence of God. In such a case Origen would find himself on orthodox theological ground.

Origen taught further that although the spiritual is logically prior to the material, matter was created simultaneously with the spiritual as its vehicle. It is clear that he does not share the Platonist hostility towards the material world, including the human body. The latter should not be left behind by the soul as in Platonism, but should be transformed into a spiritual body. Salvation therefore entails a creative engagement with the material sphere (Moore 2001). For Origen matter is not undifferentiated but adapted to spiritual conditions. A distinction is made between solid matter that serves lower intellects such as humans, and subtle matter that serves more perfect spirits such as angels (*On First Principles*, II.2.2). This reference to subtle matter is reminiscent of St Paul's reference to the spiritualised bodies in the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15), so that we again find Origen standing on solid scriptural grounds in this regard.

Regarding the creation of humankind, in some of his texts Origen distinguished between creation (*poiesis*) and fashioning (*plasis*), in Genesis 1:26-27 and 2:7 respectively. Paradise and its flora were understood allegorically and not historically: it can signify the moral realm where humans can choose the good, or a divine place where Adam and Eve dwelt until their exile. Origen saw Adam as both a historical person with a progeny and the name of humankind in general (Bouteneff 2008).

We thus see in Origen a brilliant philosophical mind coupled with a devout Christian soul, striving to bring the manifold and sometimes contradictory elements of his thought and faith into harmony. His lasting contribution to the development of Christian theology and Biblical studies is beyond dispute. Much of his thought became appropriated in modified form by the Cappadocian theologians, especially by Gregory of Nyssa. And yet Origen's errors have ever since his condemnation at the fifth ecumenical council in 553 outweighed his contributions in the eyes of many in the Church.

Augustine

The greatest among the Latin Church fathers was undoubtedly Augustine, bishop of Hippo in North Africa (354-430). His spiritual autobiography, the *Confessions*, is widely regarded as one of the spiritual treasures of humankind. In it he traces his movement from a classical Roman education through libertinism, Manichaeism and Platonism to the Christian faith. Augustine's magnum opus is *On the City of God*, on which he worked over many years in later life. In this monumental work the distinction between the City of God and the City of man was presented to the Christian world. As the Latin father defined it, the heavenly city was created by love of God extending to contempt of self, and the earthly city by love of self extending to contempt of God (*City of God* XIV, 28).

Following in Philo of Alexandria's footsteps, Augustine taught that the divine Word (Logos) contains the Ideas as divine thoughts (Knuuttila 2001). Furthermore, the Latin father held that the providence and will of God are identical with the essence of God. In this regard he differed fundamentally from the Greek fathers, who taught a distinction between the transcendent divine essence and the immanent divine energies. The latter include the divine will and providence. Therefore, in the Augustinian view biological evolution would imply not only mutability of the archetypes, but of the divine essence itself. And if God is mutable, He

is not eternal, and therefore not God (Gabriel 1997). According to this reasoning, evolution has been seen by many Christians to be incompatible with the existence of God.

In addition to this theological issue, Augustine also committed an exegetical error that would be responsible for the opposition to evolution in much of Western Christianity. According to the apocryphal book *Wisdom of Solomon* (18:1), God created all things jointly (Greek *koine*), in other words linked together. However, the Latin father translated the text as *simul*, meaning simultaneously. Due to his authoritative translation it became axiomatic in Western Christian theology that God created all things at the same time (Kuraev 2001).

Most of Augustine's cosmology can be found in his three commentaries on Genesis, the last three books of the *Confessions*, and Books 11 and 12 of *The City of God*. He continues the classical Christian teaching that God created both the spiritual world (including angels) and the visible world (including incarnate souls) out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). This implies that ontologically new beings come into existence when God creates (Knuuttila 2001). The Latin father had a more developed view of creation from nothing than Origen. It recognised the total freedom of God in the creative act, as the Russian Orthodox theologian Georges Florovsky commented. Time and contingency are therefore integral to creation, but not to God in Himself. For Augustine the created order is wholly real, albeit with a nature that is different from God (Tataryn 2000).

God is the only Creator, Augustine insisted, since created beings cannot create out of nothing. However, since all created beings are created out of nothing, they display an inborn compulsion to return to nothingness. This striving towards non-being is none other than evil, which has no substance. An evil will could not exist in an evil nature, the Latin father reasons, but in a nature that is both good and mutable. Evil arises not from the created nature of humankind, but from the fact that humans are created out of nothing (*City of God*, X11.7). It is therefore absurd to blame God for the existence of evil.

The opening verses of Genesis held a lasting fascination for Augustine, so that he devoted more attention to it than anything else in the Bible. In the *Confessions* (11.3-12.13) the Latin father gives an extensive exegesis of Genesis 1:1-2. How did God create? By his word; but there was no physical voice or time yet, and so this means that God created by his eternal Word (as we read in the prologue of the Gospel of John). Therefore, 'in the beginning' means

'in the co-eternal Word' (Williams 2001). Immediately thereafter Genesis mentions the Spirit moving over the waters. In this way the whole Divine Trinity is involved in the work of creation (*Confessions* 13:5).

Augustine interprets the statement that God created the heaven and the earth (Genesis 1:1) as follows: 'heaven' refers to the heaven of heavens, while 'earth' refers to the whole visible creation, including the skies. The heaven of heavens is the intelligible nature that ceaselessly contemplates God. Although mutable, it exists outside of time. This intelligible nature is also called created wisdom, and is to be distinguished from the uncreated Wisdom through which God creates. In other words, the expression 'heaven and earth' refers to the spiritual created order and unformed matter out of which visible matter is formed, respectively (*Confessions* 12:15, 17). We can discern echoes of Plato's distinction between the intelligible and sensible spheres in this view, although the Latin father does not subscribe to the Neo-Platonist doctrine of creation by emanation.

The statement 'The earth was invisible and unformed' is read by Augustine to refer to the formless matter that God forms. This unformed matter is timeless, because time implies change in form. There is no mention of 'day' when God created the heaven of heavens and unformed matter, since neither creation was or is temporal. Time begins when God starts to form matter (Williams 2001). Among all created things, formless matter comes closest to nothingness (Moran 1989). Therefore, we could represent Augustine's view of creation as an ontological flow in the following way: God → nothingness → unformed matter (outside time) → both intelligible world (outside time) and sensible world (in time).

The whole Book 13 of the *Confessions* is a mystical and allegorical reading of Genesis 1:2-31. In common with the worldview of his time, Augustine believed that less than 6 000 years had passed since the creation of the world (*City of God* XII.11). This timescale is clearly incompatible with an evolutionary understanding of life. Augustine viewed the Biblical account of the six days of creation as a metaphor to assist the human imagination. In his interpretation, God created simultaneously all actualised things and through 'seminal reasons' the conditions for all things to come until the end of the world. This entails not only the unfolding of natural kinds, but also of miraculous deviations. God is therefore the creator of every new being (Knuuttila 2001).

In the beginning God created only one single man, so that the entire human species descended from him would be bound together by similarity of nature as well as bonds of kinship. All humans were contained seminally in Adam, though their individual forms were not yet existent (*City of God* XII.22, XIII.14, XXII.24). Augustine's anthropology clearly shows Platonic influence, although not as much as with Origen. The Latin father taught that the human soul is created immortal, and as such is independent of the body and superior to it. The soul has a superior mental faculty called the intellect, which should be distinguished from the Greek Patristic concept of the spiritual intellect (*nous*). Augustine's intellectual soul knows things in their essences, since the human mind contains copies of the immutable spiritual essences according to which everything is made. The choice that we have is between the lower reason (*ratio*) and clinging to the natural forms, or the higher reason (*intelligentia*) and contemplating the eternal essences (Sherrard 1959).

Against the Gnostic and Manichean condemnation of the physical body, Augustine drew a distinction between the body (*corpus*) and the flesh (*caro*). The body refers to human nature as created by God, while the flesh represents fallen human nature. It is therefore not the body that is evil, but the defective human will (*City of God* XIV.3, 5). For Augustine the natural relation between the body and the soul demonstrates the order and structure of God's creation. This orderliness pervades all of creation, but it has been corrupted by human sin (Tataryn 2000).

Only God is being itself and the highest good, Augustine insisted; created beings are less existent, and are more or less good. Nonetheless, God saw the creation as very good, as we read in Genesis 3:1. This implies that all singular beings were good, and the whole formed a good and beautiful order (*Enchiridion* 3, 9-10). After the fall, suffering occurs due to the corruptible human condition. Animal suffering is the price to be paid for the harmonious whole with its great variety of beings (*City of God* XI.22, XII.4). Interestingly, this aspect of Augustine's thought is more conducive to an evolutionary understanding, in which random genetic mutations cause both new biological forms and debilitating illnesses to appear. The Latin father also taught that the struggle for life among animals should serve as an example of how we should struggle for our spiritual salvation (Kuraev 2001).

Augustine held that Paradise was both spiritual and corporeal, reflecting the double nature of humankind (*City of God* XIV, 11). When Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise, they

parented Cain and Abel. These two brothers represent the beginnings of the City of man and the City of God, respectively. Cain was a citizen of this world, while Abel was a pilgrim in this world. The citizens of the earthly city are produced by a sinful nature, while the citizens of the heavenly city are produced by grace, which redeems nature from sin (*City of God* XV, 1, 2). In a brilliant distinction Augustine writes that the good make use of this world in order to enjoy God, while the evil wish to make use of God in order to enjoy this world (*City of God* XV, 7).

Furthermore, in Book 11 of the *Confessions* the Latin father gave the first psychological account of time from a Christian perspective, anticipating Husserl's phenomenological time by 15 centuries. This important meditation shows the influence of Aristotle and the Stoics, with Augustine reasoning as follows: firstly, time is an infinitely divisible continuum; secondly, there is no time if there is no motion and no souls; and yet time and motion are distinct. The measurement of time is based on the fact that the human consciousness anticipates the future, remembers the past, and is aware of the present through perception. In other words, there are three times: memory, experience, and expectation (*Confessions* 11:20). Therefore time exists, in this sense, as a distension of the soul (*distentio animi*). Augustine's view of time diverges from the Neo-Platonist one: for Plotinus, the world-soul spreading out (Greek *diastasis*) involves time, but for the Latin father it is the human soul involving time (Knuutila 2001). In the twentieth century the Russian Orthodox thinker Sergei Bulgakov declared that Augustine's analysis of time remains unsurpassed (Tataryn 2000).

Through his voluminous doctrinal and polemical writings Augustine exerted a vast influence in the Western Christian world. This was the case not only in the Catholic Church, but also among some of the leading Protestant reformers, notably Luther and Calvin. In the Orthodox Church this Latin father has been venerated as a saint from early times, although he has not enjoyed the same theological standing as some of the Greek fathers of the Church.

Eriugena

Around the year 845 the enigmatic Irish scholar John Scottus Eriugena (ca. 810-877) was invited to teach at the court of the Frankish king Charles the Bald. The first historical reference to Eriugena dates from around 851 when he published *De divina praedestinatione*, in which he argued against the doctrine of double predestination that was being propagated by

the Saxon monk Gottschalk. His treatise would soon be condemned by two local church councils for being too ‘philosophical’, but thanks to royal patronage Eriugena was permitted to continue his teaching activities. However, this hostility from the Latin Church (which at that time was still in full communion with the Christian East) was a portent of things to come for the liberal arts master.

Following his pioneering translations of Greek theological texts into Latin (including the complete Dionysian corpus), Eriugena constructed a comprehensive cosmology in his masterwork, the *Periphyseon*. It is subtitled ‘On the division of nature’ and consists of five books. Therein he postulated a fourfold division of nature that encompasses all that is and that is not (Book I, 441-442). Building on earlier schemes suggested by Augustine, Marius Victorinus and Maximus the Confessor, the Irishman divides the whole of reality into that nature which is uncreated and creates (God as beginning of all things), that nature which is created and creates (the primordial causes), that nature which is created and does not create (the effects of the causes), and finally that nature which is uncreated and does not create (God as end of all things). All of created nature, that is the primordial causes and their visible effects, is seen as a theophany, or a manifestation of God (Book I, 449). This cosmology holds positive ecological implications, since violations of the natural world could be seen as misdeeds against God.

Flowing throughout this scheme is a constantly shifting interaction of being and non-being. In fact, Eriugena provided the most profound study of non-being in Western thought until perhaps the nineteenth century (Moran 1989). He suggested that the same reality could be seen as being from one perspective and as non-being from another. The difference between being and non-being, and between God and the world, in this way becomes a matter of perspective rather than one of substance. Perhaps not surprisingly, this perceived subversion of the boundary between Creator and creature led to the Irish philosopher being posthumously condemned by the Catholic Church for pantheistic tendencies.

In his panoramic survey of reality Eriugena consistently employed the Neo-Platonist scheme of procession (*exitus*) and return (*reditus*): all things proceed from God and return to God. This double movement should not be seen as separate processes, but as constantly interacting. The link between the movement of all things out of God and the return of all things to God is

Christ (Book II, 526). We may notice here how the Irishman adapted 'pagan' thought according to his Christian beliefs.

The cosmological system of Eriugena could be understood as a transposition of the doctrines of the Greek fathers upon a basis of Augustinian thought (Lossky 1991). In this system the divine Ideas are the first created principles by which God creates the universe. The Ideas are therefore outside the divine essence, but like Augustine the Irish philosopher tries to maintain their substantial character, so that the Ideas become the first created essences. Working within the Latin-speaking Carolingian church, Eriugena was unfamiliar with the fundamental distinction made by Greek theologians between the essence and the energies of God, both categories being uncreated. Lossky contends that Eriugena therefore attempted to safeguard the transcendence of the uncreated divine essence by classifying the primordial causes as created.

Of more relevance for our present purpose is the extended commentary on the *Hexaemeron* (Six Days) that Eriugena provides in Books II to IV of the *Periphyseon*. In a refreshing departure from literalism, the six days of creation are viewed as prophetic meditations rather than earthly days. The statement 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth' is interpreted as referring to the creation of the archetypes, or primordial causes as Eriugena calls them, in the divine Logos. These are the prototypes of all intelligible ('heaven') and sensible ('earth') things (Book II, 546-548). The scriptural references to the earth being empty and void and to darkness upon the deep are understood by Eriugena as referring to the primordial causes that cannot be fathomed by the human intellect (Book II, 549-541).

It is clear that the Irish thinker is continuing the allegorical approach of Philo, Origen and Augustine to the creation narratives. When Genesis states that the Spirit of God was hovering above the waters, it is read as referring to the Holy Spirit that proceeds from the Father and is elevated above all created essences. Remarkably, Eriugena rejected the Franco-Latin innovation that the Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son*, preferring the Greek teaching on a single procession, which he strove to buttress with arguments from logic (Book II, 601-615). The Spirit distributes the primordial causes into the various genera, species, and individuals of both heavenly and sensible things.

In Book III (61-189) of the *Periphyseon* we find an extended discussion of the nothing (*nihil*) out of which God creates. It has been described as the most sophisticated concept of non-being in early medieval thought (Moran 1989). Eriugena taught that God created formless matter from nothing and created the world from formless matter, as Augustine had done. The 'pagan philosophers' are criticised for viewing formless matter as co-eternal with God. It is wrong to see the world as a type of filling between God on the one side and formless matter on the other hand, the Irishman held, since matter is 'folded up' in the primordial causes and through them in God (Book III, 636-637). This could be seen as an anticipation of the concept of the 'within' of matter that the great proponent of Christian evolutionary thought, Teilhard de Chardin, would much later propose.

Eriugena continues his commentary on the creative days from two to six, describing the creation by God of the visible universe. The divine command, 'Let there be light', signifies the creation of both angelic and human nature (Book IV, 780-781). The second day focuses on the reasons (or causes) of all things, the primal elements, and composite bodies. The third day refers to the distinction between essential form and formed matter. The fourth day describes the procession of the celestial bodies from their primordial causes, situated as they are in infinite space. On the fifth day God's creation of the soul is depicted, as found among marine animals and birds. The sixth day entails the creation of the terrestrial animals, each consisting of body and soul. For Eriugena this creation includes humankind, being closer to the mammals than to other animals (Book IV, 744) – a taxonomically correct interpretation.

Although God commanded the water and the earth to bring forth life, they do not do so by themselves. Eriugena correctly remarked that 'it is by the operation of the life force, which is called nutritive, in accordance with the laws and principles which were implanted in those elements, that the potency of seeds, which they [i.e. water and earth] contain, bursts forth from the secret recesses of creation through the genera and forms into the different species of grasses, twigs, and animals.' The Irish philosopher holds that there is a general nature created by God in which all things participate. 'From this nature corporeal creatures are derived and can be likened to streams which, issuing from one all-providing source, pursue their different courses through subterranean channels until they break out above ground in the different forms of the individual objects of nature' (O'Meara 1988). This understanding of the unfolding of life on Earth is eminently compatible with an evolutionary process.

We encounter an admirable love for animals in Eriugena's writing. He rejected the opinion of Basil the Great that the souls of animals die with their bodies, arguing that the Greek father had a pedagogic purpose for simple people in this regard, namely that an animal-like life can lead to the loss of the soul (Carabine 2000). He held further that humans differ from other mammals only in the possession of intellect and reason. In fact, the intelligence of more noble animals was seen by him as an indication of a measure of participation in the divine life (Gardner 1993). What a contrast this sensitivity towards our animal relatives represents with those over the ages who have engaged in activities such as trophy hunting, whale hunting, fur farming, fox hunting, bear baiting, and similar outrages against God's creation!

In Book IV of the *Periphyseon* an extensive anthropology appears when Eriugena contemplates the creation of humankind. It comprises an allegorical exegesis of the first three chapters of Genesis, drawing on the earlier commentaries of Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, and Augustine. Interestingly, he sees the sixth day of creation as the beginning of the return to God, while the first five days represented the procession from God (Otten 1991). In other words, Genesis teaches the return of human nature to its source, and not only the creation thereof. Human nature consists of two triads, reflecting the Divine Trinity: the first triad is that of essence, power, and operation; and the second that of intellect, reason, and inner perception (Book II, 568). The reflection of the Divine Trinity in human nature should in no way be seen as an identity of the two. Eriugena emphasised that only God is self-existent, while humans are created by God (O'Meara 1988).

Another interesting parallel with Teilhard's thought is to be found in Eriugena's suggestion that God creates through a five-fold process. First, He gives existence to inanimate objects such as rocks. In the case of plants, life is added to existence. In addition to having existence and life, irrational animals are given perception. To humans and angels, God gives all of this as well as intellect (Book II, 530, 580). This sequence could be viewed as agreeing with Teilhard's teaching of gradually increasing consciousness as neural complexity increases. Human beings therefore contain the whole of the created universe (Book IV, 774). It is clear that the Irish philosopher held an elevated view of human nature, but not one that allowed for irresponsible human exploitation of the natural world.

Eriugena reads the two accounts of the creation of humankind in Genesis chapters 1 and 2 as referring to creation as part of the animal kingdom first, followed by creation in the image and

likeness of God (Book IV, 750). Human nature is therefore both animal-like in the material sense and heavenly in the spiritual sense (Book IV, 735-736). The second creation had to occur after the Fall, commencing with the division of human nature into two genders. In contrast to the traditional Christian view, the Irish thinker held that there was no lapse of time between these two creations (Book IV, 807). This implies that creation and Fall coincided for humans. An further implication of this view is that our animal nature should not be viewed as punishment for sin (Book IV, 763).

Since humans are the only animals created in the divine image, Eriugena continues, we have been chosen by God to rule over His creation (Book IV, 768-769). The divine command to Adam to name all the animals (Genesis 2:19) is interpreted as indication that the concept of nature, as found in the human mind, is the substance of nature itself – just as the substance of the whole created order is to be found in the divine mind (Book IV, 769). We again see the close relationship between humankind and the natural world in this view, which would eventually be confirmed by the biological axiom that all living beings on Earth are genetically related.

From the late ninth century onwards Eriugena exercised considerable influence within Latin Christianity, notably through the *Periphyseon* and his translation of the Dionysian corpus. However, with the condemnation of the *Periphyseon* for 'heresy' by the Catholic Church in 1210 and again in 1225, its author was consigned to obscurity. When the English scholar Thomas Gale dared to print the *Periphyseon* for the first time (in 1681 at Oxford), the work was promptly consigned to the Index of banned books, where it would remain until the second Vatican council almost 300 years later. However, during the nineteenth century, a full millennium after his lifetime, Eriugena was rediscovered by German, French, and Russian scholars. Finally, in the closing decades of the twentieth century and into the new millennium he has been reclaimed with justified pride by Irish scholars such as John O'Meara, Mary Brennan, Dermot Moran, James McEvoy, Deirdre Carabine, and Catherine Kavanagh.

In summary, we may state that the Christian Platonist cosmology entails a duality of divine creation: God creates the intelligible world of archetypes directly and the sensible world of phenomena indirectly. This duality also pertains to time, in that the creation of the archetypes takes place outside time while their unfolding takes place within time. The world is therefore

both eternal and created: eternal from the point of view of the archetypes and created from the point of view of the phenomena.

In evolutionary terms, the Platonist Christian view of creation implies that the diversity of life on Earth is due to the unfolding in space-time of the divine ideas. From an evolutionary viewpoint there are arguments for and against this cosmology. On the one hand, if a gradual transformation of species into new forms actually does occur, as postulated by both classical Darwinism and Neo-Darwinism, then the evolutionary process could not be seen as based on archetypes, since the latter are by definition immutable. On the other hand, if new species are formed relatively fast, as suggested by the lack of transitional forms and the sudden appearance of new species in the fossil record, then the evolutionary process could reasonably be viewed as the temporal unfolding of eternal archetypes. The theory of punctuated equilibrium as first proposed by the American scholars Stephen Jay Gould and Niles Eldridge in 1972 might well be compatible with such an understanding, and thus with Christian Platonism.

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