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## Lost Simplicity: Eriugena on sexual difference

The fact of sexual difference, one of the most common characteristics of our human condition, strangely enough has always given rise to perplexity and wondering. Man<sup>1</sup> does not exist: there is male or female, both equally man and yet so different, opposed to each other and yet so attracted by each other that they desire to suppress their difference in unification. This wondering appears in many myths which «explain» this phenomenon by telling how the *sexus*, that is the «cutting» or «splitting» (for «sexus» is derived from «secare») originated. It is remarkable that most of these stories assume that the first humans were originally not sexually differentiated, but were either sexless or androgynous beings. Well known is the humorous story that Aristophanes tells in Plato's *Symposium* about the original men who were doubly as strong as we are now, for they had two sets of arms and legs, two faces, and also two sets of sexual organs<sup>2</sup>. They challenged Zeus, who decided to weaken them by cutting them in two. Actual man is the result of this cutting: each of us there-

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the text I will retain the term «man» for human regardless of gender. I am well aware that in English this term is also used in contradistinction to wo-man. However for the sake of argument the traditional ambiguity of the term serves well.

<sup>2</sup> See *Symp.* 189A-193D. Note in passing that the myth also explains variant forms of sexual attraction, such as homosexuality.

fore passionately tries to rediscover his original half and thence to restore his original unity. *Eros* therefore is this impossible desire to reunite our «ancient nature»: it is the pursuit of «wholeness»<sup>3</sup>.

Hearing this and similar stories a sober mind might react by observing that sexual difference in man needs no particular explanation. He would wonder about our wonder. After all since «birds do it and bees do it», why not man? Why should human animals be an exception to a universal biological law? Is the difference between a male and a female element not characteristic of all living beings, even in the realm of plants, present as a duality necessary for procreation? A naturalistic-minded philosopher such as Aristotle therefore has no fundamental questions about the why of this gender difference in man, although he describes extensively and in a detailed manner the anatomy and function of this difference in his biological works. He also deduces from this difference, and particularly from the inherent natural inequality between the male and female, the active and the receptive, important anthropological, ethico-political and even metaphysical consequences<sup>4</sup>. But the fact itself that man is sexually differentiated never becomes an object of philosophical inquiry. Wonder about this difference arises only in those philosophers who consider man not primarily from a biological point of view, but define him by those properties which distinguish him from the animals: his consciousness, his thinking and self-determination — in short his *psyche*. For if, as Plato seems to suggest, man is ultimately identical with his soul, then his sexual behavior seems to be an alien element not belonging to his essence. Is it not striking, even frightening, how similar men become to the animals in their sexual behavior, so much so that they have the feeling that they lose therein their own dignity and freedom? For that reason sexual activities are always accompanied by feelings of shame, however natural they may

<sup>3</sup> In his poem «Among School Children» Yeats refers to this Platonic myth to recall times past when he and the woman he loved were «...blent into a sphere from youthful sympathy, or else, to alter Plato's parable, into the yolk and white of the one shell». I owe this reference to Mrs. Maria Desmond who read my text and was so kind to polish my English.

<sup>4</sup> On the metaphysical meaning of the gender difference, see *Metaph.* I, 6 988 a 5-9.

be. The attempts of cynical philosophers to refute this *in actu* remained futile<sup>5</sup>. From such a «Platonic» perspective it is reasonable to ask why a particular soul is incarnated in a male body and another in a female (not to mention animal!) body. An interesting example of such speculation is the last section of the *Timaeus*. In this dialogue Plato describes extensively the formation of the human body and soul, and examines the diverse functions of the soul and their relation to the respective bodily organs. Yet, in this long discussion sexuality and the organs required for it are not mentioned. They are only described at the very end of the dialogue, in an appendix, when the question is raised about the degeneration of human nature and the birth of female humans. For at the moment of the first incarnation of the soul only male beings were formed. Or, rather they were not yet males, since the male would only be able to exist in opposition to the as yet non-existent female. One could say that the first humans were just «men» in the ambiguous sense which the term has in English («man» being similar to «human», while at the same time being a term used in contradistinction to «wo-man»).

In this contribution I would like to present the views on sexual difference of a medieval philosopher who definitely stands in this Platonic tradition: John Eriugena. In his monumental work *Periphyseon* which deals with the division and the unification of all natures, we find elaborate speculation on the division of the sexes in the Fourth Book<sup>6</sup>. Eriugena develops his anthropology by way of an interpretation of the first chapters of *Genesis* where we find the story of the creation of man, of paradise and fall. In the «intelligible order» of the narration, the world and everything which it contains is created in a period of six days. On the sixth day, however, two different acts of creation must be distinguished. God creates first all the animals on the earth: «God made every kind of wild beast, every kind

<sup>5</sup> Cf. AUGUSTINE, *De civitate Dei*, XIV, 20.

<sup>6</sup> On this topic, see E. JEAUNEAU, «La division des sexes chez Grégoire de Nysse et chez Jean Scot Erigène», in *Eriugena. Studien zu seinen Quellen*, ed. W. BEIERWALTES, Heidelberg, 1980, pp.33-54. For *Periphyseon*, I-III we quote from the modern edition of I. SHELDON-WILLIAMS, Dublin, 1968, 1972, 1981. For Book IV en V we use the edition of H. J. FLOSS in *Patrologia latina* 122.

of cattle, and every kind of land reptile». This act of creation is concluded with the phrase «God saw that it was good» which on the other five days had marked the end of the day and the transition to a new day. But this is not yet the end of the sixth day, because there follows another, final act of creation: «God created man in the image of himself». What is the sense of this special creation of man? For man seems to have been created twice, first as included within the genus of animals, and second in the likeness of God.

Christian authors have examined again and again the sense in which man can be considered to be in the image or likeness of God. We all know from experience the wretched situation of mankind: we are subject to disease, corruption and death, and are taken by the most hideous passions, full of villainy and cruelty. Considering this state of mankind, it is not easy to see in him an image of God and of His eternal perfection. Is man as a whole, both body and soul, an image of God, or is it only in his spiritual nature that he images God? In his discussion of this question Eriugena follows closely the arguments of Gregory of Nyssa in his treatise «On the constitution of man», a work he had translated himself into Latin, giving it the eloquent title *De imagine*<sup>7</sup>. According to Gregory the whole man cannot be considered an image of God, but only his intelligence and his power of self-determination and freedom which spring from his intelligence. These are precisely the characteristics which set man apart from the animals. Moreover, as we have noticed, on the sixth day two acts of creation are clearly distinguished: first God creates the animals of every kind; next he makes man in his image. As is evident from the sequence of this text the animal aspect of man cannot be subsumed under his character as an image. For man, insofar as he is animal, is included in the genus of animals in the first act of creation. The second act of creation concerns only those aspects by which man transcends and dominates the animals. For it is said: «Let us make man in our own image *and let them be masters* of the

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<sup>7</sup> The treatise of Gregory is mostly quoted under the title *De opificio hominis* (ed. J. LÖENKLAU, Basel, 1567, PL 44). The translation of Eriugena has been edited by M. CAPPUYNS: «Le 'De imagine' de Grégoire de Nyssa traduit par Jean Scot Eri-gène» in *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale*, 32 (1965), pp. 205-262.

animals». Now it is only through his intelligence and freedom that man dominates the animal kingdom. Therefore we must restrict the creation in God's image to the spiritual nature of man.

However, in this interpretation it becomes extremely difficult to understand why in the presentation of the creation of man the fact of being made «male and female» is immediately connected with being made in the «image of God». For it is said: «God created man in the image of himself, male and female he created them». Some modern exegetes have risked the hypothesis that in this verse there may be traces of a primitive androgyne myth. Precisely by being made male and female is man an image of God. However that may be, this interpretation is diametrically opposed to that of Gregory and Eriugena. In their view the fact of being made male or female must be entirely dissociated from being made in the image of God: *alienum est ab his quae de deo intelliguntur*<sup>8</sup>. For it is impossible that human beings would resemble God exactly in that aspect in which they are most alike irrational animals. Moreover, if all sexual determination is excluded from God (sexuality is in the Old Testament even seen as a specific character of created things), how could humans then in their sexual differences be in his image?

In order to escape from this exegetical difficulty, Eriugena follows Gregory in distinguishing a double creation of man: there is the creation in God's image without sexual difference, and there is the creation in the likeness of irrational animals which includes the gender split. To this second creation belongs not only sexuality, but also all other *negative* aspects of our animal nature<sup>9</sup>: procreation, the fact that our bodies need clothes and food, rest and sleep, and the fact

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<sup>8</sup>IV, 795 B (quotation from Gregory). Cf. 799 A-B: «Quae divisio omnino divinae naturae imaginis et similitudinis expers est». «Imago autem Dei non est masculus neque femina; ista enim divisio naturae propter peccatum facta est» (896 B). «Imago Dei omni sexu libera est et absoluta» (846 A).

<sup>9</sup>The distinction between first and second creation does not simply correspond to the distinction between rational and animal nature. The animal nature is included in the first creation of man (for man is by definition an *animal rationale*). Cf. IV, 763A: «non enim peccatum de homine fecit animal, sed natura». However it is an animality without any of the negative aspects which are connected to the physical earthly body as we now possess it, subject to procreation and corruption.

that they will eventually disintegrate (perhaps we moderns too often tend to forget the prison and chains of our body!)<sup>10</sup>. The distinction between two modes and two moments of creation can be traced back to the text of the *Genesis* story. For after the creation on the sixth day and the divine rest on the seventh, we find in chapter two another story of the creation of man. This second account of the creation of man reads: «God formed man out of the clay of the earth. Then he breathed into his face the breath of life, and thus man became a living soul.» Regarding this text Eriugena exclaims: «How is that which is created in the image of God formed out of the clay of the earth? And how could the same thing be said of him, 'man became a living soul' as was said of the other beasts, which had been brought forth from the earth? Have we not here good reasons to believe that there were two creations of man? For first it is written: 'And God created man in His own image; in the image of God created He him'. This is the first creation, in which there is no mention of the clay of the earth nor of the living soul. But then follows a second creation which began with the division of nature into two sexes as a punishment for transgression: 'Male and female', he says, 'created He them'. First, by the use of the singular, the unity of human nature before the Fall is indicated: 'in the image of God created He *him*', but then the plural is used with reference to the division of that nature after the Fall: 'male and female created He *them*'»<sup>11</sup>.

This is a clear and powerful interpretation, though it manipulates the text somewhat. Yet, even modern exegetes will admit that in the composition of the first chapters of *Genesis* one may find some arguments to justify the hypothesis of a twofold creation. Since the pioneering studies of J. Wellhausen, exegetes have been examining how the Pentateuch has been constructed out of different «docu-

<sup>10</sup> Cf. 807 D-808A: «animale quidem corpus atque terrenum et corruptibile, sexus uterque ex masculo et femina, bestiarum similitudine procreationis multiplicatio, indigentia cibi et potus indumentique, incrementa et decrementa corporis, somni ac vigiliarum alterna inevitabilisque necessitas, et similia, quibus omnibus humana natura, si non peccaret, omnino libera maneret, quemadmodum libera futura est».

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Periph.* IV, 833C-834A. We use the translation of John O'MEARA, *Periphyseon. The Division of Nature*. Montréal-Washington, 1987, p. 491.

ments» or layers of tradition. The solemn hymn on the creation of the world in six days and the sabbath on the seventh belongs to the tradition of the so-called Sacerdotal text, which runs until *Gen. 2:4a*. From *Gen. 2:4b* on begins the mythical account of Paradise, the formation of man and woman and their Fall, which seems to belong to a much older tradition: the texts of the so-called Jahwist. The two textual traditions are interwoven, but there remain some doublets, particularly concerning the creation of man, which seems still to occur two times: a first time in the creation in God's image on the sixth day, and a second time when man is fashioned from clay. This double creation was rightly noticed by Eriugena, and before him by Gregory and Philo of Alexandria. Therefore, he was not so wrong in claiming a scriptural foundation for his doctrine of the double creation.

However, for the most important point of his argument, the introduction of sexual difference, Eriugena radically violated the biblical text. In the *Genesis*, sexuality is not only introduced in the second story of creation, which deals with the formation of Adam out of the clay and the creation of Eve out of the rib of Adam, but is already present in the first account, the creation of man on the sixth day. If then one wants to talk about two creations, one cannot affirm that the first was asexual and purely spiritual, whereas the second was sexually differentiated and animal. In both accounts of creation, that of the Jahwist and that of the sacerdotal writer, the phenomenon of sexuality is presented in a very positive way. The distinction between and the union of the sexes are God's own work and they are fully approved of and praised by him. In the biblical text there is no connection whatsoever between gender difference and the Fall, which moreover only occurs later in the story after Eve had been created. For Eriugena, on the contrary, the creation of the animal nature of man involving all kinds of pain and sorrow, of which sexual behaviour is the most evident manifestation, is a *superadictum*, an appendix, a *supermachinatio*, which does not belong to the original plan God had when creating man<sup>12</sup>. Therefore,

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<sup>12</sup> On the meaning of the term «supermachinari» see E. JEAUNEAU, art. cit., p. 47.

all of the negative aspects of our human being, including sexuality, will disappear at the end of time in the general restoration of nature, when all creatures will return to God. At that time human nature will return to the form which was made in the image of God.

Eriugena finds many arguments in the biblical narrative to prove his thesis that sexuality is connected to the fallen state. Is it not striking that the first event which is told after Adam and Eve were chased from paradise, is the following: «The man had intercourse with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain» (4, 1)? This intercourse could only happen *extra paradisum*, after Adam and Eve had been clothed with «skins of animals», that is, after an animal nature had been added to cover the interior man created in God's image. Someone, however, might object that sexuality was required for the procreation of mankind as a «necessitas naturae». Eriugena is not shaken by this objection: let him know that the multiplication of mankind would also have been possible without sexual intercourse, as is clear from the example of the angels, who from the first moment of their creation proceeded to the determined number of their class! «If man had not sinned, no one would be born through the intercourse of the sexes nor from seed, but just as the angelic essence while remaining one is at once and together without temporal interval multiplied into infinite myriads, so too human nature would have at once and together broken forth into the number fore-known to its Creator alone»<sup>13</sup>.

Against this negative view of sexual difference, one might quote other passages from *Genesis*, in particular the compassionate words with which God introduces the creation of Eve from Adam: «it is not good that man should be alone. I will make him a help-mate». Are these words not proof that God himself created woman as a helpmate to man out of sympathy and compassion? And did he not bless their intercourse, and even order it? Of course, Eriugena cannot deny that God himself took the initiative for the creation of Eve, but as he explains, it seems that the creator had been forced by the perverse desire of man himself. The divine words should not be understood as a sign of benevolence, whereby the creator tries to

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. 799B and I013 A-B.

perfect his initial project of creation by adding a mate for man. Rather, these words manifest the divine irony: «So man thinks that it is not good for him to be alone (that is to say: a simple and perfect nature without he division of his nature into the sexes). Well, let us give him what he wants, a companion like unto him through whom he can perform what he longs to do, in earthy coupling as do the beasts»<sup>14</sup>.

For Eriugena then there is an evident connection between sexuality and evil or sin: it belongs to all the negative aspects of our animality which make us suffer, and experience pain, sorrow and decay. However, this connection with evil should not be misinterpreted. It does not mean that the second creation is the work of an evil divinity, whereas only the first creation, that of our spiritual nature, may be attributed to a good God. Both Eriugena and Gregory emphatically reject any Manichean explanation of the duality of man. The animal irrational nature with its sexuality has been created by God himself, and even blessed and ordered by him: «be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth»<sup>15</sup>. But how is it possible to reconcile the fact that this sexual difference has been created by God himself, and hence is good as are all His effects, with Eriugena's thesis that it is evil and linked to sin as an effect and punishment of sin? Eriugena solves this difficulty in an ingenious way. God had foreseen from all eternity that man would abuse his freedom and sin, and thus fall from his status of equality with the angels to the level of beasts. Therefore, God's creation of man was such that he allowed for the consequences of sin even before sin had occurred. In this He is like a masterful engineer who, foreseeing possible problems with his design, builds remedies into his system. With his infallible foreknowledge, God in creating man at the same time created the consequences of sin even

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. IV, 846B: «Quod etiam divina ironia apertissime declarat quae dicit: 'Non est bonum hominem esse solum, faciamus ei adiutorium simile'. Ac si aperte diceret: non videtur homini, quem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram fecimus, bonum esse solum, hoc est simplicem atque perfectum sine divisione naturae in sexus».

<sup>15</sup> Cf. IV, 846D-847A: «We do not attack wedlock as long as it is a legitimate union for the purpose of procreation (...). Indeed we praise these institutions since they are permitted and ordained by God».

before man had sinned<sup>16</sup>. The sexualised animal body of man was created together (*concreatum*) and at the same time as his spiritual nature, but as something external to his true essence, added to it as a remedy and a penance for sin.

However, one could exclaim, is it not unfair and unjust that even before man actually sinned God created in him something which was essentially a consequence of sin, which thus should only have been present after sin occurred? In his answer to this objection Eriugena argues that it is ridiculous to take the *status ante peccatum* and *post peccatum* as two historically distinguished periods of time. He first reminds his pupil that in God himself there is no distinction between a 'before' and an 'after', between past and future, for «to Him all things are at once present». Therefore, our expressions «before sin» and «after sin» only demonstrate «the multiplicity of our thought processes which is due to the fact that we are still subject to temporal conditions». But this distinction between «ante» and «post» makes no sense in God, as to God «the *foreknowledge* of sin and the *consequence* of sin itself are contemporaneous»<sup>17</sup>. He did not first create man in his image and add the sexual body later, but He created man at once as he now actually exists including all aspects of his nature. Nevertheless, it is possible to distinguish in this whole man those aspects which are directly intended by the creator, and those aspects which are created on account of the transgression which was foreknown by God. But it is absurd to situate these two aspects in a sequence of time, as if God created the image first, and only later the rest<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. IV, 807B-C: «Quoniam igitur de sua praescientia, quae falli non potest, certissimus erat, etiam, priusquam homo peccaret, peccati consequentia in homine et cum homine simul concreavit». 799B-C: «Quoniam vero praevidit Deus..., supermachinatus est alterum multiplicationis humanae naturae modum».

<sup>17</sup> 808A-B: «Nam cum dicimus ante et post peccatum, cogitationum nostrarum mutabilitatem monstramus, dum adhuc temporibus subdimur. Deo autem simul erant et peccati praescientia eiusque consequentia. Homini siquidem, non Deo, futurum erat peccatum».

<sup>18</sup> Cf. 807C: «eorum quae simul in homine facta sunt, quaedam quidem propter divinam bonitatem, ut sunt illa in quibus imago conditoris intelligitur, quaedam vero propter delictum praescitum atque certissime futurum».

Even if we take the perspective of man and his history, it is impossible to distinguish between two periods *ante* and *post peccatum*, as if man had first lived for some time in Paradise, and afterwards having sinned was banned from Paradise. For as Eriugena argues, from the very first moment of his existence man abused his freedom and sinned (although he could have avoided sinning). So there was no temporal period during which the first man inhabited Paradise<sup>19</sup>. He immediately deserted the path of truth through the perversion of his will, and so was expelled from Paradise. For Eriugena the moment of creation coincides in fact with the moment of the first sin, although in principle both moments must be sharply distinguished: the act of creation is not the origin of sin! This is not only true in the case of men, for the devil as well, although created an angel, was from the very first moment of his existence perverted. But if there has never been an historical period *ante peccatum*, then one is free to say that our sexualised animality, although principally «following upon sin», was created together with sin as a punishment for sin.

Using all his hermeneutical skills, with arguments both from the text and from the patristic tradition, Eriugena finally convinces his student that Paradise could never be considered as an historical situation, as the primitive age of mankind<sup>20</sup>. For as we have seen, man did fall from the very beginning of his existence, as did the devil, without ever tasting the eternal blessedness now enjoyed by the angels. The praise and exaltation of the life of Paradise before sin must refer to a future life which we may expect at the end of time. Paradise is not an archeo-logical state but a eschato-logical description of the ultimate destination of human nature when no longer perverted by sin: «Therefore that praise of the life of man in Paradise must refer rather to the life that would have been his if he had remained obedient»<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. 808C: «Ac per hoc datur intelligi hominem peccato numquam caruisse».

<sup>20</sup> Cf. 809A: «Quod etiam nullo temporali spatio primos homines fuisse in paradiso».

<sup>21</sup> Cf. 809B: «plus laus illa vitae hominis in paradiso referenda est ad futuram eius vitam, si obediens permaneret, quam ad peractam, quae solummodo inchoaverat, nec umquam steterat».

With this position Eriugena comes into direct conflict with Augustine, whose views had otherwise influenced him deeply. Augustine had defended the thesis that the first men had lived in Paradise for a certain period of time before trespassing God's commandment. Further, he had insisted that in this blessed state the first humans had already an animal body and also had sexual intercourse with each other. «It is certain that male and female were created in the beginning exactly as we see and know them now, as human beings of different sex. (...) The view that there would have been no procreation in Paradise if there had been no sin amounts to this: that man had to sin to fill up the number of saints»<sup>22</sup>. Thus, according to Augustine sexual difference and sexual behaviour have as such nothing to do with sin: sexual difference has been created not as a punishment, but as a divine gift to mankind. However, through sin the experience of sexuality has been radically changed. Sexual intercourse has since been characterised by *concupiscentia*, the shameful lust whereby the sexual organs no longer obey the command of the will but tend to function autonomously. This disobedience, this conflict of the body with the will, is for Augustine the punishment of original sin which precisely consisted in this: that man by his own act set himself up in disobedience to his creator. In the state of Paradise, men could experience their sexuality without any passionate libido, using their organs in perfect obedience to the command of the will. Further, their animal bodies were absolutely perfect, not being subject to fatigue, disease or corruption. Augustine gives us a nice description of this happiness enjoyed by the first humans in Paradise in his *De Civitate Dei* XIV, 23-24.

Eriugena cannot refrain from making some ironical remarks about this Augustinian Paradise; it is so nice, so pleasant — it is even impossible to believe that it was ever an historical period in which real humans lived. «You see how he celebrates and praises the happiness of each sex in Paradise before Fall; how holy and immaculate was their married state; what a blameless love and inseparable association existed between the pair; how lovely was the way in which those holy beings propagated their kind... It is not sur-

<sup>22</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, XIV, 22-23, transl. G. WALSH and G. MONAHAN.

prising if one should express astonishment that it can be believed that animal bodies have dwelt in such a height of bliss»<sup>23</sup>. Eriugena's conclusion is clear: reason cannot think of Paradise as an historical state of mankind; it is a figurative description of what life would have been if man had not sinned. For modern readers this is not a very original position, but in the medieval context Eriugena's argument was unheard of and very provocative. To be sure, all authors have tried to develop allegorical and symbolical interpretations of the Paradise story, without however ever questioning the literal historical meaning of the texts. Eriugena, on the other hand, entirely rejects the historical significance of the text. The garden of Eden never existed as a physical and historical reality. In his interpretation, Paradise is nothing but human nature created in God's image in Eden, that is in the state of blessedness and perfection which man would have enjoyed had he not sinned.

However, in the elaboration of his interpretation of the various details of the Paradise story, Eriugena runs into serious difficulties. For it seems that not all elements of the narrative can be referred to the future state of happiness that is predestined for man. We also find in the Paradise story those events that according to Eriugena are connected with the original sin of man, and refer to those aspects of our human condition which have been added to our true nature because of sin. One may mention here the description of the formation of Eve out of one of Adam's ribs, after God had put him into a deep sleep. This event certainly occurred while still in Paradise, yet before the Fall. Must we not then conclude from this narrative order that sexuality does belong to the original plan that God had for man, supposing he did not sin. Must we not again agree with Augustine that sexuality is an essential part of our human nature from the very beginning.

A first attempt to solve this problem is to offer an allegorical interpretation of Adam and Eve whereby they are not seen as two sexually differentiated humans, but as two complementary aspects

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. 806C-D: «Videsne, quantum laudat, quantum glorificat felicitatem utriusque sexus in paradiso ante praevaricationem...ut non immerito quis miretur quomodo animalia corpora in tam excelsa beatitudine vixisse credibile sit».

of the one human nature. The formation of Eve out of Adam is then indeed an event in Paradise, descriptive of our nature in Paradise. In this interpretation Eriugena is able to follow the patristic tradition, which since Philo, Origen and Ambrosius understood Adam in terms of the intellect (*nous* is masculine in Greek) which commands the whole of human nature, and Eve in terms of sense perception (*aisthesis* is feminine in Greek)<sup>24</sup>. Both aspects do belong in their interrelation and complementarity to the one human nature, with the intellect, of course, commanding sense perception. Augustine also knows such an interpretation in his treatise *De Trinitate* XII («vir ponitur pro mente, mulier pro sensu corporis»), but he rejects it, arguing that it is difficult to interpret the woman as standing for sense perception, because that is not a specific faculty of human nature, since we share it with animals<sup>25</sup>. However, he too recognises in Adam and Eve — without denying the historical truth of their existence — two functions of the human soul, but defines them differently. Adam stands for the contemplative knowledge which is directed towards the immutable eternal truth and seeks wisdom (*sapientia*), whereas Eve stands for the practical knowledge which is involved in the regulating of our actions in the temporal realm (*scientia*). For reason has delegated some part of itself in order to let our actions in time share in rationality. This delegation or internal division in reason, however, must not lead to a splitting or a «divorce» of the two parts, for practical knowledge must be permanently inspired by contemplation<sup>26</sup>. Thus for Augustine, the formation of Eve from Adam figuratively expresses how practical knowledge can proceed from a contemplative attitude of the soul<sup>27</sup>. For man has first been created in God's likeness as Adam, that is as a contemplative mind. Eve (practical reason) only exists insofar as she is related to

<sup>24</sup> See IV, 815C. Cf. Philo, *De opificio mundi* 59, 165 and Ambrose, *De paradiso* 2, 11 (PL 14: 279).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *De Trinitate* XII, XIII, 20.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *De Trinitate*, XII, III, 3: «Quiddam rationale nostrum, non ad unitatis divortium separatum, sed in auxilium societatis quasi derivatum, in sui operis disperitur officium».

<sup>27</sup> This figural interpretation does not exclude the historical truth of the biblical account: «salva illius veritatis historia» (XII, XII, 19).

Adam (contemplative reason). In this sense Augustine interprets the difficult passage in Saint Paul, where it is said «that man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of the man» (*I Cor. XI, 7*). However, the fact that Adam symbolises theoretical reason and Eve practical reason does not imply that the male aspect of reason only is present in men and the female only in women. Augustine emphatically rejects such a position because it would imply that women only have a partial and inferior share in rationality (a position defended by Aristotle). Women as much as men have a contemplative reason, and men too must have a practical rationality in order to live morally. Thus, in their souls both men and women have the same rational nature. However, their bodies are undeniably different; thus the female body, which is weaker and softer than the male, has in its structure a natural predisposition to nurture and care, and the male to force and domination. Augustine then believes that man and woman, although having the same rational soul, symbolise in their respective bodily structures the «distribution between functions» which exists within their soul<sup>28</sup>. Woman then shares with man in both functions of rationality, but in her corporality rather expresses «that part of reason which inclines towards the administration of the temporal»<sup>29</sup>, while man expresses in his body contemplative reason<sup>30</sup>. Man and woman then symbolise in their gender difference a diversity which belongs to their common spiritual nature.

Eriugena is clearly influenced by these views of Augustine. He too affirms that the sexual difference in the external bodies of male

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<sup>28</sup> «Ergo in eorum mentibus communis natura cognoscitur; in eorum vero corporibus ipsius unius mentis distributio figuratur» (XII, VIII, 13). See also the conclusion of 19: «in diverso sexu duorum hominum aliquid tamen significare voluisse quod in uno homine quaereretur».

<sup>29</sup> «Sed quia sexu corporis distat a viro, rite potuit in eius corporali velamento figurari pars illa rationis quae da temporalia gubernanda deflectitur» (XII, VII, 12).

<sup>30</sup> This seems weird! For it may seem that the male body with its «aggressivity» rather expresses practical reason and that the female body is a better candidate to symbolise contemplation. But Augustine probably only considers the unequal relation (strong-weak) between the sexes, whereby the female is dominated by the male. Therefore the male body expresses the domination of theoretical reason over practical reason.

and female expresses the «interior habits of the mind and soul»<sup>31</sup>. But in his attribution of functions he rather follows Ambrosius and the traditional view according to which Adam stands for *intellectus*, and Eve for *sensus* — not however the bodily external sense, but the internal sense. Both aspects belong to the nature of our soul created in the image of God. In this sense the creation of Eve from Adam has a purely symbolic meaning: it manifests the two essential aspects of our soul. If understood as «spiritual sexes existing in the soul — for *nous* is a kind of male in the soul, while *aisthesis* is a kind of female — they do belong to our original nature created in the image of God and they do exist in the Paradise of our soul»<sup>32</sup>. But if the sexualised body does not belong to our original nature, it is for Eriugena impossible to accept that the two bodily sexes are simply a symbolisation of two aspects of our rational nature, as Augustine thought. The appearance of the «bodily sexes» is an addition to our original nature as a punishment for its sin, so that this bodily expression of duality has no place in Paradise. If then the sexual split into a male-female opposition is not the expression of our twofold rational nature, it is rather the embodiment, the incarnation of our nature's corruption, that is the perverse cleavage, the internal conflict between mind and sense, which is the result of sin.

In order to understand Eriugena's view of sin, let us see how he interprets the story of the Fall of man in the tasting of the forbidden fruit. We have seen that Eriugena follows the patristic tradition, whereby Eve stands for *aisthesis*, the sense perception through which images of the sensible world with their ambiguous fascination enter into our consciousness. As long as his sense perceives the beauty of this world in connection with and obedience to reason, man will see in these sensible objects a manifestation of the divine

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<sup>31</sup> «Nam et sexus duplex, virilis sane atque femineus, qui in solo corpore exterior inspicitur, interiores animi et animae habitudines preatendit» (*In loh. Ev.* IV, V, P. 304, 23-25 ed. E. JEAUNEAU, S.C. 180). In Jeauneau's very informative footnotes 2 and 3 we miss the reference to *De Trinitate* XII.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. II, p. 38, 27-31: «Quamquam enim in anima spirituales sexus intelligantur — *Nous* siquidem, id est intellectus, veluti quidam masculus in anima est, *Aisthesis* vero, id est sensus, veluti quaedam femina —, non tamen ibi cognoscimus naturae devortium».

creator, and this vision will lead him to praise and thanksgiving. However, Eve (sense), may be misled in this sensible experience by the serpent, who represents the lustful desire for the enjoyment of the material world. These material temporal goods are now adored as absolute. Eve possesses a confused knowledge of good and evil, and is unable to distinguish between the good which appears and the evil hidden under its surface. Fascinated by the beauty of this world, she does not see the evil which is hidden under the form of beauty. For evil as such cannot directly allure; it is in itself entirely deformed and ugly. Only when painted with beauty and goodness can it attract us. Eve thus seduced her husband and made him share in this fruit. The seduction of Adam signifies that the intellect, which ought to have domination over the soul, agrees with this confused desire for evil in the guise of the good which the senses present to it. And so Adam deserts the contemplation of the truth. «And thus of his own accord and under no compulsion, but compelled by his love of sensible things, man has abandoned his God»<sup>33</sup>. Not only has the community and peace between creator and creatures been destroyed, but man himself experiences a disorder and an internal conflict: «And hereupon followed a kind of divorce between the male and the female, that is, between the intellect and sense; for the corporeal senses did not obey the precepts of the intellect according to the laws of nature»<sup>34</sup>. This divorce of intellect and sense is expressed in the *secatio* of man into male and female animals each possessing a different sexuality. This expression is much more than a symbolic figure. As we have seen, it is the incarnation of this perverse divorce and its punishment. In the interpretation of Eriugena, the myth of the formation of Eve from the rib of Adam, as a female dis-

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. IV, 855C. We find a similar view on the origin of sin in Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XII, VII, 13 - XII, 18 (*defluxus ab imagine Dei*): the auxiliary part of reason which had been delegated to the administration of the temporal, has inclined too far downwards, abandoning the dictates of contemplative reason: this is Eve's fall which eventually carries along Adam.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. IV, 855D. In this perspective Eriugena can understand the condemnation of Eve «You shall be under the domination of the man» in a positive sense as a promise: «Here God promises the restoration of the natural order of human nature», which is: the sense subject to the authority of the intellect (855B-C).

tinguished from a male, is indeed a story about the Fall of man from the original unity and simplicity of his nature to the level of the irrational beasts. From this time forward man has to propagate and multiply in a humiliating manner: he is born of sexual intercourse; he increases, feeling in his body all possible pain and need; he grows older and dies. In fact, the story of the formation of Eve coincides with the story of the Fall. For it is by transgressing the divine command and eating of the fruit that man introduces into his soul the conflict between sense and intellect, which is further incarnated in the sexual split and gender opposition, both as a manifestation of our sinfulness and a punishment for it.

If then one knows how to interpret the story of Adam and Eve, one will discover that it deals with the origin and the consequences of evil. It is man himself who splits himself into Adam and Eve in the act of sinning. Therefore Reason cannot accept the apologies of Adam when he tries to find an excuse for his sin by passing the responsibility onto Eve: «Adam said, the woman you gave to me, gave me of the tree and I did eat». In a splendid dramatic scene the philosopher Eriugena calls the man Adam (this is in fact himself, for «in Adam we all have sinned) before the tribunal of reason and examines whether his apology is justified<sup>35</sup>. How can Adam put the blame for sinning onto Eve, when the woman did not yet exist before sin. The fault lies not with Eve, but with Adam, because he let Eve proceed from him. By sinning man has forsaken the unity and wholeness of his nature and has been torn apart into two opposing sexes. Adam cannot place the responsibility onto Eve; he himself is responsible for there being an Eve. And the same is true for Eve: she cannot blame the serpent, for what else is the serpent but the perverse desire which she cultivated in herself? The apologies of Adam and Eve and the requisitory by Reason as public prosecutor is not just a rhetorical and stylistic masterpiece; it is a recapitulation of all of the essential points of Eriugena's position on sin and sexual division.

As a conclusion let us examine what connection there may be between the *divisio sexuum* and the metaphysical concept of the *divi-*

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<sup>35</sup> See IV, 845-848.

*sio naturae*, which yields the fundamental structure of Eriugena's work. In the Neoplatonic tradition *divisio* is first to be understood as the logical method of *diairesis* whereby through differences we descend from the most general concept (say body) to the most specific (say living, sensitive, rational, mortal). Corresponding to it is the method of *synopsis* or *analysis* which reduces the specific to the universal. For Eriugena the dialectic of *divisio* and *recollectio* is not just an expression of the logical articulation of concepts, it is the movement of reality itself. From the most general, the One, proceeds through division the manifold of beings. The division is thus an emanation, or in religious language, a creation of everything; correspondingly, the *recollectio* is a bringing back to unity, a reintegration of the multiple. In this circle of emanation via multiplication and return via unification man occupies a central place. Indeed, in man the whole universe, the visible and the invisible, has been created. Man is the *medietas* who connects the extreme realms of creation, the corporeal and the spiritual. For this reason the creation of man is introduced at the end of the hexaemeron, on the sixth day; his formation is the coronation and recapitulation of the creation of the whole universe. However, man must also be considered as the ultimate level of division, which is particularly evident at the moment of death, when body and soul separate. Therefore, it is fitting that the *reditus* and *adunatio* of all things and the return of all creatures to God will start from man. This *adunatio* begins most remarkably with the reunification of the sexes at the moment of the resurrection, when the animal sexualised body will be transformed into a purely spiritual body. Then there will no longer be male and female, but man will be as God had always wished him, had not sin intervened. Hence all other divisions will disappear, as that between heaven and earth in the sensible, and between the sensible and the intelligible. Finally also the distinction between the creature and its creator will disappear, when everything is united to God, the «nature which does not create and is not created», that is God as ultimate finality of the universe<sup>36</sup>. In this process of unification, the infe-

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<sup>36</sup>On the suppression of all divisions in the process of return, see *Periphyseon*, II, p. 14, 25-42, 7, a commentary on a beautiful text from Maximus Confessor,

rior is never destroyed by its integration into the superior, but is only transformed into the superior. Thus the earth changes into the heaven, the sensible into the intelligible, and so also will the sexes be transformed into man. And so «the unification of human nature recalls the division of the two sexes into the simplicity of man because man is better than sex»<sup>37</sup>.

It is not necessarily the case that from such a metaphysical perspective on the division and unification of nature the *divisio sexuum* must be interpreted in a negative way. For is not all division also a development and manifestation of the richness that is only present in the superior level in a general way? Ultimately the whole process of «division» is a manifestation and revelation of the unfathomable richness of God himself, and thus a *theophania*. Why not also see the differentiation of the sexes as a manifestation of what is only included in potency in the general nature «Man»? Of course, as we all know, the division of the sexes can also be experienced as conflict, opposition, discrimination, repression, domination; and in this negative experience the gender split is certainly connected with the *consequentia peccati*, as is clear from the terrible verdict of God when banning Eve from Paradise: «Your desire shall be for your husband, yet he will dominate you». With sin comes the end of the ideal equality of man and his helpmate wo-man. In this sense, we readily admit that the *divisio sexuum* is a «consequence of sin». However, Eriugena considers the gender split as such to be evil and sinful. He was so influenced by a negative approach to the human body, and to sexual behaviour in particular, that he could no longer see this division as an expression of the infinite richness of Man. He thinks of it only as a manifestation of an abasement to the level of beasts.

Perhaps we may also recognise in this negative approach of the gender difference an argument that goes back to the Aristotelian

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*Ambigua ad Iohannem*, XXXVII (ed. E. JEAUNEAU, CCSG 18, p. 179-187). This text is summarized at the beginning of Book V, which deals with the «reditus» of all things (893 B-C).

<sup>37</sup> «Humanae naturae adunatio duplcis sexus divisionem in simplicitatem hominis revocat, quia homo melior est quam sexus» (II, p. 24, 8-10); cf. V, 893 D: «quoniam inferior est sexus homine».

tradition. Eriugena evaluates the «divisions» of natures positively whenever they specify *formally* the generic concept. But it is impossible to consider the male-female difference as a further formal specification of the species Man (as are the differences rational-irrational in the genus animal). Male and female are differences which are ultimately reducible to materiality, as is clear from Aristotle. In *Metaphysics* X 9, the philosopher asks why contrary opposites such as male and female are not *differentiae secundum speciem* even though they are *per se* differences of the genus animal and not accidental differences such as black and white? In his answer to this aporia Aristotle observes that only differences based upon form can be specific differences, and not those that go back to matter<sup>38</sup>. The fact that the human seed sometimes develops into a male and sometimes miscarries through insufficient bodily heat and becomes a female, is due to the materiality in which the form is realised. Aristotle concludes: «male and female are indeed modifications peculiar to animal, not however, in its essence, but in the matter, i.e. the body.» (1058 b 25). Therefore they do not further develop and express the intrinsic conceptual content of the species Man.

From this logico-metaphysical perspective one may better understand why Eriugena cannot consider the sexual division of man as an ultimate stage in the division of nature which starts from the most general and goes down to the most specific forms. For this division is not a manifestation of the formal content of the species Man, but the result of its perversion and scissure. As Eriugena says: «For male and female are not names of the nature of man, but of his partition through disobedience, whereas man is the special name of his nature»<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. Thomas, *In Metaph.* X, lectio XI, n. 2131: «Illae propriae sunt differentiae generis, quae sumuntur a diversis formis perficientibus materiam. (...) Quaecumque 'contrarietates sunt in ratione', idest ex parte formae, faciunt differre secundum speciem. Illae vero quae sunt ex parte materiae, non faciunt differre secundum speciem».

<sup>39</sup> «masculus siquidem et femina non sunt nomina naturae, sed partitionis eius per praevaricationem, homo vero specialis ipsius naturae appellatio est» (II, p. 24, 10-12; continuation of quotation in n.+).

We might be inclined to read Eriugena's text as an interesting document from the Middle Ages which reveals a very negative attitude towards human sexuality, an attitude that may irritate us or make us laugh because it seems to be so far from our modern opinions. Perhaps we could agree with his proposition that «man is more than sex», if we understood it in the sense that sexuality is an animal-like and debasing behaviour if it is not humanised by integrating it into an interpersonal relationship of love and mutual respect (while being quite aware that this is never perfectly possible, as our animality has its own laws which never fully obey our will, as Augustine rightly notices). However, when Eriugena defends the position that «Man is more than sex», he is not just talking about the place of sexuality in human life. He primarily intends that «to be man» is much more important than «to be male or female», because the sexual difference does not pertain to the essence of man. Our task, our destination, is to be as perfect as possible Man, not to be woman or man, for the sexual difference will ultimately be abolished. If we understand it in this sense, Eriugena's thesis may have a surprising relevance.

In fact, the question concerning the relation between our common human nature and sexual difference is central in contemporary socio-political debate. Since the beginning of the feminist movement there has been a fierce fight against traditional prejudices concerning the nature of man and woman, and the social consequences linked to these prejudices (different functions adapted to different natures). It has been argued that these so-called natural differences between the male and the female are in fact the result of cultural determination, that it is only through the symbolic order that man and woman receive diverse social roles, patterns of behaviour, and values. The biological fact of gender difference plays only a «marginal and accidental role» (M. Mead) in this functional differentiation. As a matter of fact, such a view comes surprisingly close to the 'Platonic' dualism of body (nature) and soul (culture). It also manifests a remarkable preference for the general («Man», or «the Human» as in politically correct English) over the particular (male, female). All emphasis is laid upon the general human nature which the diverse individuals can realise in various unique ways. The difference

between man and woman is only a biological matter and has no fundamental anthropological or ethical significance.

Against this thesis one could argue in an Aristotelian way that if soul and body constitute a substantial unity, then biological and hormonal differences must have an effect on the *psyche*. In all classes of living beings, Aristotle says<sup>40</sup>, there corresponds to the sexual difference also a differentiation in character and disposition. Thus with all other animals the female is «softer in disposition, less simple, more impulsive, and more attentive to the nurture of the young»; the male, on the other hand, is «more spirited, more savage, more simple and less cunning». The traces of these characteristics are more or less visible in all classes of animals, but they are especially evident where the innate dispositions have been more developed through culture and education, that is to say, in man. Aristotle gives as confirmation the standard clichés about male and female characters. We here see immediately the danger of the Aristotelian position which attributes to man and woman essential differences based upon gender differences. One risks justifying and establishing biologically existing social inequalities with different roles. However, emphasis on gender difference does not necessarily have these consequences, as is evidenced from the sudden shift in actual feminist discourse. Whereas in the beginning of the movement the tendency was to minimise all sexually-related differences and to reduce them to culturally determined gender roles, there is now an attempt to accentuate the otherness of woman and man. It even seems now as if the «sexus» is better than the «homo». Thus one talks about female rationality and a particular female way of practising science, and there are serious arguments asking for segregation of male and female youth in education programmes.

The question about the relation between «the man» and «the sexes» cannot be answered without reflecting on the relation between mind and body, culture and nature. As we have said, it is impossible not to admit that our psychic attitudes and patterns of behaviour are influenced by our biological conditions, of which being male or female is the most evident. However, nature does not deter-

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<sup>40</sup> See *Historia animalium* IX 1, 608 a 21-23 en b 4-18.

mine the cultural order. It only gives a «gentle hint»<sup>41</sup>, without driving us in a certain direction. It is up to culture to express the sexual difference in a symbolic order (family relations, social structure, value systems, religious rites and representations), either accentuating it or minimising it. But however different the socio-cultural order might be, the fact of being male or female never has a «marginal or accidental» meaning. For gender means more than possessing a different body; it also indicates a particular mode of being human. In their different corporeal being, man and woman both manifest different forms of being human. Both also evoke different values of life which seem strange to the other partner, and yet familiar and complementary. Perhaps the traditional culture wrongly attributed those different values exclusively to only one of the two gender partners, and therefore fixated them in different social positions. However, the different values that man and woman evoke in their diverse corporeality must not be developed exclusively by one of the sexes, — for example tenderness and caring by woman, courage and assertiveness by man — but must be cultivated by both. Thus woman may manifest in her body a value which I as man can and must realise, even if I am not so disposed to it 'by nature'. Perhaps we may say with Augustine that man and woman symbolise in their different bodies diverse aspects of the same human nature shared by both. For, however different man and woman may be in their experience of being human, there are no female and male virtues. Virtue is one and the same for man and woman: it is the virtue of the whole Man before the splitting. «All human beings are good in the same way, for they become good by obtaining the same good things. But surely they would not be good in the same way unless they possessed the same virtues»<sup>42</sup>. And thus Plato again has the right over Aristotle.

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<sup>41</sup> I owe this expression to H. Fortmann, whose reflections on female and male very much influenced this conclusion. See *Heel de mens*, Baarn, 1972, pp. 105-121

<sup>42</sup> *Meno* 73C, transl. R. E. ALLEN. Plato's view on the unity of virtue is criticised by Aristotle (see *Politics* I, XIII), but defended by the Stoics. Cf. Musonius Rufus, *Diatribes* III and IV and, among christian authors, Clemens of Alexandria, *Stromates* IV,8 and Gregory of Nyssa, *Or.1 in Gen. 1.* 26 (PG. 44: 276A).