

THE PHILOSOPHY OF JOHN SCOTTUS ERIUGENA, A Study of idealism in the Middle Ages by Dermot Moran, *Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. xviii + 333, £35.00.*

This painstakingly researched study takes account of a vast secondary literature on Eriugena, and seeks to explain his position as a forerunner of German idealism—and as (as proposed by Leszek Kolakowski) therefore of Marx. There can be nothing but praise for an openness to this speculative theme. Medievalists will approve the meticulous research of his background and life in the earlier part of the book. This conforms to their conventional encyclopaedicism, which allows the conclusions of modern scholars, and MS particularities, to stray out of their footnotes, and, so to speak, to rub shoulders with the ancients: here speculative writing is more reserved.

Chs. 8–13 frequently take up the idealism of the subtitle. The definition given of idealism: ‘the (Auflösung) of the world of experience in the process of consciousness’ (p. 81, n.1) comes near to an early definition of Schelling, which has yet an *objective* point: ‘True idealism reposes solely on the ground that outside and apart from consciousness that division (between thinking and being) just does not exist’ (*Kritisches Journal der Philosophie* I/1, 1802, p. 13). The detection of idealist-type theses is correct: the dependence of being on mind (p. 143); man and God mutually define each other (not ‘mutually self-defining’) (p. 162); all things are in mind (p. 200 — supported by Augustine’s ‘*phantasia* of body is better than body’ (p. 201); essential (not empirical) self-knowing (p. 210); the division of divine and created is cancelled in the highest *theoria* (pp. 260, 262). Intersubjectivity (p. 207), and the frequently mentioned not-being and dialectic are not precisely *idealist* concerns (v. below). Similarly the seemingly idealist *Begriff* of Hegel is incomprehensible without its part-realist origin (despite Schelling’s later dismissal of it as ‘idealist’) (p. 259). The author could have added to the list of supposed idealist theses absolute liberty (pp. 163–6), and *hen kai pan* (p. 258).

Particularly interesting is the idealist interpretation (as a set of mental acts: p. 241) of the four divisions of nature: the account of ‘creates’ and ‘created’ — complete according to the logical truth-table (1:0 | 1:1 | 0:1 | 0:0) (*PL* 122.441B–442A): true of God (as containing creation), and yet *theoriae* of the human mind (pp. 256–68), on the grounds that for the wise man ‘divine theophanies ... and human willing are one and the same’ (p. 267). Thus, speculative competence *abolishes* a subjective boundary which, in their idealisms, Kant and Fichte had set up. If the boundary reappears and, at times, a concomitant realism emerges (*isomorphism* of thought and being (pp. 139, 253); being *depends on* mind (p. 143, cf pp. 176, 185); world of spirit and matter (p. 154); *objective* theophanies (pp. 149–50, 262); cf also on knowledge of nature *PL* 122.333A, 334D), a parallel exists in all the supposed ‘idealists’.

The author introduces true and supposed idealist theses in an encyclopaedist manner to establish identities with Eriugena’s thought. That gives no idea of the structuring and process of the thought of Hegel and Schelling, whom he chiefly cites. But it can easily be shown that neither is a true idealist. Even the enlightened generalities cited from Werner Beierwaltes do not discern Schelling’s increasing valuation of realism from a

variation of a supposed 'idealist' norm; nor that he asserted that the movement of his thought was the contrary of neo-Platonism (*Sämmtliche Werke*, I.8, p. 245). Both Hegel and Schelling sought an authentic relationship between idealism and realism. For Hegel, v. *Enz.I*(=logic) §82.z: "'speculative" is ... (not) purely subjective, but quite expressly contains oppositions, which would remain as such in the understanding (and so that of subjective and objective), in a higher way ("als aufgehoben"), thereby demonstrating itself to be fully real and comprehending the whole'. For Schelling, v. *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, (Stuttgart, etc., 1989), p. 2: 'Since it has been recognized that nature and man are two reflections of a single God, the science of nature makes up an essential part of philosophy'. Nevertheless, the relationships between the thought of Eriugena and Hegel and (especially) Schelling are of considerable interest.

The writer sees that Hegel based his knowledge of Eriugena on Peder Hjort, *Johann Scotus Erigena*, (Copenhagen, 1823), without the available text (ed. Gale, Oxford, 1686). But this is short: 148pp., 8^o, with only pp. 47–86 on Eriugena himself. Hegel was not displeased by it, for it echoed his own thought (v. p. 55) ('den Keim aller neueren Philosophie'); p. 144; p. 145 (apology for Eriugena's 'leere Refleionsbestimmung' of God). He wrote: 'in comparison with (true) philosophy, we find it correct and deep; here everything is already prepared ("fertig")' (*Werke*, (Suhrkamp, XIX, p. 552); '(Eriugena) was the first with whom a veritable philosophy now begins, and principally the following out the ideas of the neo-Platonists' (ib., p. 551). But Hegel thought that they had not gone on from their discovery of subjectivity to relate it to the objective world (cf. ib. p. 448). Hence, Eriugena's thought cannot be identified with his.

There are many approximations of Eriugena's thought to Schelling's. For both there is no 'what' in God (*PL* 122.771C (cf. Moran, pp. 207, 238); *SW* II.1, p. 586). For Eriugena, God is 'nihil' (ib., 589A–B), while for Schelling, God *is* as *Seyende* (=esse), but as *Seyn* (concrete existent) *is* not: 'das, was es ist, ist und auch nicht ist' (ib., II.2, p. 377, cf. II (II. 1,), p. 331). Therefore for Eriugena, God could not know Himself: He would particularise Himself, and be in contradiction with His universality (ib., 587B; cf. 589A–C). Nor could man, as God's image, know himself (ib., 772A–B; Moran's reference (p. 186) here is defective). With Schelling there is here a striking parallelism. The essence of consciousness lies in the fluctuation from the more perfect condition of pure subjectivity (as 'reyn Seyende') into the factual tolerance of objectification into *Seyn*: hence the perfection 'in not acting, not willing, not knowing' (*SW* II.2, p. 119). God is the identity of subject and object and makes Himself conscious (ib., I.7, pp. 433–4; cf. II.3, pp. 262–5), and man should preserve himself in the innocence of pure essentiality (v. ib., II.2, pp. 118–123; cf. II.3, p. 208). And as, for Eriugena, man is the *officina omnium* (Moran, pp. 172–4), for Schelling man was created at the centre of the Godhead, and all things were raised up to him, and through him to God (*SW*, II.1, p. 206; II.3, pp. 348–9, 362–3).

Though, alas, the paths of true or supposed idealism into which the author strayed are both much more difficult, and less well sign-posted, than he supposed, the reader who expects less will find a vast amount of information on Eriugena reduced to very acceptable clarity.

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