On Eriugena’s Appropriation of the Neoplatonic Concept of Self-Movement

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Self-movement is a principle one can find in virtually all systems of Neoplatonism. It came down to Eriugena after it had already been construed in more than one sense and attributed to more than one level in the vertical structure of reality in the Greek intellectual tradition, both pagan and Christian. I will try first to sketch this development; then I will look at some shifts in meaning, operative in and resulting from Eriugena’s appropriation of the Greek concept. Finally, I hope to see how Gersh’s thesis—that in the philosophy of Eriugena “the absorption of the pagan Neoplatonic tradition by Christianity reaches its climax”—applies in this particular case.¹

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

Although Plato might not have been the first to attribute the capability of self-movement to the soul, he was the first to

develop the concept of self-movement by giving grounds for such an attribution.²

The soul, Plato argued, is the principle of life. But life is a kind of movement. On the assumption that for every movement there must be a mover, the first mover must move itself (or, be moved by itself). This is precisely what the soul does, “since every body which derives its movement from without is inanimate, but that which has its movement within itself has a soul.”³

Plato’s other assumption upon which the above argument is built, namely, that a mover itself must be in motion, was challenged by Aristotle, who argued that both the soul (qua mover of the body) and the First Mover, the mind (insofar as it thinks itself), are, in fact, unmoved. The Neoplatonists, who all took Aristotle seriously, had to meet this challenge. Thus Proclus seems to build his synthesis of Plato and Aristotle upon the fact that, since, on Aristotle’s own account (Metaph 1072 a 26-30), the First Mover causes movement in the same way as does the object of desire or thought (presumably, when the object is not the thought itself), the First Mover cannot directly move inanimate objects. To account for their movement, therefore, one must assume the existence of another, intermediate mover responsible for this, the soul. The soul, thus, is able, on the one hand, to move inanimate objects through the body it animates and, on the other hand, to be moved immediately, in the mode of desire, by the unmoved mind. (El.Theol., pr. 14; cf. pr. 20)

Thus the same animating capacity of the soul that made Plato believe it to be both self-moved and the first mover, in Proclus’ system implies only that it is immediately moved by an

³ Phaedr 245 e 7f; the relevant passage is ibid., 245 c 6–246 a 2. One finds the same argument in Leg 894ff.
immovable mover, the mind. Proclus’ affirmation that the intermediate mover (the soul) must be self-moved ("ûj[90]ûJ}C} (ibid., pr. 14) seems to imply that the soul he has in mind here must be rational, since the movement of an irrational animal, attracted to the object of its desire as an iron to a magnet, is caused by that object only. What Proclus means by the “self-” component in the movement of the soul thus must be a kind of accord with itself that makes every desire of the rational soul its own; such a reversion of an entity upon itself (ibid., pr.17), is, for Proclus, equivalent to its self-constitution ("û2LB`FJ"F4H (ibid., pr.42f)).

Priscianus takes this point to its logical conclusion. For him, it is not the soul that reverts upon itself but, rather, the very act of reversion is the soul. He thus reinterprets Plato’s original insight that self-movement is “the @ÛF\" and the very 8`(@H of the soul” (Phaedr 245 e) by taking @ÛF\" ontologically, that is, in the sense of “substance,” rather than of “essence.” According to Steel:

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4 Eriugena uses the analogy of a magnet to illustrate his idea of all creation’s natural attraction to God: “As that stone which is called the magnet, although by a natural power of its own it attracts to itself the iron which approaches it, does not move itself in any way in order to do this nor suffers anything from the iron which it attracts to itself; so the Cause of all things leads back to itself all things that derive from it without any motion of its own but solely by the power of its beauty.” Periphrseon (hereafter PER, cited here and elsewhere in the translation, and for Books I–III also in the edition, of I. Sheldon-Williams), I. Sheldon-Williams, revised by John O’Meara (Dublin 1995), L I, pp. 212:31–214:1.

5 To address some issues raised by Gersh, I will follow him in using the term “self-determination” interchangeably with the term “self-constitution” (1977; cf. p. 372 n. 2 with p. 375 n. 1).
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The soul [in Priscianus] only remains itself because it ceaselessly proceeds from itself and, at the same time, returns into itself. It realizes its existence by a continuous ‘unfolding’ (µ&gt;&lt;'metrical'). Nevertheless, in its movement it never loses itself. As a whole [it] goes outside of itself and, simultaneously, as a whole remains in itself. Abiding, procession, and reversion are thus three structural moments which make possible the existence of the soul as ‘dynamic entity’.6

Given the overall Neoplatonic scheme of vertical causality, self-movement in both Proclus and Priscianus thus appears as a reversion (µ&gt;&lt;'metrical') of the effect not upon its cause—the immovable object of its desire—but upon itself, which makes it semi-independent from its cause.

Turning now to a Christian Neoplatonist known as Dionysius the Areopagite (and so I shall call him), one may observe that although the highest principle for him is—as it is, also, for most pagan Neoplatonists—the object of desire for the entities of the lower levels of reality produced by it, it is not immovable. The Deity in Dionysius is moved by Love (µ&gt;&lt;'metrical”), “gushing” itself out (µ&gt;&lt;'metrical”) to all creation in a rather non-Platonic fashion (DN IV.14, Suchla, p. 160:10f).7 This is not

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7 Cf. Campbell’s observation: “In comparing the two systems [sc. Neoplatonic and Christian], there is one thing that is striking—the utter absence of love [of the supreme principle to the lower ranks] in the Neoplatonic system. The emanations from the One are entirely ignored by [It]. The love of
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to say that for Dionysius the highest principle is moved by the lower orders of the hierarchy but, rather, that (as he puts it in DN IV.17),

there is one simple power [of Love], able to move itself (“ÛJ@64<0J46Z”), for the sake of some unifying blending, from the Good even to the last of beings and from that [being], once more in a row, through all [of them], into the Good—from itself, through itself and towards itself—turning itself around again and ever revolving in the same way into itself through unfolding (µ<84] @(X-0).

The similarity of the formal characteristics of this “unfolding” with those of “unfolding” that Steel finds in Priscianus (see n. 6 supra and text) is striking. However, since Dionysius construes the act of unification of Divinity as prior (º ¹F4H ) to its self-movement, this self-movement in Dionysius (unlike the self-movement of the soul in Priscianus) does not constitute the self of the Divinity.

Thus Dionysius construes self-movement as either self-reversion (when he predicates it of the Divinity) or self-determination (when he predicates it of humanity), but never as both. This confirms Gersh’s thesis that “Dionysius is clearly breaking with the pagan Neoplatonic view that self-reversion = self-determination” (1977, p. 375). The point of importance for

a heavenly Father for His children <. . .> is <. . .> found in Christian writers alone.” (Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, translated and annotated by Thomas L. Campbell (Washington, D.C. 1981), p. 112 n. 17 and ff. Thus, one may add, in Proclus, providence towards the universe is the business of the “gods” (“henads”) (El.Theol. pr. 120), not of the One.

8 DN IV.33, PG 733 B; VII.7, PG 896 A.
us is that nowhere does Dionysius attribute the term "αυτοκίνησις" (the technical expression for self-movement) to the angels, that is, to the level intermediate between the levels of humanity and of Divinity.9

**SOME QUESTIONS PROPER TO THIS STUDY**

In the *Corpus Dionysiacum* (hereafter CD), forms of "αυτοκίνησις" used as terms for self-movement occur only in DN and Epistle 9; they are all adjectival and predicated of either God or human beings. However, in Eriugena’s version of CD, self-movement is ascribed, as we shall see, to virtually all levels of reality: God, angels, human soul and inanimate nature. In the rest of this paper, I will focus on the passages in Eriugena’s translation of CH in which he attributes self-movement to the element of fire and to the first triad of angels.

The phrase in which self-movement is attributed to angels, and to which Eriugena devotes a page in his commentary on the treatise,10 belongs to a lengthy period enumerating various reasons why “the first essences” (that is, the angels of the first triad) should (or should not) be considered “pure.” In Heil/Ritter’s edition (p. 29.1–3),11 it reads as follows:

\[
[5 "2" ΔΗ <...> "Џ" ΔΗ ΈΧ(Ο)Χ<X<...> ΔΗ <...>] \text{JH} \quad \text{αΘΗ} \quad \text{μο} \quad \text{όΘΖ(Ο)} \quad \text{6" â}
\]

\[
\text{J "Џ(ΘΗΘΖ) ΟΗ 6" D} \quad \text{JF NΗΘΞΗ ΤΗ D BJ ΚΗ}
\]

\[
\text{J VTHΗμD, ΒΑΗμJ, PΘΧθΗ}
\]

9 See *Thesaurus Pseudo-Dionysii Areopagitae* (Brepolis 1993)—hereafter *Thesaurus*—based on the recent critical ed. The angels, however, are called "αυτοκίνησις" in DN IV.16, PG 713 C.


11 CH VII.2, PG 208 B
Eriugena’s translation makes a commentary desirable indeed:

\(<. . .> \text{proprio per se motu et eodem motu secundvm diligentis Devm inconversibile ordinis in}
\text{flexibiliti receptas }<. . .>: \text{having been inflexibly received [as part?] of the rank [characterized by] proper movement by themselves and in the same [way], according to inconvertibility of [anyone] who loves God.}\n
The occurrence of \text{per se motu}, however, seems not to be a result of a clumsy or mistaken translation of \text{\textmu, 464-Z@L}. According to Heil/Ritter’s apparatus (ad loc), there is a manuscript tradition (Re Pn Le) that reads here \text{"UJ@64<ZJ@L} instead of \text{\textmu, 464-Z@L}. This must have been the reading of the ms. with which Eriugena worked as well.\textsuperscript{12} Therefore, the following

\textsuperscript{12} In their apparatus ad loc, Heil/Ritter do not mention the ms. used by Eriugena—codex Grec 437, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (Pa, in their nomenclature)—among the mss. that support this reading of our phrase. The ms., as is well known, was presented in 827 in Compiegne by the ambassadors of the Emperor Michael the Stammerer to the son of Charlemagne, Louis the Pious; the same year it was transferred to the Abbey of St. Denis, the burial-place of the dynasty, where the abbot Hilduin soon translated it or, rather—as I douard Jeauneau puts it (“Pseudo-Dionysius, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus the Confessor in the Works of John Scottus Eriugena” in \textit{Carolingian Essays: Andrew W. Mellon Lectures in Early Christian Studies}, ed. U.-R. Blumenthal [Washington, D.C. 1983], p. 140)—“had it translated.” Jeanne Barbet (“La tradition du texte latin de la Hi\textjarchie c\textjleste dans les manuscrits des Expositiones in Hierarchiam caelestem” in \textit{The Mind of Eriugena: Papers of a Colloquium, Dublin, 14–18 July 1970} [(Dublin) 1973], p. 89) indicates, moreover, that “les travaux du
question suggests itself: what difference does this contrast in the reading make for the thought of Eriugena and, in particular, for his idea of self-movement?

However, before we come to this, there are technical problems to be solved. To begin with, not only Eriugena but, also, some modern translators who used the same Greek text of our phrase as the one in the Heil/Ritter edition, have self-movement attached to the angels in their translations of that phrase because, unlike Eriugena, they take the word to mean “self-moved,” i.e., as a cognate of Thus, for instance, in Gandillac’s Sources Chrétienes translation, the phrase reads:

[Il faut <. . .> les penser pures <. . .> parce qu’] elles s’attachent de façon constante B’ordre qui leur est propre et qui se meut de lui-même d’un mouvement toujours identique dans un immuable amour de Dieu.

and so in Luibheid/Rorem’s translation:

[Because {sic} of their supreme purity,] they <. . .> firmly adhere to their own order which is eternally self-moved according to an immutable love for God. (emphasis added)

Should we assume, then, that Dionysius meant, indeed, the angels to be self-moved and that, therefore, the error of the

P.Th[ry], corrobor[ed by those of P. Dondaine, ont d]émontré que ces deux premières traductions latines du Corpus dionysien [d’abord par Hilduin vers 832–835, puis par Jean Scot vers 862] n’ont pas eu d’autre base que le Paris BN grec 437.” Even though I have had no chance to see this ms., my reconstruction of the phrase about the angels seems reliable, for not only Eriugena’s translation but, also, that of Hilduin (see n. 2o infra and text) supports it.
scribe who changed “μ. Ἀμφίπτωσις” into “μ. Ἀμφίπτωσις @ ϕ” providentially served for the preservation of Dionysius’ idea expressed by “μ. Ἀμφίπτωσις @ ϕ” in Eriugena’s version of the phrase about the angels, despite his mis-translation of that word as “[characterized by] movement in the same [way]? We might rather check first whether Eriugena’s translation of “μ. Ἀμφίπτωσις @ ϕ” in the phrase about the angels is, indeed, a mis-translation. For the moment, I will leave the question unresolved in my own translation of that phrase:

[They must be considered pure as] clinging unwaveringly to their proper rank, which is ever movable and capable of movement in the same [way] {or: ever movable and capable of self-movement?} {or: ever movable and capable of both self-movement and movement in the same [way]?) according to the immutability [characteristic of anyone] who loves God.

Now, in another passage—the only one elsewhere in CD in which the word “μ. Ἀμφίπτωσις @ ϕ” occurs— it refers not to the angels but to the element of fire (Heil/Ritter, p. 52.19). Among the reasons why fire, of all material elements, is most similar to the “superessential and shapeless essence [of God],” Dionysius mentions that it is “μ. Ἀμφίπτωσις @ ϕ”, which Eriugena translates as: “semper motus, per seipsvm motus, movens alterum.” Thus “μ. Ἀμφίπτωσις @ ϕ” when it refers to fire, has for Eriugena the meaning of self-movement, that is, the same meaning that it has for Gandillac and

13 The word occurs both times in combination with “μ. Ἀμφίπτωσις @ ϕ”.
14 CH XV. 2, PG 329 B. Dionysius nowhere describes fire as “μ. Ἀμφίπτωσις @ ϕ”.
15 According to Heil/Ritter’s apparatus (ad loc), the ms. Eriugena used reads here Ἡμείς @ ϕ instead of Ὁμείς ϕ.
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Luibheid/Rorem (but not for Eriugena!) when it refers to the angels.

Could it be, then, that Ἀρκαὶ ᾿Ορυμὰς has two meanings, one of them being synonymous with Ἀρκαὶ ᾿Ορυμάτων as Gandilliac’s translation of the phrase about the angels seems to suggest? There is one piece of evidence, at least, in favor of this hypothesis. In the codex Vaticanus gr. 370 (saec. X–XI), the phrase about the angels reads, according to Heil’s apparatus in the \textit{Sources chr\'etiennes} edition, Ἀρκαὶ ᾿Ορυμάτων not instead of Ἀρκαὶ ᾿Ορυμάτων (as in the ms. Eriugena used) but instead of Ἀρκαὶ ᾿Ορυμάτων. Given that a scribe construed Ἀρκαὶ ᾿Ορυμάτων as Ἀρκαὶ ᾿Ορυμάτων in the codex Vaticanus gr. 370, in a context in which the word refers to the angels, one cannot exclude the possibility that Eriugena did the same in his translation, in a context in which the word refers to fire.

Now, if the meanings of Ἀρκαὶ ᾿Ορυμάτων and Ἀρκαὶ ᾿Ορυμάτων overlap, the difference in Eriugena’s translations of Ἀρκαὶ ᾿Ορυμάτων in the two phrases (as \textit{eodem motu} and \textit{per seipsum motus} respectively) might result from his merely stressing this or that aspect of the meaning the two words share. If they do not overlap, however, Eriugena’s departure from Dionysius (in one of those two phrases, at least) must be conceptual rather than stylistic. To solve this problem we must answer first a purely philological question, namely: what does the word Ἀρκαὶ ᾿Ορυμάτων actually mean?

The word does not occur in LSJ; however, the pattern which the meanings of all words beginning with Ἀρκαὶ ᾿Ορυμάτων found there follow, agrees, not surprisingly, with the fact that Ἀρκαὶ ᾿Ορυμάτων the crasis for Ἀρκαὶ ᾿Ορυμάτων (=the same), not for Ἀρκαὶ ᾿Ορυμάτων (=itself).

The earliest evidence for Ἀρκαὶ ᾿Ορυμάτων indicated in Lampe is a fragment attributed to Apollinaris. Ἀρκαὶ ᾿Ορυμάτων occurs there in the same combination with Ἀρκαὶ ᾿Ορυμάτων as it
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does in the variant reading of our phrase about the angels in the Greek ms. used by Eriugena:

\[ \delta \mu \dot{\alpha} 2, \ddot{\alpha} \dddot{\alpha} \dddot{\alpha} < \dddot{\alpha} H \ \dddot{\alpha} \dddot{\alpha} \dddot{\alpha} 4 \ \dddot{\alpha} 6 \ \dddot{\alpha} \]

But in the variant reading of our phrase about the angels in the Greek ms. used by Eriugena:

\[ \delta \mu \dot{\alpha} 2, \ddot{\alpha} \dddot{\alpha} < \dddot{\alpha} H \ \dddot{\alpha} \dddot{\alpha} \dddot{\alpha} 4 \ \dddot{\alpha} 6 \ \dddot{\alpha} \]

The divine mind, on the one hand, is capable of self-movement and of movement in the same [way] (for it is immutable), the human [mind], on the other hand, is capable of self-movement but not of movement in the same [way] (for it is mutable).16

Since the passage presents a close parallel to our phrase about the angels, it might well be the direct source of the emendation.17 What is crucial for us is that the context clearly suggests only one meaning for \( J \dddot{\alpha} \dddot{\alpha} \dddot{\alpha} < \dddot{\alpha} H \) here, namely, that of immutability (as opposed to mutability) of movement.

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17 Apollinarius believed that, in Christ, the divine Logos replaced the human mind; thus the “divine mind” in this passage means “the Logos.” However, in CD, \( \delta \mu \dot{\alpha} 2, \ddot{\alpha} \dddot{\alpha} < \dddot{\alpha} H \) means the angel (e.g., DN IV. 8). Thus, for somebody well-read in Dionysius, the point of the passage might be that the human mind and the angel share the capability of self-movement but the capability of movement in the same way makes the angel different. As we shall see, Eriugena’s commentary on the phrase about the angels in the Expositiones culminates in a similar parallel between the movement of the angels and that of the human soul, the essence of which for Eriugena is the mind/intellect (PER, Lib. II, p. 100:30f).
Let us look now at the meanings given by the dictionaries. Lampe, who bases himself on both occurrences of \( \text{λάμπε} \), besides the Apollinarius’ fragment, gives only one meaning, namely, that which both the fragment and the inner form of the word suggest: “moved uniformly.” Demetrakou uses our phrase about the angels only; the meaning he gives is on the same lines as the one in Lampe: \( \text{δέχεται} \) or \( \text{δέχεσθαι} \). This, however, seems not the way the compilers of the Thesaurus have construed the meaning of the word, given that they have placed it under the entry \( \text{αὐτός} \) "self-moved." Now, if they have taken \( \text{δέχεται} \) or \( \text{δέχεσθαι} \) to mean “self-moved,” they have only followed (whether deliberately or not) the venerable Western tradition of interpreting \( \text{οὐκ ἔχεις} \) started by Hilduin, the first translator of CD. What he renders as \( \text{se moventis et a se moti} \) in his translation of the phrase about the angels\(^{19}\) might be only \( \text{σε μεταφέρεται} \) in his Greek text.\(^{20}\) At least two modern translations—those of Gandillac and Luibheid/Rorem (see above)—testify that Hilduin’s tradition is still alive. One may notice, however, that Gandillac’s translation differs from that of Luibheid/Rorem in that it combines Hilduin’s interpretation of \( \text{οὐκ ἔχεις} \) in the phrase about the angels with that of his successor, Eriugena, who translates it as \( \text{eodem motu} \) ("characterized by movement in the same [way]").

\(^{18}\) D. Demetra, D. Demetra Mega lexikon hōles tes Hellenikes glosses (Athens 1933-1956, s.v.).

\(^{19}\) My source for Hilduin is the Thesaurus.

\(^{20}\) This confirms my reconstruction, already mentioned, of the reading of this phrase in the ms. Grec 437, used by both Hilduin and Eriugena (see n. 12 supra).
Eriugena in its pure form: “Ihre Reinheit ist <. . .> aufzufassen <. . .> in dem Sinn, daß sie <. . .> unverwandt an ihrer Ordnung ewig gleichförmiger Bewegung entsprechend der Unwandelbarkeit aus Gottesliebe festhalten” (emphasis added).

It seems plausible that, in translating J "û [G6<0J@H in the phrase about fire as “self-moved” (= “moving itself”), both Hilduin and Eriugena were misled by the play on words that could all too easily suggest itself to them, since the adjacent locution, namely, 64<0J46Î< see supra), clearly means “moving other.” The question remains, why, in the phrase about the angels, Eriugena changed Hilduin’s translation of "û [G6<0J@H 6"Â J "û [G6<0J@H] from se moventis et a se moti to per se motu et eodem motu. One cannot exclude a possibility, of course, that Eriugena just had a better reference tool at hand than Hilduin did, although we have no evidence for this. What seems more certain, however, is that, given, first, the reading of the manuscript shared by Hilduin and Eriugena and, second, the assumption one might expect them to share as translators, namely, that the meaning of the phrase about the angels is not tautological, they shared, also, the intention, at least, to render somehow the difference in meaning between "û [G6<0J@H and ] "û [G6<0J@H in their translations of that phrase. Now, Hilduin barely escapes tautology by rendering the difference in meaning between these two adjectives by the difference in the voice of the participle: moventis and moti. This might not have seemed convincing to Eriugena, since the contrast between activity and passivity in Greek adjectives is normally indicated by the suffix; but the suffixes of "û [G6<0J@H and ] "û [G6<0J@H are identical. There might, however, be another and, as it were, a positive ground for Eriugena’s alternative translation, namely, a passage in the scholion (ad loc, PG 4 68.6) by John of Scythopolis.21

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21 John’s authorship for this and other scholia is established by Paul Rorem and John C. Lamoreaux, John of Scythopolis and...
This holy man [sc. Dionysius] says that their movement is J" Ū j̣O [in the sense] that [this movement] does not involve alternation or transition, but is likewise (dF" b) TH]. So, then, the unceasing activities involving thoughts (<̣F, 4̣) are, in the case [of the minds], movements; for the minds (<̣, ̣) cannot be silenced.

The fact that Eriugena’s translation of J" Ū j̣O in the phrase about the angels agrees with the explanation of that word given in the scholion might be additional evidence that Eriugena, unlike Hilduin, was familiar with the scholia by John of Scythopolis, at least. However, in his translation of

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22 According to Jeauneau 1983, p. 178f, Eriugena became familiar with the _Corpus Anastasianum_ (and, thus, with the Scholia) before he started his translation of St. Maximus: “In order to compensate for the obscurity of [Eriugena’s] translation [of CD], Anastasius [the Papal Librarian in Rome] sent to Charles the Bald a copy in which the Latin text [of Eriugena’s translation] was accompanied, in the margins, not only by his own emendations, but also by glosses of Maximus the Confessor [and John of Scythopolis], translated by himself. Presumably, Charles the Bald showed both the letter of Anastasius and the copy of Dionysius to John Scottus. Imagine that you were in John Scottus’s place. You receive an extremely critical appraisal of your work, accompanied by corrections and scholia. Would you not desire to become more familiar with the man whose scholia had proved so helpful and had clarified so many difficult passages of Dionysius? Most likely, this is just what John Scottus felt: he wanted to get hold of the works of Maximus. The first work he was able to obtain was the _Ambigua ad Iohannem._”
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J “\[\text{5\(\text{j}\)}\text{\(\lambda\)}\text{\(\iota\)}\text{\(\kappa\)}\text{\(\tau\)}\text{\(\mu\)}\text{\(\nu\)}\] in the phrase about fire,” Eriugena sides with Hilduin against the scholion ad loc (PG 105.3), despite the fact that the explanation of J “\[\text{5\(\text{j}\)}\text{\(\lambda\)}\text{\(\iota\)}\text{\(\kappa\)}\text{\(\tau\)}\text{\(\mu\)}\text{\(\nu\)}\] given in this scholion: “\{\text{S\(\text{F}\)}\text{\(\text{b}\)}\text{\(\theta\)}\text{\(\text{b}\)}\text{\(\text{h}\)}\text{\(\text{m}\)}\text{\(\mu\)}\text{\(\nu\)}\text{\(\tau\)}\]” repeats the explanation of the same word given by John of Scythopolis in his scholion to the phrase about the angels quoted above, with which Eriugena agrees in his translation of that phrase. This, by the way, shows that the later scholiast(s) might be totally dependent on John. Such a lack of originality, however, does not exclude the possibility of St. Maximus’ authorship. Thus the first scholion on DN (PG 3 185.1), which Suchla attributes to St. Maximus (since in the

Given the dates of Eriugena’s works accepted by most scholars, including Jeanneau (see his “L’homme et l’oeuvre” in Jean Scot: Homêlie sur le Prologue de Jean, Sources chrêtiennes, no. 151 [Paris 1969], p. 48f), this would imply that the Corpus Anastasianum reached the Frankish court at some point between 860 (the earliest date for Eriugena’s translation of CD) and 864 (the latest date for his translation of the Ambigua). According to M. Cappuyns, the date on Anastasius’ letter to Charles the Bald (the letter that supposedly accompanied the Corpus sent to him), “peut s’entendre <. . .> aussi bien de 860 que de 875” (Jean Scot lrigê: sa vie, son œuvre, sa pensê [Louvain and Paris 1933], p. 155 n. 2). However, most scholars today (including Cappuyns) accept with confidence the latter date. This, of course, does not exclude the possibility that Eriugena had had access to the Scholia even before he received Anastasius’ translation of them, and even before 870 (the accepted latest date for the Expositiones). Cf. the conclusion of Sheldon-Williams (in PER Lib. 1, p. 237 n. 144): “Although the codex of Ps.-Dionys. which [Eriugena] used was not furnished with [the] scholia, he seems to have known them [already when he worked on PER].”

23 Heil/Ritter, p. 52.19; CH XV. 2, PG 329 B.

24 According to Rorem and Lamoreaux (see n. 21 supra), this scholion is not by John of Scythopolis.
oldest extant ms. of the *Corpus Anastasianum* this scholion has “das [rote] Kreuz, durch welches Anastasius die Scholien des Maximus von der Hörigen <...> hatte unterscheiden wollen”),\(^{25}\) repeats the last scholion on CH in Migne (PG 3 113.10), which Rorem and Lamoreaux (see n. 24 supra) attribute to John of Scythopolis as the first scholion on CH in Syriac.

Turning to Eriugena’s translation of the phrase about fire: *semper motus, per seipsvm motus, movens alterum*,\(^{26}\) there are two conclusions one can draw at this point. Firstly, in translating \(\text{"JLJ<0J@<}\) in this phrase as *per se ipsum motum*, Eriugena had a choice from among at least two options, since in another context (namely, in the phrase about the angels) he translated \(\text{"UJ<0J@H}\) differently. Secondly, Eriugena was not bound in his choice by either the scholiast’s or Hilduin’s authority, since he could well side, as we have seen, both with the former against the latter and *vice versa*.

These two points give enough ground to believe that, in describing fire as self-moved, Eriugena must have been guided either by the play on words only (suggested by “\(64<0J46\)\(\)" or, also, by some *idea* (whether his own or drawn from a source other than CD) of the sense in which one can attribute self-movement to the lowest, inanimate, level of


\(^{26}\) Of the modern translators mentioned above, only Heil in this case agrees with the meaning given by both the scholiast and Lampe; he translates the phrase about fire as “*st@dig in gleicher Weise bewegt, andere bewegend.*” Gandillac abandons even the compromise solution he found for \(\text{"ULJ<0J@H}\) in the phrase about the angels; he leaves out the genuine meaning of the word and translates: “douj d’un mouvement Jternel et moteur de lui-mLme et des autres.” See the Appendix infra for a synopsis of modern and medieval translations of our two phrases.
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creation. This sense, at any rate, is to be looked for in Eriugena, since unlike the modern translators of CD (whose familiarity with the Scholia does not guarantee that they have or give reasons for all points on which their translations contradict the Scholia), Eriugena made himself accountable for every word of his translation of CH, at least, by his Expositiones. It is in the Expositiones, then, that we are to look first, in order to see whether or not the play on words was the only reason Eriugena could have for translating in as per seipsvm motus.

SELF-MOVEMENT AND SELF-REVERSION

One may get a first glimpse of the idea that guided Eriugena’s translation from his commentary on the phrase about fire:

EVER MOVED: it does not stand, indeed, but is incessantly moved through all things, moving all things. MOVED BY ITSELF; indeed, it suffers motion from no other corporeal element. MOVING OTHER, understand element. For it first moves by itself air; by air, water; by water, earth and all earthen bodies. (Barbet, Cap. XV.231–6)

Thus one reason Eriugena believed self-movement can be attributed to the element of fire might be his assumption that fire is the sole origin of movement within the species (or at the level) of creation to which it properly belongs. However, this does not

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27 The idea that fire is self-moved is found, e.g., in Origen, in a passage Arnim identifies as Stoic (SVF 2.988, citing Princ. lib. III, p. 108, ed. Delarue).

28 Cf. “Thus by four differentiations created life is brought together into four species: the intellectual in angels, [the rational in men, the sensitive in beasts, the insensitive] in plants and in
yet fully describe the idea of self-movement Eriugena attributes to material creation. A discussion of fire in PER indicates that there is more to it:

By the sun I mean that incomprehensible power which is diffused through the whole of this visible world, which is called fire for that reason that it acts within in all things, of which the principal source is that external body which is called by the name of 'sun', in which and through which it manifests the most evident powers of its operation, I mean light and heat. But it administers all the other bodies which are born and nourished in the world by its most hidden operations and is made in its totality everywhere, and from itself in itself it is made in all things, breaking out into all things visibly, consuming all things into itself invisibly. Hence it is not unwarrantably that Scripture says, "Gyrating in a gyre the spirit goes forth and returns into its own place" [Eccl. 1:6]. For the fiery spirit because of the exceeding subtlety of its nature traverses all things and is made all things in all things, and returns into itself, since it is the substantial source and origin of all visible things and for that reason is called by the Greeks Ν@Α< that is to say, "The Returning One (reuertens)."29 For, after traversing all the other bodies, in which only the form shows a trace of life, as are the four elements of the world whether as simple in themselves or as composite: earth, I mean, water and air and ether. . . . Outside these you (will) find no creature.” (PER, Lib. III, p. 286:3–13). As Sheldon-Williams indicates (ibid., p. 318 n. 53), “ether” in Eriugena is “equivalent to fire.”

Interestingly, Eriugena could read the idea of reversion into the Greek participle only because for him the latter could be
bodies of the world both visibly and invisibly it returns into itself and calls back into itself all things which receive the beginning of their generation from it. Hence also the holy theologians often represent the superessential divine and formless essence, as St. Dionysius says, by fire, for it images the divine property, if one may say so, visibly in many ways (igne habente multas divinæ proprietatis imagines). (Lib.III, pp. 165:33–166:16; emphasis added)

The place in CD to which Eriugena refers here is CH XV.2: *(Î D Ê D@Â J † YB, D@FÂ< 6" â µt› DNT] â†† Î< ÂLBDâ B@H< PN †*4'( DNð@F< dH CP@J 4B@B8 H) † H2," DP@H, æ©H, ê<©J 0J 1HdH â£@D° J † CH, ã< <H(PG 329 A; Heil/Ritter, p. 52.8–11). The last sentence of the passage from PER quoted above is an almost word-to-word translation of this phrase. The account of fire in CH that immediately follows this phrase, however, does not distinguish, among the many properties of fire, any particularly “divine” one. This suggests that by “º ÑJ®" Dionysius means, in this phrase, the property of being “ýB, D@FÂH 6" â µt› DNT] â††” characteristic of the divine predicated of the source of fire, the sun: “Phoëntos—that is, N© A< † CH N© A<—that is, coming; hence, N© A< † CH—genitive [case]. The sun is, moreover, called N© A< because it daily comes in sunrise and sunset” (Annotationes in Marcianum, 486.3, ed. Lutz, p. 198:7–9).

Cf. Sheldon-Williams’ footnote ad loc. Given that PER antedates Expositiones (Jeauneau 1969, ibid.), this passage in PER, insofar as it comments on a phrase from Dionysius account of fire in CH XV.2, must have been a natural Vorlage for Eriugena’s commentary on the same account in the Expositiones.
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essence; what he lists then are “the many images” of this property that fire “has”:

Visible fire, after all, is, so to speak, in everything. It passes undiluted through everything and yet continues to be completely beyond them. It lights up everything and remains hidden at the same time. In itself it is undetectable and becomes evident only through its own working on matter. It is unstoppable. It cannot be looked upon. Yet it is master of everything. Wherever it is, it changes things towards its own activity. It bestows itself upon all who draw near. With kindling warmth it causes renewal. With unveiled enlightenments it grants illumination, yet continues to be pure and undiluted. It makes distinctions and is nevertheless unchanging. It rises up and penetrates deeply. It is exalted and is never brought low. It is ever on the move, moving in the same way, and moving others. It extends in all directions and is hemmed in nowhere. It needs no one. It grows unseen and it manifests its greatness wherever it is received. It is dynamic, powerful, invisibly present in everything. If ignored it does not seem to be there, but when friction occurs, it will seek out something; it appears suddenly, naturally and of itself, and soon it rises up irresistibly and, losing nothing of itself, it communes joyfully with everything. <...> One could discover many other attributes of fire which, like images drawn from perceived things, can be applied to the activities of the Deity.

31 Luibheid/Rorem’s translation, which accords here with Eriugena’s, reads: “moving itself.”
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There are three points to be made concerning these two accounts of fire. Firstly, Eriugena concludes his account in PER with the phrase from Dionysius’ account in CH XV.2 to draw attention not so much to the “many images” of a “divine property” (as Dionysius does in his account) as to the one “divine” property of fire, namely, to its capacity of self-reversion. This, therefore, seems to be Eriugena’s re-interpretation of “Æ _ µ _ Ø _ A _ " (the *divina proprietas*) in Dionysius’ phrase. Secondly, this “property” of self-reversion (which alone, according to Eriugena, makes fire an image of the divine essence) is not even mentioned by Dionysius in his lengthy enumeration of the “visible images of the divine property” made manifest by fire. Finally, this self-reversion of fire in Eriugena seems modelled on the self-movement of the Deity he could find in Dionysius (cf. the passage from DN IV.17 quoted in section “Historical Introduction”).

Now, as we have seen, Eriugena’s interpretation of the movement of fire as self-reversion is foreign to Dionysius. However, the very idea of self-reversion Eriugena uses for that purpose belongs to Dionysius’ account of self-movement, even though not of fire but of the Deity. This means that, even prior to the *Expositiones*, Eriugena had, in fact, already developed in PER the idea of the self-movement of fire and thus followed up his mistranslation of “_ µ _ Ø _ A _ " in CH XV.2 as *per se ipsum motum*. The account of fire in PER, if taken as a Vorlage for the commentary on the phrase about fire in the *Expositiones* (cf. n. 30 supra), suggests that all four corporeal elements mentioned in that commentary participate in one circular movement, initiated by—and consummated in—the most incorporeal of the four, namely, the element of fire. Thus, in the same way as

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the Divine Goodness and Essence and Life and Wisdom and everything which is in the source of all things first flow down into the primordial causes and make them to be, then <. . .> descend in an ineffable way through the orders of the universe that accommodate them, flowing forth continuously through the higher to the lower; and return back again to their source through the most secret channels of nature by a most hidden course (PER Lib III, p. 56:26–31),

so fire, too, produces and nourishes “by its most hidden operations <. . .> all the other bodies in the world” (PER Lib. III, p. 166:1–3)—“by itself air; by air, water; by water, earth and all earthen bodies” (Barbet, Cap. XV.235–6)—only to call “back into itself all things which receive the beginning of their generation from it” (PER ibid., 11–13). Fire thus imitates—with the lowest, corporeal, level of creation—the self-movement of the Divine Goodness which creates, sustains and perfects all things (Barbet, Cap. I.192f), both corporeal and incorporeal.

As Eriugena’s mistranslation of Ĭ L Џ I @ in CH XV.2 indicates, his conceptual departure from Dionysius must have started already with his first translation of CD, assuming with Barbet (1973, p. 96) that the Latin text of CH commented upon in the Expositiones goes back to that first translation. As we shall see, the same kind of mistranslation occurs in Eriugena’s version of St. Maximus’ Quaestiones ad Thalassium (hereafter Thal).

ERIUGENA’S REINTERPRETATION OF ST. MAXIMUS

Already in Eriugena’s translation of Ambigua ad Iohannem (hereafter Amb)—the first work of St. Maximus he translated (Jeauneau 1969, ibid.)—there is at least one shift of meaning to be mentioned. In the passage from Amb 23 (PG 91 1260 C)
which Eriugena quotes in PER (Lib I, p. 214:6–13), St. Maximus elaborates upon Dionysius’ idea that “under the one aspect [God] is moved, under the other He moves” (DN IV.14):

As being Desire and Love the Divine is moved, but as desirable and lovable It moves to Itself all [things] that are receptive of desire and love. <...> It is moved as creating an inherent bond of desire and love in those who are receptive of them, but moves as attracting by nature the appetite of those who are moved because of It. <...> He moves and is moved as thirsting to be thirsted and loving to be loved and desiring to be desired.

St. Maximus differs from Dionysius in that he stresses not so much one circular, self-revertive, movement of the divine essence, into which the whole of creation would be involved (cf. DN IV.17), as the distinction between the movement by which the Deity goes out of Itself, into creation, on the one hand, and the movement by which creation returns into the Deity, on the other hand. Thus, elsewhere (Amb 7, PG 91 1073 B), he denies the capability of self-movement to any creature whatsoever:

Cf. P. Sherwood’s translation: “Whatever comes to be suffers, receiving movement, as not being self-motion or self-power” (The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor and his Refutation of Origenism [Rome 1955], p. 128). Yet, right after this passage, in which St. Maximus denies to humanity (as part of creation) the capability of self-movement, he grants to it the capability of freewill (Amb 9, PG 91 1076 B). Thus he breaks with the intellectual tradition that either identifies the two or construes the latter as a species of the former. This tradition is still at work in St. Maximus’ predecessors, Dionysius and John
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The way Eriugena mistranslates this latter phrase: “Omnia enim ea quaecunque facta sunt patiuntur moueri, sicut ea quae non sunt per seipsum motus aut per seipsam uirtus sunt,” \(^{34}\) may seem not dramatic. Although he turns the denial into assertion, what he asserts—namely, that self-movement pertains to the things that are not created—is not what St. Maximus denies. Nevertheless, this alteration makes a difference. To begin with, St. Maximus (in his phrase quoted above, at least) does not encroach on Dionysius’ understanding of divine self-movement; this is, as I am going to show now, what Eriugena does in his translation of that phrase.

For Dionysius, the only thing besides the human soul to which self-movement pertains is “the ever revolving <. . .> simple power [of Love]” (DN IV.17). This self-reversion of the Deity, as it were, does not seem to have any connection with Dionysius’ eschatology, any more than his eschatology has any connection with the idea of the self-reversion (or self-movement) of creation. \(^{35}\) Eriugena, on the other hand, in his translation of St. Maximus’ phrase, endows (and, even, identifies) with self-movement “things that are not created.” Now, in PER, “uncreated Nature” means “the ultimate Consummation to which all things tend and in which the limit of their natural motion is

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\(^{35}\) The most direct discussion of eschatology in CD is in DN I.4, 592 Bf; see also EH VII.
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set” (Lib. V, 1019 B). It seems not unlikely, therefore, that, already in his translation of Amb, Eriugena had meant by “things that are not created” what he would call in the language developed then in PER the fourth “division of Nature” (which “neither creates nor is created”), not the first one (which “creates and is not created”) (PER Lib. I, p. 36.22–24). Thus, the way Eriugena mistranslates St. Maximus’ phrase indicates that he might ascribe self-movement par excellence not only to the Creator (as Dionysius does) but, also, to the whole of creation in its eschatological (and, thus, fully deified) state.

In Amb 7, St. Maximus stresses, moreover, voluntary (cf. n. 33 supra) suffering (BVFP, 4) of nature as constituting its return to God; it is only natural for him, therefore, to deny that this return is “self-movement” ("ΩΓΩΦ" or “self-power” ("ΩΓΩΦ"). Ironically, Eriugena, who uses in PER St. Maximus’ idea of return, might have been prepared, as I hope to have shown, already when he first encountered this idea in Amb, to construe it as self-movement. He then does this, in fact, in his translation of Thal,37 by mistranslating "ΩΓΩΦ" (just as he had mistranslated its cognate in CH XV) as “self-movement.”38

36 “There is no body contained [even] in corporeal nature, whether latently or patently endowed with vital motion only, or enriched in addition with corporeal sense of the non-rational soul, which shall not return through the mediation of its life process into its hidden causes: for among the things which derive their substances from the cause of all things there is nothing which shall be reduced [in the end of time] to nothing” (ibid., 1020 B).
37 Question LXV. Laga/Steel: 522–549/411–435; PG 90 757–760 A.
38 This is the only case in which I have followed the meaning of the Greek text rather than that of Eriugena’s translation; aside from this, I believe my translation of the passage renders both.
When nature [supposing that it happens] will be united by grace to the Logos, the *sine qua non* [conditions of the changeable movement] will not exist, [and for this matter] the alterable movement of [things] moved by nature will have died out. For the limited [state of] rest, in which of necessity naturally arises movement in the sense of alteration of the [things] moved, [this state] must receive an end by the presence of the unlimited [state of] rest, in which the movement of the [things] moved naturally stops. For in that in which there is, according to nature, a limit, the movement of the [things] that are in it, prevails as alterable in all respects; but in that in which there is, according to nature, no limit, no movement of the [things] that are in it will be known to be alterable in any respect. Thus, the world, on the one hand, is a limited place and the [state of] rest which has been circumscribed; time, on the other hand, prevails as a circumscribed movement. This is why the movement which is according to life of the [things] that are in [time] prevails as alterable. But when nature [supposing that it happens] will have passed, according to activity and thought, beyond time and place, that is to say, [beyond] the *sine qua non* [conditions of it], that is—[beyond] the limited rest and movement, it forms an immediate connection with the forethought; it finds the forethought to be a logos, simple and stable by nature, having, as it were, no circumference at all, and because of this—[having] in all respects no movement. On the one hand, therefore, as it exists in a temporal [way] in the world, nature has movement which is alterable because of the limited [state of] rest of the world and [because of] the current of time.
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according to alteration; on the other hand, coming to be in God, nature, on the account of [the fact that He], in whom it has come to be, [is] a natural monad, will have the ever movable [state of] rest and the stable [state] of moving in the same [way] [statum semper mobilem et stabilem per se motum, F].\(^{46}\) everlasting coming to be around the Same, the One and the Unique. The word knows \([@\theta\delta\'\text{ }\text{Eriugena}\text{ }A] \) that this [state] is an immediate and abiding foundation [being built] around the first cause of the [things] that have been created by it [sit immediatum circa primum causale eorum que ex eo facta sunt, et singularem collocationem;\

\(\text{\text{sit immediatum circa primum causale eorum que ex eo facta sunt, et singularem collocationem.;} }^{46}\)\]

The last phrase in this passage is a clear parallel to the phrase about the angels in CH VII.2 with which our discussion above of self-movement in Eriugena started: \(\text{\text{sit immediatum circa primum causale eorum que ex eo facta sunt, et singularem collocationem;}}\) 

\(\text{\text{sit immediatum circa primum causale eorum que ex eo facta sunt, et singularem collocationem;}}\)

Thus “[@\theta\delta\'\text{ }\text{Eriugena}\text{ }A]” in our passage from Thal does not indicate some kind of knowledge communicated by the Logos (“le Verbe sait,” as in E. Ponsoye’s French translation of Thal [Les I ditions de l’Ancre 1992]) but means, rather, “it has been said [sc. by Dionysius] . . .”—see Palmer/Sherrard/Ware’s translation in The Philokalia, vol. 2 (London 1981), p. 272 and note. St. Maximus might use here also CH VII.4 (Heil/Ritter 31.6ff; PG 212 A): \(\text{\text{sit immediatum circa primum causale eorum que ex eo facta sunt, et singularem collocationem;}}\)

\(\text{\text{sit immediatum circa primum causale eorum que ex eo facta sunt, et singularem collocationem;}}\)

\(\text{\text{sit immediatum circa primum causale eorum que ex eo facta sunt, et singularem collocationem;}}\)
the two phrases in CD where both the word J"LJ<0J< occurs and ‘self-movement’ (not meant by Dionysius) appears in Eriugena’s translation. In the passage above, St. Maximus uses the idea of the highest kind of movement (“everlastingly coming to be around” God), which Dionysius attributes to the angels (that is, to the highest part of created nature) only. St. Maximus uses this idea, however, only to re-attribute this kind of movement to the highest, eschatological state of created nature as a whole. Eriugena, in his turn, uses St. Maximus’

overlooks St. Maximus’ dependence on CH here in his detailed article: “Der Einfluss der Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita auf Maximus Confessor” in Texte und Untersuchungen (Berlin) 77 (1961): 331–350. He mentions, however, that, although “darin sind beide [sc. Maximus und Dionys] der gleichen Meinung, daß die μ, 6Δ4-0F\" B, © 2, \` ein Wesensmerkmal der Kr@te ist (Myst. 19, 696 C cf. mit CH 7, 1, 205 B),” “einen Unterschied kürte man . . . darin sehen daβ Maximus bei der μ, 6Δ4-0F\" . . . an die Engel überhaupt denkt, w@rend Dionys [sic] auf die erste Triade einschr@kt”; and that “Maximus gibt diesem Gedanken noch insofern eine besondere Nuancierung, als er jene auch dem Menschen zuspricht, wenn er die Stufe des ÆV( , 8@l erreicht hat . . . , und der NbF4H wenn sie in Gott ist (Thal 65, 760 A). Hier fallen antithetischen Formulierungen auf (FV<k μ, 6Δ4-0J<©, die an Dionys erinnern” (p. 340).

40 This idea does not seem to occur in the contemporaries of Dionysius, the Neoplatonists of the Athenian school. Thus, for Hermias (see n. 41 infra), the highest, circular movement, is self-reversion (ÆB4F D€Nl BΩ H Ε"LJ<, that is, self-movement, rather than movement around and in the immediate proximity of the higher principle, that is, the kind of movement Dionysius attributes to the angels (but cf. Plotinus, Enn VI.9.8.1–8). This seems the reason why Dionysius prefers not to call the circular movement he attributes to the angels in DN IV.8 “self-movement.”
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reinterpretation of Dionysius’ idea in his commentary on the phrase about the angels in the *Expositiones*.

SELF-MOVEMENT AND ESCHATOLOGY

*Expositiones* cap. VII.387–432 (commentary on the phrase about the angels):

It follows: HAVING BEEN INFLEXIBLY RECEIVED [as part?] OF THE RANK [characterized by] PROPER MOVEMENT BY THEMSELVES AND IN THE SAME [way], ACCORDING TO THE INCONVERTIBILITY OF [anyone] WHO LOVES GOD. By the [words] above [the following] is implied: it must be supposed, or [if you wish] considered, that they, namely, the first essences, have been received inflexibly. It cannot be said, indeed, in what way, they are received immutably into themselves, that is, [in what way they] return into themselves, say, by a circular movement, or [if you wish] a spherical revolution, which is from themselves, indeed, because they are moved by themselves, and by the same movement. Indeed, their movement is uniform, because it is most truly proclaimed of it: the stable movement and the mobile state [*motus stabilis et status mobilis*]. And this is what follows: [part?] of the rank according to the inconvertibility of [anyone] who loves God. For, indeed, every rank of [anyone] who loves God is being turned around God by an inconvertible, that is, in no way variable, but always uniform, movement. But what he says of the proper movement [of things] by themselves needs
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careful examination. If, indeed, all things are moved by God, as true reason teaches, in what way are the heavenly, and in the highest degree primordial, essences said to be moved around God by their proper movement by themselves? For if someone will have said: every creature, from the highest [principle] all the way downwards, has its own proper, that is, natural, movement, an inquiry will be made about this movement: what, thus, is [there] of great [value], if what may be regarded as praiseworthy in the heavenly and most excellent Throne pertains not less to the praise of a tiny worm; if each creature may naturally have its own movement? But perhaps it must be said, not without reason, about this question: everything that is not moved by a creature superior to it but accepts the principle of its movement immediately from the sole cause of all things Itself, is not undeservedly said to be moved by no [thing], since the cause of its movement is superessential, and it surpasses everything that is and that is not. Indeed, the other ranks of the universality founded [by God], although they may establish the principle of their movement in the one cause of all [things], nevertheless, are both moved and administered not immediately by this [principle], but always gradually, the inferior [ranks] through the superior [ones]. Finely, therefore, the most excellent ranks of the heavenly essences both exist as and are called AYTOKINHTOI, that is, moved by themselves, because they move themselves by themselves and are moved of themselves. Indeed, they are moved by no [thing] superior to themselves, except by God Himself, who is, properly [speaking], the principle of movement of no
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[thing], because he is [the principle of movement] of all [things] in general; but what [belongs] to all [things] in general, [belongs] properly [speaking] to no [thing]. For this reason, not only the primordial causes of all things but, in truth, even the most excellent ranks [of angels] are declared AYTOKINHTOI. The human soul is also not unreasonably called by the philosophers AYTOKINHTOS, that is, moved by itself, since no creature is nearer to God [than it is], and, if it were not sinning, it would be administered by no rank superior to itself, because no rank would happen to be superior to it, just as there will be no [such a rank], when [the soul] will be called back into the pristine dignity of its nature.

Several themes already familiar to us come together here. Firstly, Eriugena seems to take the traditional identification of self-movement with self-reversion seriously enough to consider it worthwhile to demonstrate that the angels of the first triad, who (as his Greek text must have suggested to him) possess self-movement, possess, also, self-reversion. His mistranslation of μεταφερόμενοι as “received” must have been the first step instrumental in this demonstration; what was left to the Expositiones then was to interpret this as “received into themselves.” Such a reading of the idea of reversion into the phrase about the angels might seem another conceptual deviation from Dionysius, who ascribes reversion (στραφῶν) only to the second (CH VIII.1, Heil/Ritter 33.7.15), not to the first, triad of angels. The reversion of the angels in Dionysius (which Eriugena renders in his translation as conversio) is, moreover, directed “to that which in the proper [sense] is” (BDIIT 6LDTH<i>ε<sub>ς</sub></i>) (ibid., 33.7), not to themselves; in this sense, it is not self-reversion. However, in DN IV.8, Dionysius attributes to the angels in general circular movement. Given that it is to the angels of the
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first triad that this (highest) kind of movement would belong in the first place, it must have been only natural for Eriugena to assume that that-into-which those angels “are received” must be “themselves.”

Second, to explain the meaning of the term “movement in the same way” in Dionysius’ phrase about the angels, Eriugena uses St. Maximus’ formula: “He who is always movable and always stable moveth himself.”


42 The expression “motus stabilis” goes back to Augustine (e.g., De ordine II, 16.44); however, it does not occur in Eriugena’s De divina praedestinatione, where he uses Augustine more than in any other of his works. The idea of status mobilis must be of later origin, and, if the formula equating it with that of motus stabilis first occurs in Eriugena—which seems not implausible (see l’Ouad Jeanneau, “Pour le dossier d’Israël Scot” in Archives d’histoire doctrinale et litteraire du Moyen Age 52 [1985], p. 63)—then this Latin formula must go back to Eriugena’s mis-translation of the term “statum semper mobilem et stabilem per se motum.” Interestingly, Eriugena uses the same formula, motus stabilis et status mobilis, to describe, in the Expositiones, the self-movement of the Father (Barbet, Cap. I. 170f). He uses there also a locution from Augustine: “Mouet [sc. Pater] igitur seipsum non localiter, non temporaliter” (Barbet, ibid. 167f). (Cf. De Genesi ad litteram VIII 20.39: Spiritus creatus mouet se ipsum per tempus et per
Third, Eriugena grapples here with the same question as that upon which he touches further on in the Expositiones, in his commentary on the phrase about fire (see the beginning of the section “Self-Movement and Self-Reversion”), namely: how is the self-movement of any creature whatsoever compatible with the basic tenet of Christian Neoplatonism that all creation is moved by God? Eriugena’s demonstration of such a possibility in both cases, assumes that that which is self-moved is not necessarily moved by itself alone; although it cannot be moved by anything belonging to any level of creation lower than itself.

Fourth, Eriugena seems to develop here a stronger notion of self-movement than in his commentary on the phrase about fire. Unlike fire, the first triad of angels “is not moved by a creature superior to it but accepts the principle of its movement immediately from the sole cause of all things Itself” (see the passage we are discussing). Since this cause, as Eriugena explains a bit further, is “superessential” in the sense that it “surpasses everything that is and that is not,” one may say that the first triad of angels is moved by absolutely no thing, not by no thing inferior to itself only, as the fire is.

Fifth, this stronger notion of self-movement in Eriugena is co-extensive with that of immediate proximity to God. This stronger notion applies to that which has no creature superior to itself in the hierarchical order of creation, i.e., in the linear order of proximity to God. It follows that to be self-moved means to be in immediate proximity to God.

Sixth, Eriugena inscribes this idea of self-movement as the state of immediate proximity to God into the traditional idea of self-movement as naturally belonging to the soul. The fact that the soul by its very nature is self-moved must not contradict the fact that, in its present state, it is “administered” (= moved?)

tempus ac locum corpus. Spiritus autem creator mouet se ipsum sine tempore ac loco, mouet conditum spiritum per tempus sine loco, mouet corpus per tempus et locum [quoted in PER Lib. V, 889 A].}
by the angelic ranks superior to itself, since its nature—that is, its “pristine dignity”—is precisely what it lost (or, rather, is losing constantly) through sin. However, when the soul will regain its pristine proximity to God, there will be no rank superior to it; its return to itself thus will make it equal to the angels.

Now, in both Dionysius and St. Gregory of Nyssa, the idea of man’s becoming “equal to the angels” (Lk. 20:36) is the paradigm for eschatology, it is no wonder, then, that this idea plays the same role in Eriugena. What Eriugena seems to stress, however, in St. Maximus’ eschatological interpretation of the state of immediate proximity to God (see the passage from *Thal* quoted above) is its protological dimension. The soul returns not to God only but, also, to its very nature, its “self”. On this assumption, one may call not only the state the soul reaches in the eschaton but, also, its movement towards that state that starts already here, in space and time, “self-movement.”

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43 DN 1.4, PG 3 592 C; *De opificio hominis* PG 44 188 C (quoted in PER Lib. IV, 797 D).

44 Cf. PER, Lib. V: “The paradise from which man was driven forth was nothing else but his own human nature” (PL 863 A). In Lib. II, Eriugena it makes clear that “man’s first state before sin in paradise <…> was equal and, as it were, of the same nature with (that of) angels” (p. 110:31–33). But the angels [of every rank?] “are substantially nothing else but intelligible, eternal [and] unceasing motions about the Beginning of all things” (ibid. 7–9). The soul, on the other hand, also “subsists in its motions <…> For it is by nature simple and indivisible, and is differentiated only by the substantial differences of its motions” (ibid. 3–6). Thus human intellect, which is “understood to be the principal part of the soul” (ibid. 2) is, in fact, its first motion, “by which it eternally revolves about the unknown God” (ibid., p. 108:29f). It is because “man when he was in honor abandoned his intellect’ [that is, the circular movement about God, natural to him] and ‘became equal to the beasts’ [Ps. 48:21, Vulg.],” that “he withdrew far from his angelic status and fell into the misfortune of this mortal life” (ibid., p. 112:2–5).
Yet a question remains. What will be, in the eschatological situation, as Eriugena presents it in the *Expositiones*, the role of Dionysius’ second and third triads of angels? In Dionysius, the mediating and anagogical activity of those lower ranks of angels towards the still lower levels of creation seems the only rationale for their existence. But such an activity seems to make no sense in Eriugena’s eschaton, with the whole of creation recapitulated onto the level of immediate proximity to God (that is, onto the level of the first triad of angels).

Eriugena does not address this issue in PER. This seems only natural, given that self-movement and immediate proximity to God do not yet appear there to be the *sine qua non* conditions of the eschatological fulfillment of creation. Thus, in Lib. V, after having reminded the Alumnus that

the Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones have a deeper and closer and purer contemplation of [God] than the Virtues and Powers and Dominions; and these again a more excellent and brighter contemplation of Him than the Principalities, Archangels and Angels (PL 1012 D f),

the Nutritor comments on Christ’s “promise to man that after the resurrection ‘they shall be as the angels in Heaven’ [Mk. 12:25]”:

Angels are disposed according to their proper rank; therefore men too will be disposed according to the different degrees of their virtues. (ibid. 1013 B)

This is the famous idea of the “many mansions” (Jn. 14:2) in Heaven, known already to St. Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer*. V. 36:2). This idea from Eriugena’s PER seems hardly compatible,
however, with the eschatological implications of the idea of self-movement he develops then in the *Expositiones*; it is not surprising therefore that we find there a hint of a quite different eschatological solution. As M.de Gandillac perfectly sums it up:

Le but [eschatologique] vis} est que l’Iglise d’ici-bas, s’]levant au-dessus de la varijte et de la dispersion que lui impose la peregrinatio huius vite, sparsim per loca et tempora, variatim per diversa mysteria, multiplex in doctrinis, composita in symbolis, atteigne €cette “unit} qui la fera l’ “Jgale” des “Vertus c]lestes en lesquelles n’est aucune diversit].” ([Barbet, Cap.] I, 441–451, p. 13)45

Thus Eriugena’s modification of the traditional idea of eschatological equality of men with angels developed in the *Expositiones*, seems to imply eschatological equality of all angelic ranks among themselves. Assuming that Eriugena still meant to inscribe this situation into the hierarchical universe of Dionysius, one implication seems to be that in the eschaton the two lower triads of angels will have merged (or, coincided) for him with the first triad. Eriugena nowhere explicitly says this. Whether he was aware of this aspect of his reinterpretation of Dionysius or not, he left it for us to speculate.

**SELF-REVERSION AND SELF-DETERMINATION:**
**GERSH’S THESIS**

Gersh (1978, p. 189) believes that Eriugena’s reinterpretation of "Û] @]J @H in the *Expositiones* (see above) shows that “the separation between his own cultural milieu and that of his

sources” has obscured for him the “traditional” (= Neoplatonic) meaning of self-movement (which, for Gersh, is “one variety of self-determination”):

Faced with the classical theory that the soul is ‘self-moved’ ("ûJ@6\C@H/ which he translates as *per seipsam mota*), and naturally having somehow to re-interpret this concept in line with the Christian Neoplatonic theory that only God is self-determined, Eriugena concludes that the terminology shows that the human soul is in direct rapport with God since there is no creature which is nearer to him [Expos. 7.408ff].

Gersh thus overlooks that, despite all the cultural distance between Eriugena and his sources, the concept of self-reversion is as constitutive for Eriugena’s concept of self-movement as it is for that of his Greek Neoplatonic predecessors; he eschatologically reinterprets both concepts without breaking the connection between them. This aspect, at least, of the “traditional” meaning of self-movement, must have been, therefore, still relevant for him.

One can agree with Gersh that in Eriugena, neither ‘self-movement’ nor ‘self-reversion’ imply ‘self-determination’, as they do, for instance, in Proclus. However, not only does the concept of self-movement “antedate [the pagan Neoplatonists] historically” (as Gersh observes correctly [1977, p. 375 n. 9]) but even the meaning of this concept had originally nothing to do with self-determination in the sense of independence from a higher principle. As Plato’s statement of the problem shows (see “Historical Introduction” above), to be self-moved meant originally to have the source of movement in no body other than one’s own. This is why Eriugena’s fire qualifies: it is moved by none of the other three corporeal elements.

Even if this original—and thus “antedating” pagan Neoplatonists—meaning of self-movement was completely lost
for them (to be rediscovered first by Eriugena), Gersh’s thesis quoted at the beginning of this paper (n. 1 and text) needs qualification. Already Proclus associates self-movement with \( \text{BEF JD @N B @ H \E L @} \) (El. Theol. pr. 17). At the same time, another pagan Neoplatonist, namely, Proclus’ Schulgenosse Hermias,\(^{46}\) construes \( \text{BEF JD @N B @ H \E L @} \) as circular movement (see n. 41 supra). And although Dionysius then attributes only circular movement—but not self-movement!—to the angels of the first triad, in Eriugena’s translation it becomes again self-movement. Yet, his interpretation of this self-movement as self-reversion only, but not self-determination, seems no less an appropriation for Christian eschatology of an aspect of traditional (“pagan”) Neoplatonism (which first defined self-movement as self-reversion) than a departure further away from this tradition along the lines projected by Dionysius (who first disconnected the idea of self-reversion from that of self-determination).

APPENDIX
A SYNOPSIS OF MODERN AND MEDIEVAL TRANSLATIONS
OF THE TWO PHRASES OF DIONYSIUS

Phrase about The Angels:

\[ [5"2\" D\" H<. . . > "\'j \" HÚ( \'j X<. . . > d\" H<. . . >] \]

CH VII.2, ed. Heil/Ritter

\[ J{l} H@6. \" H\mu. AB\@J @ 6" @ \]

\[ J"@\@ AB\@J @ 6" @ N\@\@ XT H\@J D, BJ @< \]

\[ J V> TH\mu D, BAH\mu @, P@ X< " H \]

\(^{46}\) See, e.g., Der kleine Pauly Lexikon der Antike (Stuttgart 1967), s.v. Hermias (or, Hermias).
On Eriugena’s Appropriation of Self-Movement

Codex Grec 437, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

Hilduin (Dionysiaca)

Eriugena, ed. Barbet

Gangillac (Sources Chrît.)

Luibheid/Rorem (The Classics of Western Spirituality)

Heil (1986)

Phrase about Fire:

CH XV. 2, Heil/Ritter Grec 437

Hilduin < . . > sempermotus et semovens < . . >
Arkadi Choufrine

Eriugena  
<...> semper motus, *per seipsvm motus*  
<...>

Gandillac  
<...> douj d’un mouvement Jternel et  
*moteur de lui-mLne* <...>

Lubheid/Rorem  
<...> ever on the move, *moving itself* <...>

Heil  
<...> st@dig *in gleicher Weise bewegt*  
<...>

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