

Theory and History of Ontology ([www.ontology.co](http://www.ontology.co)) by Raul Corazzon | e-mail: [rc@ontology.co](mailto:rc@ontology.co)

## Eriugena, *Periphyseon* Book I: Aristotelian Logic and Categories

### Contents

#### History of the Doctrine of Categories

This part of the section [History of the Doctrine of Categories](#) includes of the following pages:

#### The Doctrine of Categories in the Middle Ages

[Eriugena, \*Periphyseon\* Book I: Aristotelian Logic and Categories \(Current page\)](#)

[Latin Medieval Commentators on Aristotle's Categories](#)

#### Selected bibliography on the Latin Medieval Commentators:

[Commentaries on Aristotle's \*Categories\*](#)

[Commentators on Aristotle's \*Categories\*](#)

[Index of the Pages on Medieval Philosophy](#)

#### Logic and Categories in the *Periphyseon*

Categories are discussed in the Book I (462D 8 - 524B 12); numbers are that of columns in Heinrich Joseph Floss (ed.), *Joannis Scoti opera quae supersunt omnia* in: Jacques-Paul Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 122, Paris 1853, coll. 439-1022 and are reproduced in modern editions and translations.

"[John the Scot] unique qualities appear first in the treatise that Archbishop Hincmar commissioned in 850 as a reply to Gottschalk's thesis of double predestination.(26) To Gottschalk's argument that God has without qualification predestined the just to salvation and the unjust to perdition John the Scot replied by asserting the fundamental unity of God. We cannot know this unity. We can know, if only by analogy, the manifestations of this unity: God's will, his life, his power. We can recognize also that created nature is itself a manifestation of God: another form in which he is partly accessible. However trivial, and however misguided, individuals may be, as part of that creation they are all inescapably manifestations of the one ultimate unity. Gottschalk's thesis, whereby part of creation is absolutely opposed to another part (the just to the unjust), has always been so opposed and cannot conceivably resolve this opposition, introduces into creation a division that goes right back to God himself, dividing his will, and beyond that his unity; which is unthinkable. Now John is arguing here along familiar Neoplatonist lines. Where he is exceptional (for the ninth century at

least) is in seeing the relationship of God to the creation in terms of contemporary logic. In the treatise against Gottschalk this is not spelled out. John makes it clear in his major independent work, the *De divisione naturae*. For the ultimate genus, which covers everything, including God. John proposes the name *natura*.(27) The *genus natura* sums up four *species*: the first creates and is not created, the second is created and creates, the third is created and does not itself create, the fourth neither creates nor is created. Now this raises a host of questions, which cannot be discussed here. But the essential is that within the all-embracing genus nature John has included both God and the created world. The further analysis of the first species, the uncreated creator, God, takes up the rest of Book I of the *De divisione naturae*. In what sense can the ten logical categories of substance, quantity, quality, and the rest be applied to God? How are these categories related one to another? In this rather violent change of direction we can see what is almost certainly the major logical text underlying Book I. A discussion of *genera* and *species* that points in the direction of John's comprehensive *natura* can be found in the *Isagoge*,(28) Aristotle's fundamental account of the categories alone was known, though not widely available.(29) Where the two are combined, and a much closer precedent offered for John's *natura*, is in the *De decem categoriis*, the late fourth-century text that I have mentioned already as a source for Sedulius Scotus. The author of the *De decem categoriis* begins with the idea of *species* building up into ever more comprehensive *genera*. Finally, he says, the vast name of infinite capacity which comprehends everything else is substance, beyond which nothing can be found or thought to exist. This is one of the ten categories.(30) He goes on to expound each of the categories in turn. Though John the Scot has not followed the *De decem categoriis* slavishly, he could find in it a model for the general structure of Book I of the *De divisione naturae*, as well as the source for specific passages. Hugh of Saint Victor saw the parallel when he called John's treatise the *De decem categoriis in Deum*.(31) Both in the first book of the *De divisione naturae* and in the argument already cited from his treatise on predestination, John the Scot is thinking within the framework of the *De decem categoriis*.

The first book of the *De divisione naturae* is John's most explicit statement of the logical basis of his theology. The rest of the treatise, however, depends principally on texts that he himself had translated from the Greek: the writings of the Pseudo-Denis, Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor.(31) Here John the Scot had gone so far beyond his contemporaries that this part of his work had very little immediate effect. He had opened up a vein that no one else at that time could develop. We may remember the reception that the writings of Pseudo-Denis had met with in France earlier in the century. The Greek emperor had sent a copy to Louis the Pious, who gave it to Abbot Hilduin of Saint Denis. Within twenty four hours of its arrival at Saint Denis, nineteen miracles had been recorded from the mere presence of the wonderful volume within the walls of the abbey.(32) To do Hilduin justice, he then sat down and translated it; but the first reaction is the more typical, even for the later ninth century. The Greek philosophers were totally removed from the main currents of contemporary learning; and here John by his fluency in Greek was to some extent isolated from the ordinary masters of his day.

I have spoken so far of individual scholars and their work: Gottschalk, Sedulius, John the Scot. With John the Scot we are brought up against the question of what impression, if any, was made by these great men on the ordinary school curriculum. Though the study of any one institution here is bound to be inadequate, we can see the beginnings of an answer in the group of masters who taught at the monastery of Saint Germanus in Auxerre. Their founder seems to have been the monk Haimo, who was active as a teacher circa 840 to 860.(34) Younger than Haimo and roughly contemporary with each other were Heiric, also a monk of Saint Germanus, and Hucbald his pupil, who was a monk of Saint Amand, near Tournai, Finally the youngest and most prolific of the group was Remigius, who taught in Auxerre circa 876 to 893 and then moved on to Rheims and possibly Paris.(35) The school of Auxerre had a continuous existence for over fifty years: during that whole period the library was being built up; and successive masters could establish a routine of accepted texts. We do not know how far their currency elsewhere was due to the school of Auxerre; we can see only that they are in practice the texts that are generally available in France and Germany over the next hundred years. In the first place the school of Auxerre confirms the growing interest in logic. The first (and perhaps the only) commentary on the *De decem categoriis* is attributed to Heiric of Auxerre, who had himself been taught by a pupil of John the Scot. There is a trace of John's influence at the very beginning, where a phrase from Alcuin's preface is explained by a quotation from the *De divisione naturae*, but substantially it is a sober and meticulous exposition of the text. It seems to have been exactly what was needed; for it was copied again and again throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries, until the *De decem categoriis* itself went out of use.(36) The other major texts of the

*logica vetus* were already furnished with the commentaries of Boethius. So on the face of it there was less need to produce new ones. What we do find, however, are adaptations of the Boethian commentaries to meet current needs. A series of glosses on the *Isagoge* for example, which should perhaps be ascribed to Heiric's pupil Hucbald of Saint Amand, is essentially based on Boethius's commentaries on the same text.(37) The author has drawn attention to the passages that are specially important, and quoted the parts of the Boethian exposition that he thinks will be helpful. This might be dismissed as a mere abridgment, were it not so typical of the way in which the *Isagoge* and similar texts were to be treated in the future. Like Heiric's commentary on the *De decem categoriis*, these notes are an attempt to drill the ordinary student in logic: to pitch the Boethian commentary at classroom level. Here they exemplify the principal concern and achievement of scholarship over the next 150 years. Both in France and Germany *marginalia* of this type can be found throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries.(38) Notker's German paraphrases of the *Categories* and the *De interpretatione* have the same purpose.(39) Though material of this kind is not philosophically original, it is of the greatest interest as an index of where and how the *logica vetus* was being mastered. Heiric's commentary on the *De decem categoriis* and the glosses on the *Isagoge* that may be the work of his pupil Hucbald are representative of a great deal of later work in the same field. On the linguistic side of the curriculum the school of Auxerre made a contribution that was clearly useful, and may prove to have been fundamental. The other aspect of Carolingian learning may broadly be called "scientific": the enthusiasm for speculating on how the universe is put together - what keeps the stars on their courses and the material of this world in a coherent order. Most students would encounter such questions first in their study of Vergil." (pp. 6-9)

## Notes

- (26) *De divina praedestinatione* sap. 2. PL 122.360B-4C; cf. K. Vielhaber, *Gottschalk der Sachse* (Bonn 1956) 68-74.
- (27) *De divisione naturae* 1, ed. Sheldon-Williams, *Scriptores Latini Hibernici* 7 (Dublin 1968) 36.
- (28) *Isagoge Porphyrii*, ed. Minio-Paluello (Bruges 1966) 6-14; *Aristoteles latinus* 1.6.
- (29) Minio-Paluello "Note sull'Aristotele latino medievale XV," *Opuscula. The Latin Aristotle* (Amsterdam 1972) 448-458.
- (30) "Postremo, licet abunde prospexerat dispersa passim genera speciali nota concilians, tamen ingenii quodam et capaci ad infinitum nomine omne quicquid est comprehendens dixit οὐσία extra quam nex inueniri aliquid nec cogitari potest. Haec est una de categoriis decem": *De decem categoriis* 5, ed. Minio-Paluello, (Bruges 1961) 134; *Aristoteles latinus* 1.5.
- (31) Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon* 3.2, ed. Buttner (Washington 1939) 49.
- (32) I. P. Sheldon-Williams, "Johannes Scottus Eriugena," *The Cambridge History of later Greek and early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge 1967) 518-533.
- (33) PL 106.16BC, cf. H. F. Dondaine, *Le corpus dionysien de l'université de Paris au XIIIe siècle* (Rome 1953) 25.
- (34) R. Quadri, "Aimone di Auxerre alla luce dei *Collectanea* di Heiric di Auxerre," *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 6 (1963) 7-18.
- (35) R. Quadri, *I "Collectanea" di Eirico, di Auxerre* (Freiburg 1966: *Spicilegium Friburgensis* 2 3-28. For Hucbald see A. van de Vyver, "Hucbald de Saint Amand, écolâtre et l'invention du Nombre d'or," in *Mélanges Auguste Pelzer*, (Louvain 1947) 61-79. For Remigius see C. E. Lutz, *Remigii Autissiodorensis Commentum in Martianum Capellam* (Leiden 1962) 1-2, 5-16. The school of Auxerre as a whole is discussed by Quadri (1966) and E. Jeaneau, "Les écoles de Laon et d'Auxerre au IXe siècle," *Settimane di studio Centro Italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo* 19 (Spoleto 1972) 495-522.
- (36) It is likely that several scholars contributed to this gloss: see L. Minio-Paluello (n. 29 above) 451 and again in the discussion of Jeaneau's paper (n. 35 above) 558-560.
- (37) C. Baeumker and B. S. von Waltershausen, "Frühmittelalterliche Glossen des angeblichen Jepa zur Isagoge des Porphyrius," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters* (Münster 1924) 24.1; cf. Cappuyns, (*Jean Scot Érigène: sa vie, son œuvre, sa pensée*, Louvain 1933) 72-73; 73 app.
- (38) See for example Munich Clm. 14372, 14516 (S. Emmeram, Regensburg); Paris Bibliothèque Nationale lat. 11127 (Echternach): Orléans, Bibl. mun. 277 (Fleury: cf. A. van de Vyver, *Abbonis*

*Floriacensis Opera inedita* (Bruges 1966) 25).

(39) ed. Piper, *Schriften Notkers und seiner Schule* (Freiburg 1882) 1, 2-3.

From: Margaret Gibson, "The Continuity of Learning *circa* 850- *circa* 1050", *Viator*, 6, 1975, pp. 1-14 (reprinted as Essay X in: M. Gibson, *'Artes' and Bible in the Medieval West*, Aldershot, Variorum, 1993.

"The first book of Eriugena's *Periphyseon* can and should be read as a text within the tradition of commentary on the *Categories*. Although the object of Eriugena's remarks is the pseudo-Augustinian *Categoriae decem*, the paraphrase of the *Categories* that, in the era of Constantius and Theodosius, originated in the school of Themistius, his treatment of predication is altogether systematic and is at least as conformable to Aristotle's text as is the commentary of Ammonius. (1) That the *Categoriae decem* is a text derivative from that of Aristotle, Eriugena well understands. (2) Since there is no evidence than, apart from the *Categoriae decem*, Eriugena enjoyed access to the *Corpus Aristotelicum*, it seems that he could not have brought, as did Ammonius, the interpretative weight of such works as the *Metaphysics* to bear on his understanding of the *Categories*. Thus, for Eriugena, but unlike Ammonius, matter has no place in the category of substance.

Since Eriugena, is treating the categories, upholds it as a cardinal principle that all the categories, considered in themselves, are incorporeal, (3) he already has grounds for thinking that corporeal beings, with their matter, are at least as marginal as Ammonius had understood them. Believing, as he does, that substance -- in itself -- is incorporeal, Eriugena maintains that whatever inhere in substance is likewise incorporeal. (4) So the investigation of substance, for Eriugena, requires no investigation of matter.

As Eriugena would have it, the category of substance does include genera, species, and individuals but, because no substance is extended, no substance may be corporeal. The contents of the category of substance are, therefore, purely formal. As being purely formal, they are completely immaterial." (p. 19)

## Notes

(1) The text of *Categoriae decem* is in: *Aristoteles latinus I, Categoriae vel praedicamenta*, ed. Lorenzo Minio-Paluello, Bruges/Paris 1961.

(2) *Iohannis Scotti Eriugena periphyseon. De divuisione naturae (Liber primus)*, ed. I. P. Sheldon-Williams, Dublin 1968, 493A

(3) *ibid.*, 478D-479A.

(4) *ibid.*, 478D-479A.

From: Jack C. Marler, "Ammonius and Eriugena: On Matter and Predication", in: Matthias Lutz-Bachmann, Alexander Fidora, Pia Antolic (eds.), *Erkenntnis und Wissenschaft. Knowledge and Science / Probleme der Epistemologie in der Philosophie des Mittelalters. Problems of Epistemology in Medieval Philosophy*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2004.