



### On the Division of Nature John Scotus Eriugena

#### *Book IV, Chapters 7-9*

7. *Disciple.* But still the question remains, why did God create man, whom he wished to make in his image and likeness, a creature in the genus of animals? Surely it would seem more glorious for man, since he had been elected to be partaker of the supernal sign beyond all animals, and sharer with the celestial essences in which no consubstantiality with terrestrial animals is permitted, to be created free from all animality. For the celestial essences are not loaded with terrestrial bodies, nor do they use corporeal senses for knowledge of sensible things. For they do not receive phantasies from without, but know within themselves the reasons of the things which they see. So too the soul does not see outside itself what it perceives, but it sees within by phantasies which angels do not undergo. Although Plato defines angel as a rational and immortal animal, we must not include in the sure speculations on natures that which we can not prove by the authority of the holy Scriptures and of the holy fathers, since such inclusion is rash. On the other hand, the fact that Saint Augustine does not deny, but asserts that the highest angels have spiritual bodies in which they appear often, in no way compels us to believe that celestial substances are animals, especially since a harmony and an inseparable joining of celestial and incorruptible bodies to angelic spirits does not make an animal, but a connection of terrestrial and corruptible bodies to souls, rational or irrational, with sense mediating between body and soul, does. For, if the exterior sense is present in angelic bodies and understandings, what prevents us from saying, as it pleased Plato to say, that they are animals composed of body and soul, with sense mediating and understanding vivifying? And if that is so, why are they not to be counted in the genus of animals? But man, even if he had not sinned, would be animal. Certainly it is not sin but nature which made an animal of man. For no authority holds that the transgressing angels are animals. This would follow definitely from such an argument. Yet the future felicity which is promised to holy men is announced to be no other than an equality with the angelic nature, perfect and lacking in nothing. But what wise man would believe sanely that the future transmutation of man will be as if from an inferior animal to a superior one, from a terrestrial animal to a celestial one, from a temporal to an eternal, from a mortal to an immortal, from a miserable to a happy, rather than that all the things which in this life are understood or perceived in holy men in common with other animals are transferred by a certain ineffable mutation into that essence celestial and incommunicable and lacking in all animality, because that was to happen to man too if he did not sin? Wherefore then was man created in the genus of animals, which were produced of earth, in which genus he will not remain always? For, when this world of which man is an animal part shall have perished, all that is animal in man will perish with it and in it. For true reason does not permit that the whole suffer destruction and yet parts of it be saved from destruction. Besides, if all the world with all its parts will be destroyed, I do not sufficiently see how or where man, in so far as he is part of the world, will remain after the world. And because of this I am insistent in asking that you undo the knots of this question.

*Master.* You demand a very lofty physical theory of human creation, and you compel us to draw out our discussion to much greater length. It would suffice for me to answer you briefly when you ask why God should have created man, whom he proposed to make in his own image,

in the genus of animals, that he wished so to fashion him that there would be a certain animal in which he manifested his own express image. But whoever asks why he wished that, asks the causes of the divine will, to ask which is too presumptuous and arrogant. *For who hath known the sense of the Lord?* Yet, if I say this, you will perhaps be silent ungratefully, and you will think that we can conclude nothing with respect to the pure and the perfect. I shall not, therefore, say why he willed, because that is beyond all understanding, but I shall say, as he himself has permitted, what he has willed to do. He has made all creation, visible and invisible, in man since the whole spread of created nature is understood to be in him. For although it is still unknown how much the first creation of man after the transgression is in defect of the eternal light, nevertheless there is nothing naturally present in the celestial essences which does not subsist essentially in man. For there is understanding and reason, and there is naturally implanted the ground reason [*ratio*] of possessing a celestial and angelic body, which after the resurrection will appear more clearly than light both in the good and the evil. For it will be common to all human nature to rise again in eternal and incorruptible spiritual bodies. *It is sown*, he says, *an animal body; it is raised a spiritual body.* All this sensible world is fashioned in man. There is no part of it to be found, whether corporeal or incorporeal, which does not subsist created in man, which does not perceive, which does not live, which is not incorporated in him. Do not think of the corporeal size in man; consider rather the natural power, especially since you see even in the human body the pupil of the eye, which subsists with the greatest power although it is the most minute in quantity of all the members. If, therefore, God did not create man in the genus of animals, or certainly, if he did not place the whole nature of all animals in man, how would all creation, visible and invisible, be comprehended in him? And we can therefore say rationally that God wished to place man in the genus of animals for this reason, that he wished to create every creature in him. But, if you ask me why he wished to create every creature in him, I answer that he wished to make him in his image and likeness, so that, as the principal example surpasses all by the excellence of essence, so his image would excel all things of creation in dignity and grace. I confess however that I ignore completely why he wished to make man especially in his image before other creatures visible and invisible.

*Disc.* You have in my judgment answered the question why God wished to make man in the genus of animals sufficiently and reasonably. Nevertheless, I still ask this, how were all things created in man and how do they subsist in him according to essence alone or according to accidents alone, or according to all things that are considered in the whole creation, that is, according to essence, species, difference, and property, and all that is understood concerning them?

*Mast.* How I shall solve that question reasonably does not occur to me easily. For, if I say according to essence alone, you will reply rightly that then all things are only in so far as they subsist essentially, and the other things which are understood concerning essence or substance are not to be counted in the number of the whole of things, and they are not at all. And if that is so, you will ask me whence those things are, then, which are understood concerning the essence of things. If I answer that they have been made by God, you will say: why, then, are they not included in the whole of things which is made in man? If I say they were not made by God, you will reply that then they are not; for if they were, they would not be from any other cause than from the cause of all things which is God. And if I grant that those things which are understood concerning essences are not in the number of things because they are not from God, you will say forthwith: how, then, are they understood? For everything which is not from God can in no manner be understood because it is not in any manner. If I say that not only the essences but also all things which are understood naturally concerning them are from God and are to be numbered in the parts of the whole, there is no doubt but that I shall be compelled to choose one of the following two alternatives either that the entire whole of things has not been fashioned in man, if only the essences have been made in him; or the entire whole of things, that is, the essences and whatsoever is perceived about them and in them, has been fashioned in man. And if I say that not a part of the whole, that is, substances, but the complete whole has been set up in man, you will follow after with a most weighty question, saying that then irrationality has

been made in him, and bestiality, quadrupedality, volatility, and all the differences of diverse animals and of other things, and the species too, and the properties, and the accidents, and innumerable other things which seem to be far removed from human nature, to such an extent that if it were certain that they are present in man, he would rightly be judged not to be man but a very disgraceful monster.

*Disc.* You have heaped up the difficulty of the question, and you have with a kind of deliberation opposed to yourself whatever would be opposed by another; and by this means you will either clear up the question or you will pass it by as abstruse and go on to another, which will seem very incongruous indeed.

*Mast.* Let us try then to examine it in some way, lest it be wholly intact for the time.

*Disc.* You will not be able to satisfy me otherwise.

*Mast.* Do you think that everything which is known by the understanding and reason or which is imagined by the bodily sense, can in a certain manner be created and produced in him who understands and perceives?

*Disc.* It seems to me that it can. Indeed I think that the species of sensible things and the quantities and qualities which I attain by corporeal sense are in a certain way created in me; for, when I imprint the phantasies of them in memory, and when I treat of them within myself, divide, compare, and, as it were, collect them into a kind of unity, I perceive a certain knowledge of things which are outside me being produced in me. In the same way I understand that there arise and are made in me, when I seek them out earnestly, certain ideas like intelligible species, of the intelligibles within, which I contemplate with the mind alone, as, for example, the ideas of the liberal disciplines. But what there is between the knowledge and the things themselves, of which the knowledge is, I do not see clearly.

*Mast.* What does it seem to you? Are things and the ideas of things, which are made in the soul, of the same nature or different?

*Disc.* Of different natures. For how can the corporeal species, of, for example, a certain animal, or herb, or tree, and the idea of it which is produced in an incorporeal nature be of one single nature? For the same reason how can the intelligible species of any discipline and the idea of it be made of one single nature?

*Mast.* If, then, they are of different genera or natures, and not of the same, tell me, I ask, which of them do you judge must be set down as the more excellent of them; are things of a more exalted nature than their own ideas; or are ideas themselves more exalted than things?

*Disc.* I should have said that visible species are of a better nature than their ideas, if Saint Augustine did not state the following opinion in the ninth book *on the Trinity* in the eleventh chapter:

Since, he says, we learn bodies through the sense of the body, some likeness of bodies is made in our mind; this is phantasy in memory. For bodies themselves are not at all in the mind when we reflect on them, but only their likenesses. Nevertheless the imagination of the body in the mind is better than the species of the body, inasmuch as it is in a better nature, that is, in vital substance, such as the mind. However I do not dare to say that intelligible things are better than their idea which is in the soul.

Reason teaches, to be sure, that that which understands is better than that which is understood. For, if the knowledge of all things subsists in the divine wisdom, I should pronounce this knowledge of all things, not rashly, to be incomparably better than all things of which it is the knowledge. And if that is so, such an order, I believe, proceeds from the divine providence through all creation, that not only every nature which comprehends the idea of the thing following it, is better and superior, but also, because of the dignity of the nature in which it is, the idea itself excels greatly that of which it is the idea. And by this fact I should say more easily that the idea of intelligible things is more ancient than the intelligible things themselves.

*Mast.* You would perhaps be right in saying that if what is formed is more excellent than

what forms.

*Disc.* Why do you oppose that?

*Mast.* Because the idea of the arts which is in the soul seems to be formed from the arts themselves. But if you established by very sure reason that the idea was not formed from the arts, but the arts from the idea, your reasoning would perhaps start out rightly.

*Disc.* Did we not prove a moment ago that everything which understands is more excellent than that which is understood?

*Mast.* That was proved.

*Disc.* Tell me then, whether the expertness of the mind understands the discipline or the discipline understands the expertness.

*Mast.* I do not doubt that the discipline is understood by the mind. But if I say that the same discipline is learned by the expertness itself in the same way as it is learned by the mind of which it is the expertness,

I fear lest I seem to assert that the mind and its expertness are two different outgrowths in ideas of the discipline, and not one and the same essence in which the knowledge of the discipline is present naturally. If, however, the mind and its expertness are not two different things but one and the same, true reason teaches (I am forced to admit) that everything which is understood by the mind is understood too by its expertness, and it follows necessarily that mind and expertness, or certainly the expert mind, is of a more excellent nature than that discipline which it understands, if understandings are more ancient than things understood. If, on the other hand, I say that the discipline itself is the expertness of the expert mind, the consequence will be either that the expert mind and the expert discipline are two particular understandings, one of the other, and understood one by the other, and by this attaining to an equal dignity of nature, or else the mind and its expertness and the discipline, which it understands and by which it is understood, must be granted to be of one and the same essence. But which of these must be held does not yet appear clearly.

*Disc.* Perhaps it will appear when we enter upon the right way of reasoning, God leading.

*Mast.* Let us seek therefore the more carefully; and first tell me, I pray, whether the nature of the mind in which there is the expertness of the discipline, is simple or not.

*Disc.* I think that it is simple. For it is incorporeal, intellectual, and for that reason it necessarily lacks all composition.

*Mast.* You think rightly. Do you think then that something is accidental to it which is not naturally present in its essence?

*Disc.* I think so. For I see many things are accidental to it. For example, it is moved temporally, although it is not itself time. Expertness of disciplines is accidental to it: for it is now recognized as expert, now as inexpert, now disciplined, now undisciplined, now wise, now foolish, now erring when it considers irrationally, now entering upon the way of reason rightly, and many things of this sort.

*Mast.* Therefore the expertness of a discipline or the discipline itself is not present in it naturally, but they appear in it extrinsically by accidents.

*Disc.* I should not dare to say that. For it is not likely that God should have created in his own image and likeness a mind in which there were not implanted naturally expertness and discipline; otherwise it would not be a mind but a kind of brute and irrational life. For, I think, one would not say rightly that man was made in the image of God according to accident and not according to substance, especially since we see that understanding and reason are present in the mind substantially.

*Mast.* Therefore they are not accidental to it, but are present naturally.

*Disc.* I should not say that inconsiderately, I believe. For although the mind seems to be born inexpert and unwise, which occurs through the transgression of the divine command, in which it was forgetful both of itself and of its Creator, nevertheless, it is able, when it has been reformed by the rules of doctrine, to find in itself its God and itself and its expertness and discipline and all things which subsist naturally in it, illuminated by the grace of its Redeemer.

*Mast.* It remains, therefore, to consider in what manner expertness and the discipline are

present in the mind: whether as natural qualities, which are called powers, like species of wisdom and science which it perceives in the repercussion of the divine ray; or whether as the substantial parts of which the mind consists, so that it is a kind of trinity of one essence: mind, learning, art.

*Disc.* I should believe it was what you stated last; for it seems to me a kind of substantial and connatural trinity.

*Mast.* Accordingly the mind understands both its expertness and its discipline, and it is understood by its expertness and its discipline, not with respect to what it is, but that it is; for otherwise it will not be a coessential and coequal trinity.

*Disc.* I would not deny that, since reason compels me to grant that it is so.

*Mast.* Consider then whether they are formed by each other or by some other nature superior to them.

*Disc.* If the catholic faith did not teach and if truth did not assent that this trinity is set up and formed and understood by a superior nature, I should not inconsiderately reply that they are perhaps formed by themselves or that surely they are their own principal form; as it is, of course, I do not doubt, since the superior is itself that from which all things are formed, by which they begin to be formed, and turned toward which the things which are or can be turned to it are formed, that the trinity too of the mind is formed by the same nature.

*Mast.* To hesitate about that would be extremely stupid. Consequently only the divine mind possesses in itself, formed by itself and to itself, the true idea of the human mind, of expertness and of discipline.

*Disc.* Nothing could be considered more true.

*Mast.* Do you think the human mind is one thing and the idea of it in the mind of the one forming it and knowing it another?

*Disc.* That can not be. For I understand the substance of the entire man to be no other than his idea in the mind of the artificer who knew all things in himself before they were made; and that very knowledge is the true and only substance of those things which are known, since they subsist formed most perfectly in it eternally and immutably.

*Mast.* We can then define man thus: Man is a certain intellectual idea formed eternally in the divine mind.

*Disc.* That is an extremely true and a very well tested definition of man; and not only of man but also of all things which are formed in the divine wisdom. Nor do I fear them who define man, not as he is understood to be, but by those things which are understood about him, saying that man is a rational mortal animal capable of sense and discipline; and what is more wonderful, they call this definition substantial [*usiadis*], whilst it is not substantial but taken extrinsically about substance from those things which are accidental to substance through generation. But the idea of man in the divine mind is nothing of these. There indeed it is simple, nor can it be called this or that, standing above all definition and collection of parts, for only that it is is predicated of it, but not what it is. For that alone is indeed a true substantial [*usiadis*] definition, which affirms only that it is but negates that it is anything in particular [*quid esse*].

*Mast.* Does it seem to you that there is a kind of notion in man of all the sensible and intelligible things which the human mind can understand?

*Disc.* That seems clearly the case; and indeed man is understood to be most of all through the circumstance that it has been given to him to have an idea of all things which were either created equally with him or which he was instructed to govern. For how should the mastery be given to man of things of which he had no idea? Indeed his mastery would go astray if he were ignorant of that which he ruled. The holy Scripture indicates that to us most clearly, saying: *Therefore having formed out of the ground every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens, the Lord God brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living soul, that was the name of it.* It says to see, that is to understand what he would call them. For, if he did not understand, how would he be able to call them rightly? Whereas each that he called, is its very name [*nomen*], that is, it is the idea itself [*notio*] of the living soul.

*Mast.* What is there astonishing then, if the idea of things which the human mind possesses because the idea was created in it, be understood as the substance of the very things of which it is the idea, that is, in the likeness of the divine mind in which the idea of the whole created universe is the incommunicable substance of that whole? Just as we call the idea of all things which are understood and are perceived by the corporeal sense in the whole of things, the substance of the things which fall under the understanding or the sense, so shall we also say that the idea of the differences and properties and natural accidents are the differences themselves and the properties and the accidents?

*Disc.* Undoubtedly.

*Mast.* Irrationality therefore was created in the mind, and every species, and every difference, and the property of irrationality itself, and all things which are learned naturally concerning it, since there is an idea formed in it of all these and of things similar. I have spoken of things *similar* because of the things which the nature of things contains in addition to animals, such as the elements of the world, the genera and species of grasses too and of woods, the quantities, and qualities, and still others multiplied through innumerable differences. True knowledge of all of these is implanted in human nature, although its presence is as yet concealed from the soul itself until it is restored to its pristine integrity, in which it will understand very purely the magnitude and beauty of the image fashioned in it, and nothing will shut it off from the things which are fashioned in it, encompassed as it will be by divine light and turned to God, in whom it will contemplate all things perspicuously. Or did the magnificent Boethius mean something else to be understood when he says?

Wisdom is the comprehension of the truth of things which are and which draw as by lot their immutable substance. But we say that those things are which do not grow by any increase, and are not diminished by any withdrawing, nor changed by any variations, but with the endeavor and resources of their own nature preserve themselves always in their own power. These are qualities, quantities, forms, magnitudes, smallnesses, equalities, conditions, acts, dispositions, places, times, and whatever is in any way found joined to bodies: they are themselves incorporeal in nature and thrive by reason of the immutable substance, but they are changed through participation of the body and pass into changeable inconstancy through contact with the variable thing.

And where do you understand these things to subsist except in their ideas in the mind of the wise man? For where they are understood, there they are, and as a matter of fact they are nothing more than their being understood [*imo vero intellectus sui sunt*].

*Disc.* The solution of the present questions requires a multiple exposition, and an innumerable crowd of different questions do not cease to flow forth on all sides, while it is being resolved, as from a kind of infinite fountain; consequently the figure of herculean hydra may with perfect justice be applied to it, of which as many heads grow again as are cut off, so that a hundred bubble forth for one cut off, symbolizing human nature, which is a hydra, that is, a kind of multiplex fountain of infinite profundity, into which who besides Hercules, that is, virtue, is able to look? *For no one knows what things are in man, except the spirit of the man which is in him.* Accordingly, if that interior idea which is in the human mind constitutes the substance of the things of which it is the idea, it follows that the very idea by which man knows himself may be considered his substance.

*Mast.* That follows by all means. For we said that the human mind, its idea by which it knows itself, and the discipline by which it learns itself that it may know itself, subsist as one and the same essence.

*Disc.* Then what shall we say? Do you remember a little while ago we deduced the pure definition of man, saying, man is a certain intellectual idea formed eternally in the divine mind? And, if that is so, how may that idea by which man knows himself be his substance, if the aforesaid definition has not been made improperly?

*Mast.* Surely not improperly, for the definition which says that a certain idea eternally made in the divine mind is the substance of man, is true. And what we say now, namely, that the knowledge by which the human mind knows itself is substantially in man, is not stated irrationally. For each creature is considered in one fashion in the Word of God, in which all things have been made, and in another fashion in himself. Therefore Saint Augustine in his *in Hexaemeron* says:

In one fashion, the things which are made by it are under it, in another fashion the things which it is are in it. Since the understanding of all things in the divine mind is the substance of all things, it is, in fact, all things. For the knowledge by which an intellectual and rational creature understands himself in himself is, as it were, a kind of second substance of him, by which he knows only that he knows, and is, and wills, but not what he is. And the former substance, constituted in the wisdom of God, is eternal and immutable, but the latter is temporal and mutable; the former precedes, the latter follows; the former is primordial and causal, the latter resulting and causative; the former contains all things universally, the latter, so far as is allotted by the superior, comprehends particularly the things subject to it by knowledge; the latter was produced from the former and it will return again into it.

And I do not speak now of that superessential substance which through itself is God and the unique cause of all things, but of that substance which in the beginning was made causally in the wisdom of God, the effect of which is this substance which we determined, or rather which the natural order of things established, in the second place.

*Disc.* We must, therefore, comprehend two substances of man, one general in the primordial causes, the other special in the effects of those causes.

*Mast.* I should not have said two but one understood doubly. For in one fashion, the human substance is perceived through its creation in intellectual causes, in the other by its generation in effects. In the former free from all mutability, in the latter liable to mutability; in the former, simple and absolved from all accidents, it escapes all consideration and understanding, in the latter it puts on a kind of composition of quantities and qualities and other things which are understood of it, and by that composition it has the consideration of the mind. Accordingly one and the same thing is spoken of as double because of the double observation of it, but it still preserves its incomprehensibility on all sides, in, causes, I say, and in effects, that is, whether naked in its simplicity or endowed with accidents. For in all these, it comes under no created understanding or any sense, nor with respect to what it is, is it understood by itself.

*Disc.* Why is it, then, since you have spoken of it for a long time now, that the human mind has the idea by which it knows itself, and the discipline by which it learns itself, and now you assert on the other hand that it can be known neither by itself nor by any other creature?

*Mast.* Reason teaches that both are true: that the human mind assuredly knows itself and does not know itself. For it knows that it is, but it does not know what it is. And through this circumstance, as we have taught in the previous books, the image of God is shown most of all to be in man. For as God is comprehensible in that one deduces from creation that he is, and is incomprehensible because what he is can be comprehended by no understanding, human or angelic, nor even by himself because he is not a *what*, but is superessential: so it is given to the human mind to know only this, that it is, but it is in no way granted to it to know what it is; and, what is even more to be wondered at and more beautiful to those who contemplate themselves and their God, the human mind is more to be praised in its ignorance than in its knowledge. For it is more praiseworthy for it not to know what it is than for it to know that it is, just as the negation of the divine nature pertains better and with greater fitness to the praise of the divine nature than the affirmation of it: and it is wiser not to know than to know that, the ignorance of which is true wisdom, and which is known better by not knowing. The divine likeness in the human mind, therefore, is recognized most clearly in that it is known only to be; but what it is

is not known; and, to put it thus, in it we deny that it is anything and affirm only that it is. Nor is this void of reason. For if it were known to be some certain thing, it would be circumscribed certainly in something and, by that fact, it would not express in itself wholly the image of its Creator who is entirely uncircumscribed and is understood in nothing because he is infinite, above all that is said and understood, superessential.

*Disc.* How then has every creature been made in the idea of man, which idea does not know itself with respect to what it is, and how is this taken for great praise of it, and as its mark of superiority in that it is confined by no finite substance?

*Mast.* On the contrary, that every creature has been created substantially in man may be deduced likewise by very cogent argument. For of all things that are, substance can in no way be defined with respect to what it is, according to Gregory, the theologian, who investigates concerning such things, taking issue with those who deny that the Word of God is superessential, and who contend that it is comprised in some substance and therefore is not above all things but is contained within the number of all, and who insist that the substance of the Son be separated from the substance of the Father. Accordingly, just as the divine essence in whose image it was made is infinite, so too that human determination is limited by no certain end. But, from the things which are understood concerning it, that is, from times, places, differences, properties, quantities, qualities, relations, conditions, positions, actions, passions, it is understood only to be, but what it is is never understood. And thence may be understood that there is no other subsistence of any creature than that reason according to which it has been set in the primordial causes in the Word of God, and therefore what it is can not be defined, because it exceeds all substantial definition. It is defined, however, by its circumstances, which occur to it, as it proceeds into its appropriate species by generation, whether intelligible or sensible.

8. *Disc.* The holy Scripture and reason itself both assert that human and angelic nature are either the same or very similar. For both man and angel are called, and are, intellectual and rational creatures. And, if they agree so between them, it must be inquired, not improperly, why every creature is seen created in man but not in the angel.

*Mast.* Not without cause I believe. For, we see not a few things in man which authority does not teach nor reason understand to subsist in the angel, as this animal body, which the holy Scripture testifies was joined to the human soul even before sin, and also the corporeal fivefold exterior sense and the phantasies of sensible things which are formed in the human soul by it, and then too the perplexity and fretful difficulty of ratiocination in inquiring the natures of things, and further the laborious ingenuity in discerning virtues and vices, and many more of that sort. No man rightly numbered among the wise would deny that it is clear that the angelic essence lacks all these and is nevertheless present in the nature of things. For all this, Augustine would seem to have taught that angels perceive, in the eighth book *on the City of God*, chapter seven, where he praises the virtue of contemplation of the great philosophers who

saw that every species in every mutable thing, by which it is whatever it is, in whatever manner and quality its nature is, can only be from him who is truly because he is immutably. And because of this, whether we consider the body of the whole world, the figures, qualities, and the motion ordered and the elements disposed from heaven to earth, and whatever bodies are in them; or whether we consider all life, whether the life which nourishes and maintains, as in trees, or the life which has these functions and also perceives, as in animals, or the life which has these functions and also understands, as in men, or the life which does not require the nutritive support, but only maintains, perceives, and understands, as in angels: all these can only be from him who is absolutely.

I should believe, however, that he spoke of the interior sense. So, who does not know that the celestial essence does not share in many parts of nature and in many motions which inhere naturally in human nature? True reason testifies likewise that it has no knowledge of things which neither are inherent in it, that is, in celestial substance, as substance, nor happen to it as



accident. For although angels are said to administer this world and every corporeal creature, they must in no manner be thought to need corporeal senses, or local or temporal motions or visible apparitions to accomplish that. Moreover, all the things which are accidental to us because of a deficiency of our nature, subject still to the variations of places and times, are judged rightly not to be accidental to angels by a defect of their power. For when they transmute their spiritual and invisible bodies into visible forms that they may appear to the senses of mortals visibly, locally, temporally, this accident does not occur to them because of themselves but because of men to whom they are present and declare the divine mysteries. For they do not see locally by sense nor is it an accident of theirs to know temporally what will be done in the administration of things, inasmuch as they are eternally above all time and place in the contemplation of truth in which they see at once the causes of the administration of things. And do not think that I say these things concerning all celestial essences, but only of the more excellent orders, which are always about God and to which there is no ignorance save that of the divine darknesses which exceed all understanding. In fact, the lowest order which is properly called angelic, through which the higher orders administer whatever the divine providence commands by divine revelations to be done in the human mind or in other parts of this world, is not yet absolved of all ignorance, and so, as Saint Dionysius the Areopagite says most subtly in the book *on the Celestial Hierarchy: it is taught by the higher orders, and it is conducted into a knowledge of divine mysteries which are loftier than it*. Moreover, we are commanded, not irrationally, to believe and understand that every visible and invisible creature was created in man alone, since there is no substance created which is not understood to be in him; no species, or difference, or property, or natural accident is found in the nature of things which either is not inherent in him naturally or the knowledge of which can not be in him; and the very knowledge of things, which are contained within him, is better than the things of which it is knowledge to the extent that the nature in which it is formed is better. Every rational nature however is set by right reason before every irrational and sensible nature since it is nearer to God.

Wherefore too the things of which knowledge is inherent in human nature are understood not inconsistently to subsist in their ideas. For where they undergo their knowledge better, there they must be judged to exist more truly. Furthermore, if the things themselves subsist more truly in their ideas than in themselves, and if the ideas of them are naturally present in man, then they were created universally in man. The return of all things into man will doubtless prove this in its time. For by what reason would they return into him if they did not possess a certain connatural kinship in him and if they did not proceed in a certain manner from him? Concerning this return we have promised to speak in its proper place.

*Disc.* Although these things seem extremely difficult since they go beyond the mode of simple doctrine, nevertheless, considered speculatively by reason, they agree wholly with the breadth of understanding of human creation, and they very usefully establish, as we may say not inaccurately, that man was not produced in the genus of animals, but rather every genus of animals was produced in man from earth, that is, from the solidity of nature, and not only every genus of animal but indeed the whole created universe was made in man, so that what Truth said, may be understood truly of man: *Preach the gospel to the whole creation*; again the Apostle: *The whole creation groans and struggles in pain together until now*. But let him to whom these things seem too abstruse and deeply incredible, if he is inexpert of all the natural disciplines which are called liberal, let him either be silent or learn, but not combat incautiously these things which he is not able to understand; if he is learned, he will see clearly (to offer him an example of one of them) that geometrical figures do not subsist naturally in themselves but in the reasons of that very discipline of which they are figures. For since the triangular thing which is seen by the bodily sense in some matter, is surely a kind of sensible imagination of that which is present in the mind, he will understand the triangle itself which subsists in the mind apt to discipline, and he will weigh with unbiased judgment which is the more excellent, the figure of the triangle or the triangle itself of which it is the figure. And he will find, if I am not mistaken, that that figure is truly a figure, but a false triangle, whereas that triangle which subsists in the discipline is the cause of the figure itself and is the true triangle. And I do not

speak of the triangle of phantasy [i.e. the triangle perceived by sense] which descends from the mind through the memory into the senses and through the senses into sensible figures, nor of that triangle which, on the other hand, is imprinted from the sensible figure through the corporeal sense on the memory, but that very triangle which remains uniformly in the discipline itself where line and angle are at once and at the same place, nor is the line in one place, the angle in another, the middle here, the extreme there, here a sign, there the spaces of sides from the sign, here the spaces of angles, there a point from which lines begin and in which, by the junctures of the sides, angles are formed, but all these things are one, in one and the same idea aforesaid of the mind of the geometer, and all are understood in each and each in all and they are united in the understanding itself because the understanding is the substantial reason of all that it understands and from it the formulae of geometrical bodies are specified. And what we have said of the triangle is to be understood of other figures too, angular, or circular, or oblique, whether in planes or in solids, inasmuch as all these subsist in one and the same reason in their ideas in the mind which is expert and apt to discipline. If, therefore, geometrical bodies, whether they be formed in phantasies of memory or in some sensible matter, subsist in their rational ideas, lacking all phantasy and all matter, above all that which is perceived by bodily sense or fashioned in memory: what is there astonishing then that natural bodies, composed from the qualities of the elements of the world, should subsist in that nature in which there is the idea of them, especially since all things which are perceived concerning bodies are incorporeal? For the species in which they are contained are incorporeal. That quantities and qualities are similarly intelligible of nature and proceed from the intellectual reasons of vital substance seems doubtful to no wise man.

9. *Mast.* Whoever shall have considered the natures of things intently will find immediately that they are so constituted.

*Disc.* Accordingly, now that these things have been discussed, it may be asked not improperly, how every creature is formed in man, since man is said to have been made after the creation of all. If, therefore, the whole visible and invisible universe was created before him, as the divine story tells, and one reads of the creation of no creature after him, by what reason can we perceive every creature to have been fashioned in man? For, if any one should say that the whole creation was fashioned twice, first specially in itself, but second generally in man, I should not believe that that would accord easily with reason, because if it is so, man will not have a substance proper to him, but will be, as it were, a kind of composition of many things, or rather indeed of the whole creation previously made, and a single multiplex cumulation by different forms. But what is even more grave, if the whole creation whether visible or invisible has been made most perfectly in itself (and indeed since the creator is perfect and more than perfect, it is credible that he should have made no imperfect thing), how could it have taken on a second perfection of its creation, as it were, in man, who was created last in the divine operations? And, if this is so, God did not make man out of nothing in his own image, but he made him of those things which had been made before him. But if any one should say the human body had not been made from nothing but from something earthly, namely mud, what would be said of the more perfect making of man, which was set without doubt in the soul and in the spiritual body in the first creation, which, that is the soul, we believe to have been made from the divine breath, or rather to have been made the divine breath, not from something, but out of nothing?

*Mast.* I see that this question is involved in a great deal of obscurity and requires a diversified skill for its solution. But lest we pass it over utterly untouched, we shall attempt to contemplate it in some way as the interior beam of the divine light shall have disposed. And first say, I ask, whether intelligible things or sensible things are prior to the mind which understands them or to the sense by which they are perceived.

*Disc.* I should say, not improperly, that where there is one thing which understands and another which is understood, and where that which understands is of a better nature than that which is understood, the thing understood or perceived is preceded by the understanding soul or the perceiving sense. I should not say, however, that the things which understand themselves

are prior to themselves in so far as they can understand themselves. For where the thing and the knowledge of it are one, I do not see what precedence can be made. For I know that I am, nevertheless the knowledge of me does not precede me because I am not one thing and the knowledge by which I know myself another; and, if I did not know that I am, I would not ignore that I do not know that I am: and therefore, whether I shall have known or not have known that I am, I shall not lack knowledge; for it will remain for me to know my ignorance. And, if each being that can know that it does not know itself, can not ignore that it is, in that if it were not at all, it would not know that it does not know itself: it follows that absolutely everything is which knows that it is or knows that it does not know that it is. If any one however is so far sunk in ignorance that he neither knows that he is nor perceives that he does not know that he is, I should say that either such an one is absolutely not a man or is wholly annihilated. We have sufficiently established likewise in the reasons which have been given above that the following two activities are present in the human soul at the same time and inseparably and always: to know and not to know. For the soul knows that it is a rational and intellectual nature; it does not know, however, what intellect itself and reason itself are.

*Mast.* Then, were you not, before you knew or did not know that you were?

*Disc.* No; for I received at the same time being and knowledge that I am and understanding that I do not know myself in the sense of knowing what I am.

*Mast.* Tell me, when does a man receive knowledge of himself: in that creation in which all men were made universally in the primordial causes before secular times, or in the generation in which in the order of times, known and predefined by God alone, he proceeds into this life?

*Disc.* In both, I judge; in one generally and hidden in causes, but in the other specially and manifestly in effects. For in that primordial and general creation of all human nature, no one knows himself specially nor begins to have proper knowledge of himself; for a single and general knowledge of all things is there, and known to God alone. For therein all men are one and that one assuredly made in the image of God, in whom all were created. Just as, indeed, all forms or species which are contained in one genus, do not as yet fall under the understanding or the sense, known through differences and properties, but subsist as a kind of unity not yet divided until each one receives intelligibly or sensibly its property and difference in individual species: so in the community of human nature no one discerns by proper knowledge either himself or his consubstantials before he has proceeded into this world at his times appointed in accordance with the eternal reasons.

*Mast.* Why, then, does not every one know himself as soon as he has arrived through generation into this world?

*Disc.* I should say, not without justification, that the penalty of the transgression of nature is shown in that. For, if man had not sinned, he would certainly not have fallen into so profound ignorance of himself; just as he would not have suffered the ignominious generation from the two sexes in the likeness of irrational animals, as the wisest of the greek theologians affirm with most certain reasons. For he who alone was born into the world without sin, namely the Redeemer of the world, at no time and at no place endured such an ignorance, but as soon as he was conceived and born, he understood both himself and all things, and he was able to speak and teach, not only because he was the Wisdom of the Father, which nothing escapes, but also because he had taken on uncontaminated humanity in order to purge the contaminated; not because he received another nature beyond that which he restored, but because he alone remained in it uncontaminated and preserved for the remedy of the wound of tainted nature in the most secret reasons of himself. For human nature perished entirely in all men except him in whom alone it remained incorruptible. And, indeed, he is the greatest example of grace, not because he was freed of any part of the guilt of human nature, but because he alone of all men with no antecedent merit was joined in a unity of substance to the Word of God, in whom all the elect, partaking of the plenitude of his grace, are made sons of God and participants of the divine substance.

*Mast.* There was then present in human nature a power of having most perfect knowledge of itself if it had not sinned?

*Disc.* Nothing is more probable. The fall of human nature was surely the greatest and the most miserable, to forfeit the knowledge and wisdom implanted in it and to slip into profound ignorance of itself and its creator, even though the desire for the beatitude which it had lost be understood to have remained in it after the fall: this desire would in no way have remained in it, if it had completely ignored itself and its God.

*Mast.* Therefore the most perfect knowledge, both of itself and its creator, was implanted in it naturally before sin, so far as the knowledge of the creature can comprehend both itself and its cause?

*Disc.* I think it was no otherwise than that. For how would it be an image if it differed in something from that of which it is an image, except in the relation of subject, concerning which we spoke in the preceding books, when we inquired concerning the prototype, that is, concerning the principal example and its image, saying that God himself is the principal example, subsisting through himself, by himself, in himself, and created or formed or altered by none, but the image of him, which is man, created by him, is not through itself nor does it subsist by itself nor in itself; but from him, whose image he is, man receives being in accordance with nature and divine being [*Deus esse*] by dispensation of grace; and likewise all the rest which are predicated of God, can be predicated of his image, but of God essentially, of the image only by participation? For the image is both goodness and good by participation of the supreme goodness and the supreme good, of which it is the image, and also eternal and eternity by participation of the eternal and the eternity from which it has been formed; and again omnipotence by participation of the omnipotence by which it was fashioned and to which in turn it is specificated. For if human nature had not sinned, and if it had clung immutably to that which formed it, it would assuredly be omnipotent. For whatever it wished to be done in the nature of things, would necessarily be done, as long in any case as it wished nothing other done than that which it understood its creator wished to be done; and in turn, it would understand the will of its creator, absolutely omnipotent and immutable, provided it adhered wholly to him and did not leave him, lest it should be dissimilar to him, and it would understand the other predicates which can be understood or thought or predicated with right reason of God and his image.

*Mast.* If, therefore, a perfect knowledge was present in human nature before sin, both of itself and of its creator, what is there astonishing that one understood of it reasonably that it had a most full knowledge of natures similar to itself, such as the celestial essences, and of essences inferior to itself, such as this world with its reasons which fall under the understanding, and that at the present time human nature still has this in possibility alone and in actuality in the highest men?

*Disc.* Clearly that will not be astonishing to those who understand, but true and probable.

*Mast.* It is great and true praise of human nature and most of all of him who willed to create it thus. Wherefore, in the same way, the following must be accepted too of his understanding and knowledge. For just as the creative wisdom which is the Word of God saw all things which were made in it before they were made, and the very sight of things which were seen before they were made is true and immutable and eternal essence, so too the created wisdom which is human nature knew all things which were made in it before they were made, and that very knowledge of the things which were known before they were made is true and unquestioned essence. Accordingly, the very idea of the creative wisdom is understood rightly to be the first and causal essence of all creation and the knowledge of the created wisdom subsists as a second essence and effect of the higher knowledge. And what we have said of the first and causal essence, established in the knowledge of the creative wisdom, and of the second and effective essence, which is asserted, not improperly, to subsist in the human soul, must be understood in the same way without hesitation of all things which are discerned about the essence of the whole creation. For the right consideration of nature declares that everything which is established in the human understanding with respect to the substances of things, proceeds from that very idea of the creative wisdom through the created wisdom. And with respect to essences there are established sensible species, quantities, qualities, places, times, and such things without which

the essence can not be understood. Wherefore all that we wish to teach may be concluded briefly thus: just as the understanding of all things which the Father made in his one-begotten Word is the essence of them and the determination of all that is understood of essence naturally, so the knowledge of all things which the Word of the Father created in the human soul is the essence of them and the subject of all the things which are discerned concerning it naturally. And, just as the divine understanding precedes all and is all, so the intellectual understanding of the soul precedes all that it knows and is all that it foreknows, so that all things subsist in the divine understanding causally and in the human understanding effectually. Not that the essence of all things, as we have often said, is one thing in the Word and another in man, but that the mind observes one and the same thing in one fashion subsisting in eternal causes and in another fashion understood in effects; for in the first it exceeds all understanding, but in the second it is understood, from the things which are considered concerning it, only to be; in neither, however, is it permitted to a created understanding to know what it is. For, if it could be known, it would not entirely express in itself the image of its creator who is known only to be from those things of which he is the principle and cause and founder, but what he is escapes all sense and understanding.

*Disc.* Therefore no creature whether visible or invisible precedes the creation of man not in time, not in place, not in dignity, not in origin, not in eternity, and, simply, in no manner of precedence: for in knowledge itself and dignity, but not in time and place, the creation of man precedes those things which were created with it and in it and below it; and it was concreated with those to which it is equal with a condignity of nature, namely, to celestial essences. For it is itself a partaker of celestial and intellectual essence; assuredly it was written of angelic and human essence: *Who made the heavens in the understanding*, as if it were said openly: who made the intellectual heavens. Wherefore it becomes difficult to understand, if man were concreated substantially with the angelic essences, how all visible and invisible things were made in him. For it does not seem to agree with reason that he should have the beginning of his creation together with the celestial powers and that they should have been created in him.

*Mast.* If you should examine intently the reciprocal joining and unity of intellectual and rational natures, you will find certainly both that the angelic essence is established in the human and the human in the angelic. For in everything that the pure understanding knows very perfectly, it is made and it becomes one with it. So great indeed was the community of human and angelic nature and so great would it be made if the first man had not sinned, that the two would become one. That, even now, begins to be done among the uppermost men of which number are the firstlings in heaven. And the angel, moreover, is made in man through the understanding of the angel which is in man, and man in the angel through the understanding of man constituted in the angel. For he, as I have said, who understands purely, is made in that which he understands. Accordingly, the intellectual and the rational angelic nature was made in the intellectual and rational human nature in the same manner as the human was made in the angelic by the reciprocal knowledge by which angel understands man and man angel. Nor is that strange. For while we discuss, each of us is made into the other. Since, in fact, when I understand what you understand, I am made your understanding and in a certain ineffable way I have been made into you. In the same way, when you understand purely what I understand clearly, you have been made my understanding and from two understandings one has been made, formed from that which we both sincerely and unhesitatingly understand. For instance, to use the example of numbers, you understand that the number six is equal to its parts, and I understand the same; and I understand that you understand it, just as you too understand that I understand it. Our two understandings are made one, formed by the number six, and by that process I am created in you and you are created in me. For we are not one thing and our understandings another, but our true and supreme essence is the understanding made specific in the contemplation of truth. The apostolic word, moreover, when it forbids our intellectual part to cherish visible forms, saying: *Be not fashioned according to this world*, teaches that the understanding can be conformed not only to natures coessential to it, but also to natures inferior when it understands or perceives them by loving them. Consequently, by reason of this reciprocal intelligence, it is said, not

without foundation in fact, both that the angel is created in man and man in the angel, and it can not rightly be believed or understood that the angel precedes man by any law of creation or by any manner of precedence, although, as many insist, the prophetic narrative pronounces the creation of the angelic nature first and of human nature later. For it is not credible as Saint Augustine points out in the eleventh book of the *City of God* that the holy Scripture should have been completely silent in the works of the six primordial and intelligible days concerning the creation of the celestial powers, but either in the very first line of *Genesis*, where it was written: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*, their creation is brought forward under the name of the heavens, or a little later when it says: *And God said, Let there be light: and there was light*. For, in one or the other place, the aforesaid father affirms that the angelic creation was manifested and most particularly in the second. In the first, to be sure, he asserts that under the appellation *the heavens* the making of the whole invisible creation in unformed matter is signified rather than the formation specially of the angelic nature. But in that which was written: *Let there be light: and there was light*, he asserts unhesitatingly that the formation of celestial essences was described; although he introduced the meaning of others who believe that there is in this divine precept the constitution of a certain primitive light, sensible and local in the upper parts of the world; but he attacks this meaning most acutely in his *in Hexaemeron*. When, however, it is said: *And God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness Night*, he wants that to be understood in two ways: for either, by the word *light* the formation of the angelic creature in its proper species, and by the word *darkness* the unshapeliness, preceding in origin not in time, of that nature as yet imperfect, or else by the division of the light from the darkness was signified the segregation and difference of that angelic part which clung immutably to its creator, foreknowing beatitude by virtue of its obedience, from that part which did not stand in truth but was precipitated as a penalty of its pride into the darkness of ignorance of its future fall and eternal misery. But, if anyone wishes to know more fully this double explanation of the most divine master, let him read it carefully in the words of the master himself in his *in Hexaemeron* and in the above mentioned volume *on the City of God*: to insert these explanations in this little discussion of ours seems to me superfluous since they are detailed and clear to all.

*Disc.* Go on; for the opinions of the holy fathers need not be brought in, especially if they are known to most people, except where the gravest necessity requires that reasoning be fortified for those who, since they are untrained in reasoning, yield to authority more than to reason . . .

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.John Scotus Eriugena. "On the Division of Nature" 7.7-9. *Selections from Medieval Philosophers I: Augustine to Albert the Great*. Ed. Richard McKeon. New York: SophiaOmni Press, 2014.

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