From Metaphor to Theology:
Proprium and *Translatum* in
Cicero, Augustine, Eriugena, and Abelard

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> "It may be that universal history is the history of the different intonations
> given a handful of metaphors." Jorge Luis Borges (189)

In his prologue to the *Sic et non*, Peter Abelard describes a series of hermen-
eutical problems in the interpretation of sacred texts, especially those texts
that appear to be mutually contradictory although equal in antiquity and
authority. A theme to which he returns repeatedly is the intractability of
language, and the struggles faced by a theologian who seeks to use words with
precision. Different words in the Latin language may have the same meaning,
while the same word may be used in different senses, depending on the
context (89). Moreover, the use of a word may vary with the intention of the
speaker and the capacity of his hearers. Thus, for example, Abelard contrasts
the elaborately varied vocabulary of the careful stylist with the "studied
carelessness" of the impassioned orator or the classroom teacher (90).

It is my intention in the brief investigation that follows, to take up the
hint offered by Peter Abelard and to trace certain variations in the history
of the words *proprium* and *translatum*, key technical terms in Abelard's the-
ological vocabulary. The findings presented are the result of word searches
through the electronic databases of the Packard Humanities Institute CD-
ROM disk for classical Latin literature, and the CETEDOC library of Christian

Latin texts, containing the *Corpus christianorum series latina* and *Continuatio medievalis*. The complete Latin texts of the works of a selected group of authors were searched for occurrences of the words, *proprium* and *translatum*, in all their grammatical forms, within 90 words (approximately a single paragraph) of each other, and then for individual occurrences of each word in all its forms. The result of the computerized word search was a group of texts in which the authors under investigation commented on the sense of the two words, or compared the nature of their application.

The authors selected for investigation were Cicero, Augustine, Eriugena, and Peter Abelard himself. Each was noted in his generation for exceptional skills in the arts of language, and all found occasion to make use of the terms *proprium* and *translatum* (or some form of the verb *transferre*, of which *translatum* is past participle) in discussions of language and its specialized rhetorical or theological applications. Moreover, just as the works of Cicero were accessible to Augustine, so also the works of both Cicero and Augustine were known to, and influential upon, the authorships of Eriugena and Peter Abelard. Abelard, meanwhile, draws upon all three of his predecessors in composing the prologue to the *Sic et non*, and other theological works. The method and results of this investigation, therefore, serve to uncover a chain of intertextual connections that might otherwise go unnoticed.

<div align="center">Cicero, De oratore (55 BCE)</div>

Cicero's discussion of the key terms, *proprium* and *translatum*, occurs uniquely in his treatise *De oratore*, on the rhetorician's craft and its uses of language. Cicero introduces the terms *proprium* and *translatum* in book three, when he enumerates and describes the kinds and uses of metaphor (3.37.155–57; pp. 120–23). His topic in general is oratorical vocabulary, and in particular the skilful use of words to enhance a speaker's style. There are, he states,

> Three things, therefore, which the orator contributes in the matter of mere vocabulary toward the decoration and embellishment of his style — rare words, new coinages, and words used metaphorically (*translatum*) (3.38.152; pp. 122–23)[1]

It should be noted that in Cicero's Latin, the phrase for "words used metaphorically" is "*verbum . . . translatum*," and that parts of the verb *transferre* are used throughout his exposition in places where the modern translator rightly uses the English term "metaphor." *Transferre* is, indeed, the Latin equivalent of the Greek μεταφερε ("to transfer, to change, to alter").

However, both the Greek and the Latin words are used in reference to the rhetorical device or literary trope of metaphor by a species of metaphorical transposition. In their simplest sense, the words designate movement or alteration of some concrete object, but in the specialized vocabulary of the orator's art, they have become technical terms for a type of embellishment. Cicero himself alludes to such transpositions of meaning, when he remarks of the orator's vocabulary in general that:

> The words we employ are either the proper (*propria*) and definite designations of things, which are almost born at the same time as the things themselves, or terms used metaphorically (*eis quae transferuntur*) and placed in a connexion not really belonging to them; or new coinages invented by ourselves. (3.37.149–50; pp. 118–19)[2]

Turning to the use of metaphor for purposes of oratorical embellishment, he notes that while metaphor began of necessity as a means of enriching the language, the device endured because speakers of the language found it entertaining or agreeable. Casting about for an explanation, he notes that

> When something that can scarcely be conveyed by the proper term (*verbo proprio*) is expressed metaphorically (*translato*), the meaning we desire to convey is made clear by the resemblance [between] the thing we have expressed [and] the word that is alien [to it]. (3.38.155; pp. 122–23)[3]

Metaphor in this primary sense is distinguished, furthermore, from bolder pieces of verbal showmanship in the orator's art. Such expressions serve as one-word similes, designed to convey in as striking a manner as possible the meaning of an action or thought.

There are, therefore, two types of metaphor according to Cicero. The simple type of metaphor enters a language by necessity, because it serves to supply a descriptive name or special term for something that otherwise would lack a proper name. Such metaphors are accepted because they serve a useful purpose, and introduce into the language a clearer designation of the thing signified. The more extravagant type of metaphor, by contrast, is created despite the presence in the language of many specific words with which to state plainly what the metaphor suggests less directly. Such metaphors are appreciated primarily because they give pleasure and bring enjoyment to their hearers and users. What is the source of such pleasure? Perhaps, Cicero suggests, the attraction is found in the cleverness displayed by a verbal leap from the plain to the ornate, or through a brief — and so also refreshing — distraction of the hearer from the obvious to the unexpected. It may be, too, he states, that the brevity of the metaphorical phrase or word appeals to

its hearers because a single word may "in each case suggest the thing and a picture of the whole" (3.40.160; pp. 126–27).[4] Moreover, the use of metaphor may please by its appeal to the senses, since most metaphors employ words that refer to sense perceptions, especially the sense of sight. Consequently, in Cicero's opinion, they delight by evoking vivid mental images of things not visible or discernible to the hearer (3.40.161; pp. 126–27).

<div align="center">Augustine, De doctrina christiana (396–427 CE)</div>

By the fifth century CE the Greek term $\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha\phi o\rho\alpha$ had been introduced into the Latin language. As a professional rhetorician Augustine knew the word and made use of it in a variety of contexts.[5] Nevertheless, he makes a unique and highly significant reference to Cicero's terms, *proprium* and *translatum*, in a key passage of his treatise *De doctrina christiana*, discussing figural language in the text of scripture. The general context is Augustine's discussion in book two of signs, defined as things "which cause us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the senses" (2.1, p. 32; tr., p. 34). His presentation continues through the definition and description of natural and conventional signs, then focusses on the use of words as signs, spoken or written. Subsequently, the language of scripture, its translation and interpretation, are introduced as his primary topic. Scripture, Augustine states, is full of "many and varied obscurities and ambiguities" (2.6.7, p. 35; tr., p. 37) that may deceive the casual reader and lead to errors of interpretation. Correctly interpreted, however, the figural language of scripture evokes a response like that of Cicero's metaphor, namely delight in the unusual use of language.

To illustrate, Augustine offers the example of a verse from the Song of Songs, 4:2 ("Thy teeth are as a flock of sheep, that are shorn, which come up from the washing, all with twins, and there is none barren among them"), a text interpreted with reference to the Church. In its figural interpretation, the verse describes the exemplary lives of baptized believers, who fulfil the command to love God and neighbour. Needless to say, its meaning could have been conveyed plainly in clear and simple language. Augustine asks: "Does one learn anything else besides that which he learns when he hears the same thought expressed in plain words without this similitude?" (2.6.7, pp. 35–36; tr., p. 38).[6] Tacitly admitting that one does not, he continues:

> Nevertheless, in a strange way I contemplate the saints more pleasantly when I envisage them as the teeth of the Church, cutting off men from their errors

and transferring them to her body after their hardness has been softened as if by being bitten and chewed. (2.6.7; p. 36; tr., p. 38)[7]

Why the use of similitudes should be so pleasant, and bring such enjoyment, Augustine cannot explain, although he might have alluded to Cicero's remarks on the effect and appreciation of metaphor (*De oratore* 3.40.160; pp. 124–27).

Subsequently, Augustine finds occasion to return to the question, why the signs contained in scripture are obscure or ambiguous, despite the delight that scriptural figures or similitudes may offer to those who can understand them. He states:

> There are two reasons why things written are not understood: they are obscured either by unknown or by ambiguous signs. For signs are either literal (*propria*) or figurative (*translata*). They are called literal (*propria*) when they are used to designate those things on account of which they were instituted; thus, we say ox (*bos*) when we mean an animal of a herd, because all men using the Latin language call it by that name just as we do. Figurative (*translata*) signs occur when that thing which we designate by a literal (*propriis*) sign is used to signify something else; thus we say "ox" and by that syllable understand the animal which is ordinarily designated by that word, but again by that animal we understand an evangelist, as is signified in scripture, according to the interpretation of the Apostle, when it says, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treads out the corn" [1 Cor. 9:9]. (2.10.15; p. 41; tr., p. 43)[8]

Augustine's key terms, (correctly but somewhat misleadingly rendered "literal" and "figurative" in the translator's English) are Cicero's *proprium* and *translatum*, as employed in his definition of metaphor. Augustine defines the literal (*propria*) signs as those which designate "those things on account of which they were instituted," echoing Cicero's definition of the proper (*propria*) designations of things as those "which were almost born at the same time as the things themselves." The figurative (*translatum*) sense, meanwhile, corresponds to Cicero's definition of metaphor in both the simple, necessary sense and the sense by which the device is used to entertain its hearers, through an ornate or indirect expression for some matter that could equally well be stated with direct or simple words. Metaphor in Cicero's definition is, however, characterized by brevity, and pleases through the concentrated effect of a single, unexpected word. By contrast, the figural language of scripture, which is the object of Augustine's investigation, contains not only the one-word metaphor of the ox (1 Cor. 9:9), but also extended passages, and, indeed, entire books (e.g., the Song of Songs) believed to require a figural rather than literal interpretation. Augustine,

therefore, uses Cicero's vocabulary, but appears to broaden the application of *transferre* from Cicero's definition of metaphor to include a variety of extended similitudes and figural expressions in scripture. The shift may perhaps be explained by the fact that Augustine, unlike Cicero, can use the term *metaphora* to designate the device of metaphor, as such. Indeed, he does so in a subsequent discussion in book three of *De doctrina christiana*, where he remarks on the value of training in languages, especially Greek, so as to recognize literary tropes, including *allegoria*, *aenigma*, *parabola*, and *metaphora* (3.29.40, pp. 100–01; tr., p. 103).

Johannes Scotus Eriugena, *Periphyseon* (862–867)

The works of Eriugena stand out as expressions of exceptional erudition amid the brief flourishing of exegetical and theological activity during the Carolingian renaissance. He is notable not only for a flexible and original grasp of the Latin tradition, but primarily as the translator through whom, almost exclusively, the early scholastics received some hint of the Greek thought of Maximus the Confessor and pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. A different platonism from that of Augustine enters western thought with Eriugena's translation and assimilation of the pseudo-Dionysius,[9] as does a different appreciation of words in relation to thought and things.

Already in 850, twelve years before his translations of the Dionysian *Corpus*, Eriugena devoted a chapter of his treatise *De praedestinatione* to clarification of the language issues. In chapter nine, he asks, "are the words 'foreknowledge' and 'predestination' used properly (*proprie*) or improperly (*abusive*) in the sacred texts of holy scripture and the holy fathers?" (9.1; p. 55). His answer would involve a careful explication of the difference between literal and figurative language about God and divine activity in the created universe, based ultimately in an Augustinian metaphysic of being. He states:

> Some of the verbal signs which, by the custom of human speech, are used to signify God himself or his governance of the created universe through divine and human activity, are, so to speak, proper (*quasi propria*), including these examples among certain verbs: I am, he is, he was, to be, and among nouns: essence, truth, virtue, wisdom, knowledge, destiny and others of the kind. These, although they signify whatever is first and best in our nature, that is, the very substance and its best accidents, without which it cannot be immortal, are not inappropriately referred to the one and best principle of all goods who is God. Some [verbal signs] indeed, are remote (*aliena*), that is,

transferred (*translata*), and usually come from three sources, namely likeness, contrareity, and difference. (9.2; pp. 56–57)[10]

Eriugena's exposition then continues with examples of likeness, as found in texts metaphorically ascribing bodily parts or passions to God. To illustrate contrareity, he adduces texts such as 1 Cor. 3:19, "The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God," and Deut. 21:23, "Cursed is any one who hangs on a tree." These texts, he suggests, appear in scripture in such a way as to convey what is in fact the opposite of the sense of the language. The point for Eriugena's doctrine of predestination, however, is that the very words "foreknowledge" and "predestination" are not properly (*proprie*) used of God, since they imply future and past in the mind of God, for whom there is simply the eternal present. For in God, according to Eriugena:

> There neither *were . . .* nor *will be*, but only *are*, and all are one. Furthermore, because the things which were made by him, exist in one way under him, and in a different way the things which he himself is, exist in him, in [reference to] those things which are under him, words signifying place and time may be properly (*proprie*) significative, since his places and times are both created and ordered; in those things, indeed, which are eternally in him, they can be put forward figuratively (*translative*). But by this [we understand that] it is improperly (*abusive*) said of God that he made or will make, just as it is improperly (*abusive*) said of him that he foreknew, foreknows, will foreknow, and likewise that he predestined, predestines, or will predestine. (9.6; pp. 60–61)[11]

Subsequently, in his commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchy* of the pseudo-Dionysius, Eriugena would extend and refine his investigation into proper or literal, and figural or metaphorical language about God. In chapter two of that text, for example, he discusses relationships among the "uncontaminated" truths inscribed by the Holy Spirit on the minds of theologians and prophets, and the "holy of holies," or intellectual essence of those truths in the theologians' and prophets' minds, and finally the figuring forth of these truths in symbol and sacrament, or theological and prophetic speech and actions. He will quote one of Augustine's favourite Pauline texts, "The letter kills, but the spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6), so as to condemn as "slain by the letter" anyone who supposes that nothing exists beyond what is perceived by sense. Nevertheless, his work on the Dionysian corpus has modified his understanding of language about God, so that even the words "he is," or "to be" are no longer appropriately referred to God. He notes, furthermore, in *Expositiones in ierarchiam coelestam*, that

the blessed Apostle [Paul] names as 'letter' not only what is the image of a sound (*vox*), but all mystical figures in general, whether in words, or in deeds, or in the images of sense-perceptible objects described throughout sacred scripture, through which the truth of spiritual things and super-terrestrial arcana are signified, so as to exercise and elevate the human soul from the earthly to the celestial. (2; p. 53)[12]

Indeed, after assimilating the Dionysian material, Eriugena modifies his understanding of theological language so as to hold that the only true mode of theological discourse is the apophatic way, since "in the signification of things divine, the negations are [used] in truth (*vere*), but the affirmations metaphorically (*metaphorice*), and as it were extrinsically acquired, as altogether incompatibly, that is to say, not properly (*proprie*)" (2; p. 53).[13] Furthermore, since divine truths are more expressly signified "by true negations" than "by figural affirmations (*per translatas affirmationes*)," the affirmations themselves must be remote and improbable and drawn from the realms of likeness, contrareity, and difference sketched in *De praedestinatione*, rather than the celestial or sublime language of being. For ultimately all speech about God is uttered "*non proprie, sed translative*" (2; p. 53; lines 1204–05).

The point is one to which Eriugena would return again and again: no positive statement about God is as true as its negation, since all use of language in reference to divine truth is metaphorical. Accordingly, he devotes a segment early in his *Periphyseon* (composed in the mid 860s, completed in 867), book one, to the problem of figural language in scripture, especially figural language about God. "The authority of sacred scripture must be followed in all matters" (line 64; p. 189), he states, and yet he observes that the language scripture employs to describe the deity seems to contradict the logical implications of divine immutability, eternity, and the like. In the context of a discussion of action, motion, and time, the problem at issue becomes the propriety with which such categories may be predicated of the deity. Numerous passages in scripture suggest that God is subject to motion and passion, although the divine nature is said to be immutable and impassible. However, Eriugena explains:

If . . . these verbs, whether they are active or passive in meaning, are no longer properly (*proprie*) predicated of God, but metaphorically (*translatiue*), and if nothing that is predicated metaphorically (*translate*) is said of Him in very truth but after a certain manner, then in very truth God neither acts nor is acted upon, neither moves nor is moved, neither loves nor is loved. (1.62; p. 177)[14]

As the discussion continues, Eriugena introduces extensive quotations from the pseudo-Dionysius's *De divinis nominibus*, and again makes the point that the language of both scripture and the tradition is metaphorical when applied to God:

> For if [the names] of essences or substances or accidents are applied to God not in a real sense but from the need to express somehow His inexpressible Nature, does it not necessarily follow that the verbs also which denote the motions of the essences, substances, and accidents cannot be applied properly (*proprie*) to God, Who by the incomprehensible and ineffable excellence of His Nature rises above every essence, every substance, and every accident? (1.68; p. 197)[15]

In short, all language about God is improperly used, since it is transposed from the creature to the Creator. No alternative, exclusively theological vocabulary is available, either. And so the only means of correcting the distortion produced by an improper, metaphorical, or transposed usage, is the negation of that expression in systematic application of the apophatic way. Like Augustine, Eriugena is sensitive to the highly figurative language of scripture. Unlike Augustine, however, he holds that not only the figurative or metaphorical, but all language about God is transposed (*translatum*) and not used in its proper (*proprium*) sense, since all language is devised to refer to creatures, but not the Creator. Thus, in Eriugena's view, all positive theological vocabulary is metaphorical, and only its negation points toward the divine truth.

Peter Abelard, the *Theologiae* (ca. 1118–1140)

The Latin of the early scholastics is a world apart from that of Cicero and Augustine, and from the hothouse scholarship of the Carolingian renaissance. Nevertheless, the twelfth-century authors inherited both the vocabulary and the methods of classical, patristic, and Carolingian or pre-scholastic language theory. The theological works of Peter Abelard (e.g., *Theologia summi boni*, *Theologia scholarium*, and *Theologia christiana*) seem particularly apt for use as examples, since he had access to both Cicero's *De oratore* and Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*, as well as other classical authorities on the arts of language.[16] Eriugena, meanwhile, would also have been available to him, although unlikely to be cited by name, because of recent condemnation.[17]

In his earliest theological treatise, the *Theologia summi boni*, Abelard, the one-time teacher of logic, finds occasion to comment, in the manner

of Eriugena, on the problem of language about God, with the apparent
irrationalities that it may display:

> That, in fact, all human speech is precisely adapted to the condition of crea-
> tures is evident especially from that part of speech without which, according
> to Priscian, no complete statement is possible — from that, namely, which is
> termed the verb. Indeed, this part of speech designates time, which began with
> the world. Hence, if we rightly observe the signification of this part of speech
> it is necessary to restrict the sense of every construction under the ambit of the
> temporal, that is, to be limited only to [discourse about] those things which
> we wish to designate as happening temporally, and not as subsisting eternally.
> Thus, when we say, "God is prior to the world," or "God existed before time,"
> what true sense can there be in these statements about the preexistence of
> God and the subsequent existence of these [created] things, if we accept these
> words at their human institution, according to their temporal signification?
> So that in effect, we would be saying that God is prior to the world in time
> or existed — that is, was in past time — before there was any time? It is nec-
> essary, therefore, when we transfer (*transferimus*) any kind of words to the
> unique divine nature, that we limit them thereafter to a single signification or
> construction, and of necessity, transcend their proper (*propriam*) institution
> through that [i.e., the divine nature] which surpasses all. (2.104; pp. 458–59)[18]

The figural language which could delight Augustine, the teacher of
rhetoric, has become as much of a problem for the logician Peter Abelard
as it was for Eriugena. Language is bound to the verb, according to the
Roman grammarian Priscian, and the verb is bound to time (17.12; p. 116).
Yet God is eternal, and cannot, without absurdity, be described in terms
of temporal existence, or of "time" prior to that creation of the material
world that is the beginning of time. The poverty of language, therefore, re-
quires that the words coined in reference to the creature be transferred into
a specialized — not metaphorical — usage distinct from their original sense.
This is a very narrow application of *translatum* for something like the pur-
poses suggested by Cicero's definition of the simple type of metaphor made
necessary by some deficiency in the language. In effect, it gives a fourth ap-
plication to the term *translatum*, as the word becomes Abelard's expression
for the process by which the theologian selects technical terms for his spe-
cialized vocabulary. That process, meanwhile, has none of the entertainment
content and delight found in the classical rhetorician's account of metaphor,
or the patristic exegete's comments on figural language. Instead, it is the
systematic theologian's grave and anxious search for adequate expression of
the divine mysteries.

In his later theologies, Abelard uses the word *translatum* to indicate the
transposition of terms in ordinary language to a specialized theological use.

Such transposition occurs primarily in language about the divine nature, and especially in the traditional terminology used to express the doctrine of the Trinity. Thus, the term *persona* is observed by Abelard to have been transposed (*translatum*) from use in other contexts, to serve as a kind of similitude in reference to God. In the *Theologia scholarium*, for example, he finds occasion to remark, in the context of his discussion of the term *persona*:

> since the word *persona* bears various senses, those first suggest themselves to us to be specified, so that it may be seen by what similitude the name of person is transposed (*translatum*) from [its] other senses to the excellence, finally, of divinity. (2.104; pp. 458–59)[19]

Similarly, the terms Father and Son are transposed, in his view, from the context of physical reproduction, so that their use in describing personal relations within the Trinity must be carefully qualified. In the *Theologia christiana* he states:

> That truly the Son [of God] is said to be of the substance of the Father is expressed as much in this place, "to be of the substance of the Father," as [in the phrase] "begotten of the Father," because what is said of the one who is begotten is transposed (*translatum*) from our generations, in that he is said to be of the substance of the Father, because in the very begetting of the human body something of the substance of the father's body is taken and converted into the body of the son. (4.111; p. 320)[20]

Thus, the language of physical reproduction is seen to be pressed into service for the expression of a divine, and therefore incorporeal, relationship. Hence, it may be, Abelard's sensitivity to to the ease with which error may creep into interpretations of the doctrine of the Trinity, as well as the charge of irrationality levelled at it by the critics of orthodoxy.

The intractability of language, as well as its users' need to engage in extraordinary manipulations of it, is a recurrent theme in Abelard's theological works. In the *Dialogus inter philosophum, Iudaeum, et Christianum*, for example, he finds occasion to remark on the poverty of language for expressing thought or adequately designating objects of thought:

> Indeed, we find many things whose names and meanings we are not able to fix in a definition. For even if we are not ignorant of the natures of things, nonetheless, terms for them are not in circulation and often the mind is quicker to understand than the tongue to express or to discourse upon what we feel. (lines 3174–79; p. 161)[21]

Abelard's pessimism about the adequacy of language to both thought and thing — let alone the divine nature — may stem from his conviction that it is

a human artifact, devised through experience of sense perceptible creatures. As such, it is a step away from the preverbal sign in the mind that registers sense experience, and yet another step away from the creatures that it intends to name. Consequently, human language is very distant indeed from the Logos, or divine Word, which in Abelard's platonizing cosmology stands at the source of all created natures.[22]

Human language in the proper (*proprium*) sense is identified by Cicero as usage "born at the same time as the things themselves," and by Augustine as the use "on account of which [the words] were instituted."[23] On the whole, Abelard's teachings on language stand within their tradition, but he seems less optimistic about the adequacy of our vocabulary to express our experiences. Nor does he seem, with Cicero, to view the invention of metaphors as an attractive or entertaining solution to the problem. Instead, he seems, in an adaptation of the Eriugenian position, to retreat into a sort of nature mysticism, whereby the wordless eloquence of created natures alone offers the most reliable vehicle of divine revelation. And it is in this sense that Abelard understands the sacred scriptures' recourse to "similitudes" drawn from nature as well as to theological vocabulary in the strict sense:

> Truly, God so delights in the things of his making that often he prefers rather to image himself in the very natures of things he created, than to be expressed in the words of our composition or invention, and rejoices more in the likeness of those very things, than in the propriety (*proprietate*) of our language. Thus scripture, to achieve the beauty of eloquence, prefers to use the natures of things in accordance with some likeness, rather than confine itself wholly to its proper (*propriae*) mode of expression. (*Theol. Chr*. 3.8b; p. 198)[24]

Conclusion

This brief investigation has considered uses of the terms *proprium* and *translatum* in key passages from a classical, patristic, Carolingian, and mediaeval source, with a view to tracing the history of their "different intonations" (to borrow Borges's phrase). *Translatio*, a term for transfer or transposition of objects or meanings, has itself undergone translation, from the classical orator's rhetorical device, to the scholastic theologian's instrument of precision. Augustine, whose training lay, like Cicero's, in the rhetorical art, delighted in the figural language of scripture, and sought understanding through the possibilities opened up by language used figurally (*translatum*) as well as literally (*proprium*). Eriugena, the disciple of pseudo-Dionysius, sought in negation a pointer to true language about God. In effect, he saw both the figural language of scripture and the philosophical names and attributes of

God equally as metaphor, transposed language, and so also "improper" usage. Peter Abelard, whose fame rested on his skills as a logician, appears to have had little of Augustine's appreciation for metaphorical or figural language. Nevertheless, he does not follow Eriugena into unqualified adoption of the theology of negation. Instead, he sought to trace the transposition by which words are derived from the ordinary language of sense-based experience, to their specialized applications in theological discourse. Ultimately, however, the play of language — whether in metaphor, figure, or the theologian's carefully chosen vocabulary — does not disclose the truth he seeks, nor offer real enjoyment. Rather, Peter Abelard traces true delight back to the *proprium* of sense-perceptible created natures, where God is the sole author and so also the only genuine theologian, while the human theologian's efforts remain, at best, a rather shaky *translatum*.

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NOTES

1 "Tria sunt . . . in verbo simplici quae orator afferat ad illustranda atque exornandam orationem, aut inusitatum verbum aut novatum aut translatum."

2 "Ergo utimur verbis aut eis quae propria sunt et certa quasi vocabula rerum paene una nata cum rebus ipsis, aut eis quae transferuntur et quasi alieno in loco collocantur; aut eis quae novamus et facimus ipsi."

3 "Quod enim declarari vix verbo proprio potest, id translato cum est dictum, illustrat id quod intellegi volumus eius rei quam alieno verbo posuimus similitudo."

4 " . . . vel quod singulis verbis res ac totum simile conficitur."

5 See, e.g., Augustine, *Quaestionum in heptateuchum*, 2 (Quaest. exodi). 158 and *Locutionum in heptateuchum* 7 (Loc. Iudicium). 54: ed. in *Aurelii Augustini opera* 5, Corpus christianorum series latina 33 (Turnhout, 1958), pp. 145 and 464; *Retactationum libri* 2, 2.7.35, ed. A. Mutzenbecker in *Aurelii Augustini opera*, Corpus christianorum series latina 57 (Turnhout, 1984), p. 96; *De doctrina christiana* 3. 29: ed. in *Aurelii Augustini opera* 4.1, Corpus christianorum series latina 32 (Turnhout, 1962), p. 101.

6 "Num aliud homo discit, quam cum illud planissimis uerbis sine similitudinis huius adminiculo audiret?"

7 "Et tamen nescio quomodo suauis intueor sanctos, cum eos quasi dentes ecclesiae uideo praecidere ab erroribus homines atque in eius corpus emollita duritia quasi demorsos mansosque transferre."

8 "Duabus autem causis non intelleguntur, quae scripta sunt, si aut ignotis aut ambiguis signis obteguntur. Sunt autem signa uel propria uel translata. Propria dicuntur, cum his rebus significandis adhibentur, propter quas sunt instituta, sicut dicimus bouem, cum intellegimus pecus, quod omnes nobiscum latinae linguae homines hoc nomine uocant. Translata sunt, cum et ipsae res, quas propriis verbis significamus, ad aliquid aliud significandum usurpantur, sicut dicimus bouem et per has duas syllabas intellegimus pecus,

quod isto nomine appellari solet, sed rursus per illud pecus intelligimus euangelistam, quem significauit scriptura interpretante apostolo dicens: bouem triturantem non infrenabis."

9 See discussion in Chenu, pp. 60–64 and 79–88.

10 "Proinde signorum uerbalium quibus humanae locutionis consuetudine ad significandum ipsum deum aut eius administrationem in uniuersa creatura utitur diuina humanaeque industria, quaedam sunt quasi propria, quorum exempla sunt in uerbis quidem: sum, est, erat, esse, in nominibus uero: essentia, ueritas, uirtus, sapientia, scientia, destinatio, ceteraque huiusmodi quae, quoniam in natura nostra quicquid primum optimumque sit significant, id est ipsam substantiam et eius optima, sine quibus immortalis esse non potest, accidentia, non absurde referuntur ad unum optimumque principium omnium bonorum quod est deus, quaedam uero aliena, hoc est translata, quae tribus sedibus uenire solent, a similitudine uidelicet, a contrario, a differentia."

11 "Nec tamen in illo fuerunt, nec futura sunt, sed tantummodo sunt et omnia unum sunt. Proinde, quoniam aliter sub illo sunt ea quae per ipsum facta sunt, aliter in illo sunt ea quae ipse est, in eis quae sub illo sunt, quia locis temporibusque suis et creata et ordinata sunt, proprie fiunt uerba locorum temporumque significatiua, in eis uero quae aeternaliter in illo sunt translatiue proferri possunt. Ac per hoc sicut abusiue de deo dicitur fecisse uel facturum esse, ita de eo dicitur abusiue praesciisse, praescire, praesciturum esse, simili modo praedestinasse, praedestinare, praedestinaturum esse."

12 "Vbi notandum quod beatus Apostolus non illam solummodo litteram que imago uocis est appellat, sed generaliter omnes mysticas figuras, siue in dictis, siue in factis, siue in rerum sensibilium imaginationibus, descriptas in totius diuine scripture serie, per quas ueritas rerum spiritualium et supermundalium archana ad exercitationem humani animi et a terrenis ad celestia subuectionem significantur."

13 "Vt enim superius confectum est, sicut plus diuina honorificari, hoc est expressius significari per ueras negationes quam per translatas affirmationes, possunt, ita plus et significantius eadem diuina per alienas similitudines nouissimarumque materialium rerumque imagines quam per pulchras celestium rationabiliumque rerum formas mentibus humanis insinuatur."

14 "Si . . . haec uerba siue actiuae siue passiuae significationis sint non iam proprie sed translatiue de deo praedicantur, et omnia quae translate praedicantur non re uera sed quodam modo de eo dicuntur; re uera neque deus agit neque patitur neque mouet neque mouetur neque amat neque amatur."

15 "Si enim essentiarum [uocabula] seu substantiarum seu accidentium non re uera sed quadam necessitate ineffabilis naturae significandae in deo ponuntur, num necessario sequitur ut et uerba quae essentiarum substantiarum accidentium significant motus proprie de deo dici non posse, qui omnem essentiam substantiam omneque accidens . . . incomprehensibili ineffabilique suae naturae excellentia superascendit?"

16 See discussion by Jolivet, pp. 13–62.

17 At the councils of Vercelli in 1050 and of Rome in 1059; see introduction to Eriugena, *Periphyseon* (*The Division of Nature*), p. 21.

18 "Quod uero omnis hominum locutio ad creaturarum status maxime accomodata sit, ex ea precipua parte orationis perfectio, ex ea sine qua, teste Prisciano, nulla constat orationis perfectio, ex ea scilicet que dicitur 'uerbum'. Hec quippe dictio temporis designatiua est, quod incepit a mundo. Vnde si huius partis significationem recte attendamus, oportet per eam cuiusque constructionis sensum infra ambitum temporum coerci,

hoc est ad eas res tantum inclinari quas temporaliter contingere, non eternaliter subsistere uolumus demonstrare. Vnde cum dicimus deum priorem esse mundo siue extitisse ante tempora, quis sensus in his uerbis uerus esse potest de precessione dei ac sucessione istorum, si hec uerba ad hominum institutionem accipiamus secundum ipsam temporis significationem, ut uidelicet dicamus deum secundum tempus priorem esse mundo uel extitisse, hoc est in preterito tempore fuisse antequam tempus aliquod esset?. 71. Oportet itaque, cum ad singularem diuinitatis naturam quascumque dictiones transferimus, eas inde quandam singularem significationem seu etiam constructionem contrahere atque ipsas, per hoc quod omnia excedit, necessario propriam institutionem excedere." Cf. Eriugena, *Ex. in coel. hier*. 2, p. 53, and *Periphys*. 1.77: pp. 219–21.

[19] "Sed cum 'persone' uocabulum in uarias significationes deducatur, prius hee nobis distinguende occurrunt, ut appareat in qua significatione 'persona' in deo sit accipienda, uel qua etiam similitudine persone nomen ab aliis significationibus ad diuinitatis excellentiam nouissime uideatur esse translatum."

[20] "Quod uero dicitur Filius esse ex substantia Patris, tantumdem hoc loco sonat 'esse ex substantia Patris' quantum 'gigni ex Patre', ab eo quidem translatum quod in nostris generationibus is qui gignitur, in eo de substantia patris esse dicitur, quod in ipsa generatione humani corporis traductum est et conuersum aliquid de ipsa substantia corporis patris in corpus filii."

[21] "Multa enim reperimus, quorum nec nominationem sicut nec sententias diffinitione possumus terminare. Et si enim rerum naturas non ignoremus, earum tamen uocabula in usu non sunt et sepe promptior est mens ad intelligendum, quam lingua sit ad proferendum uel ad ea, que sentimus, disserendum."

[22] See, e.g., his *Expositio in hexaemeron* (PL 178: 732D–733A and 739A), on divine self-communication through sense-perceptible creation; compare discussion in Dronke, pp. 66–68.

[23] See notes 2 and 8 above.

[24] "In tantum uero in ipsa factura sua delectatur Deus, ut frequenter ipsis rerum naturis quas creauit, se figurari magis quam uerbis nostris quae nos confinximus aut inueniemus exprimi uelit, et magis ipsa rerum similitudine quam uerborum nostrorum gaudeat proprietate, ut ad eloquentiae uenustatem ipsis rerum naturis iuxta aliquam similitudinem pro uerbis Scriptura malit uti, quam propriae locutionis integritatem sequi." Cited in Dronke, p. 66; compare Eriugena, *Exp. in coel. Hier*. 2, p. 53.

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