Philosophy in Ireland:

Past Actualities and Present Challenges

Edited by

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Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

CHAPTER ONE

ASPECTS OF PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE IN ELEVENTH- AND TWELFTH-CENTURY IRELAND: METAPHOR, MORALITY AND THE MIND

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It is important to note at the outset of this study that, as far as we know, there were no ground-breaking or systematic philosophical works of significant length composed in Ireland during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[1] Rather, the works under discussion here represent Ireland's reception of an established western European philosophical tradition and the reworking of that tradition in fresh literary contexts, both Latin and vernacular. The tradition to which I refer is Christian Platonism (and Neoplatonism), a worldview which—in different guises and to differing extents—shaped the work of many Late Antique and early medieval Christian thinkers, including Augustine of Hippo, Boethius, John Scotus Eriugena, and Anselm of Canterbury. I hope to show the extent to which some eleventh- and twelfth-century Irish writers were engaged with the works of such thinkers, and, as a result, were moved to explore concepts of truth and reality, wisdom and thought.

De tribus habitaculis animae, a Latin treatise probably composed in Ireland before the year 1100, asserts that the material world is transient, illusory and false.[2] Truth is only to be found after death. Allowing

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[1] There is, however, a substantial—and largely unstudied—philosophical literature in Irish medical manuscripts of the later Middle Ages. These would repay scholarly attention, but are outside the chronological scope of the present study.

[2] *De tribus habitaculis animae*, ed. by A. Gwynn, *The Writings of Bishop Patrick, 1074–1084*, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae 1 (Dublin: Institute For Advanced Studies, 1955), pp. 106–24; trans. by E. Boyle, 'Concerning the Three Dwelling-Places of the Soul', in *The End and Beyond: Medieval Irish Eschatology*, ed. by J. Carey, C. Ó Dochartaigh and E. Níc Carthaigh (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications,

ourselves to be seduced by the unreality of the present life is evidence of
an unbalanced mind:

> What could be more stupid, or more insane, than to be deceived and
> overcome like children by the shadow and image and similitude of true
> glory and true pleasure, true beauty, true decency, true honour, and not to
> seek after, or desire, the true glory itself? Who would choose the image of
> gold in water, neglecting the gold itself, and would not immediately be
> believed by all to be an idiot or a madman? Who would love the orb of the
> sun reflected in a mirror or formed in any other material, more than the sun
> itself, and would not be derided by all?[3]

Thus, love of this life over the next is suggestive of insanity. This is
because, in a calculation of risk reminiscent of Pascal's Wager, a lifetime
of corporeal pleasures is not worth the price of an eternity of punishment.
The author develops this calculation of risk into a consideration of the
inconceivable enormity of eternity:

> Who in their right mind would choose one hundred years of punishment
> for the sake of one day of pleasure? And yet, wretched and without any
> wisdom, they do not shun following the pleasures of the flesh, they do not
> escape the intolerable punishments—not of a hundred years, not of a
> thousand times a thousand, but of all time, without end—for the sake of
> forty or sixty years of pleasure, or of any such perishable delight. But
> however great the difference is between one day and a hundred years, it is
> certainly nothing like the difference between forty, or sixty, or a hundred
> years, and an eternity to come, whether of good or evil. For there is some
> relation between the space of one day and that of a hundred years, although
> it is minimal: but there is no relation between the space of a hundred years
> and eternity. If, for instance, the aforementioned space of time were a
> hundredth or thousandth part of eternity, after a hundredfold or a
> thousandfold of that time, eternity would cease to exist: which the

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2014), pp. 527–45. On its authorship and early manuscript transmission, see,
Elizabeth Boyle, 'The Authorship and Transmission of *De tribus habitaculis
animae*', *Journal of Medieval Latin*, 22 (2012), 49–65.
[3] *Quid stultius quidue insanius est quam umbra et imagine et similitudine uere
glorie et uere delectationis, uere pulchritudinis, ueri decoris, ueri honoris more
infantium decipi et superari, et ipsam ueram gloriam non querere, non desiderare?
Quis imaginem auri in aqua ipso auro neglecto eligeret, et non statim a cunctis
fatuus uel insanus esse crederetur? Quis orbem solis in speculo redditum uel in
qualibet materia formatum plus diligeret quam ipsum solem, et non ab omnibus
derideretur?*: ed. by A. Gwynn, l. 63–70; trans. by E. Boyle.

definition of eternity does not permit. For if it could in any way end in time, it would not be eternity at all.[4]

These passages are characteristic of the expansive moral, philosophical and theological concerns of *De tribus habitaculis animae*, but they also encapsulate a number of themes found in other medieval Irish texts of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, composed both in Latin and the vernacular. One dominant theme is the idea that reality is not what it appears to be, that we need to crack the hard surface of ideas and words, to find the truth which lies within and beyond them. At the same time, that inner truth is fundamentally inexpressible and therefore must be articulated obliquely in order to be understood by the human mind. A measurable concept, such as 'time', is inadequate for expressing an immeasurable concept, such as 'eternity', and therefore strategies such as the use of simile or metaphor must be employed in the attempt to describe the indescribable. Some medieval Irish authors explored a tension between 'likeness' and 'unlikeness': on the one hand, they might attempt to describe eternal torment in hell by stating that there is a 'likeness' or 'similitude' between the bad things which people can suffer during their lifetime (cold, hunger, disease) and the punishment that the damned will suffer in hell, but the same authors also observed that suffering on earth and suffering in hell are fundamentally unlike each other, because eternal punishment is indescribable, and there is no relation between 'a long time' and 'eternity'.[5]

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[4] *Quis cum sano sensu pro unius diei deliciis centum annorum penam eligeret? Et miseri tamen et sine ulla sapientia uoluptatem carnis sequentes non uitant, non effugiunt intolerabiles penas non centum annorum, non milies mille, sed omnium sine fine seculorum pro quadraginta uel sexaginta annorum deliciis uel qualibet corruptibili delectatione. Quantum autem interest inter unum diem et centum annos, non tantum utique sed plus interest inter quadraginta uel sexaginta uel centum annos et eternitatem siue in bono siue in malo futuram. Unus enim dies aliqua proportio est in centum annorum spatio, quamuis ualde modica: at uero centum annorum spatium nulla proportio est in illa eternitate. Si enim uerbi gratia centesima uel millesima pars esset eternitatis predictum eius spatium, post centuplum eius spatium uel milliplum eternitas esse desineret: quod ratio non sinit eternitatis. Que si ullo modo tempore finiretur, eternitas omnino non esset.*: ed. by A. Gwynn, l. 79–93, trans. by E. Boyle.
[5] This 'inexpressibility topos' is widespread not only in medieval Irish, but also in Anglo-Saxon, homiletic literature. The topos is already found in the Old Irish period (before ca. 900): for example, the 'Old Irish Homily' states that 'there are, moreover, likenesses of the kingdom of heaven and of hell in this world. The likeness of hell therein first, i.e., winter and snow, tempest and cold, age and decay, disease and death'; *Ataat dano cosmuiliusa flatha nime 7 ifirnn isin bithsa.*

Similarly, people are described as being both like and unlike God. According to the biblical account, God made man in his own image and patristic authorities predicted that when mankind was resurrected to face final judgement it would be in the likeness of Christ;[6] and yet the corrupt and sinful human body, formed from clay, is unlike God. Indeed, as we shall see, sin could be perceived as actively erasing the likeness of God in man, thereby making man increasingly unlike that thing to which he also bears some similitude. This similitude can be seen, for example, in the threefold structure of the human mind—divided into 'intellect', 'will' and 'memory'—which was understood as a reflection in human nature of the threefold nature of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The idea of 'reflection' is a key one: the world was often characterised as a reflection of the eschatological kingdoms, thereby suggesting that the world is 'like' heaven and hell in the way that a reflection in a mirror provides a 'likeness' of the thing that it reflects, but it is unlike that thing in substance because it is only a reflection.[7] This study examines a selection of medieval Irish texts which use allegory and metaphor on the one hand, and simile, or ideas of likeness and unlikeness, on the other, in order to investigate the strategies used by medieval Irish authors to express what, for medieval thinkers, was the ultimate inexpressible truth, namely union with the divine. These sophisticated conceptions of the relationship between the human and the divine, the material and the immaterial, are an important feature of the philosophical discourse of eleventh- and twelfth-century Ireland.

De tribus habitaculis animae tells us that reality and truth are hidden beyond the unreality and falsehood of the material world. In the same vein, allegory is a form of veiled language, the meaning of which lies beyond its surface. But in the Middle Ages it was also a container for ideas which transcended linguistic barriers; as a means of expression it possessed a common vocabulary which could be understood across medieval

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Cosmuilius iffirnn dano and chétamus .i. gaemridh 7 snechta sin 7 uacht. aes 7 críne. Galar 7 báss: ed. and trans. by J. Strachan, *Ériu*, 3 (1907), 1–10 (pp. 5 and 9). The same idea is found in *De tribus habitaculis*: ed. by A. Gwynn, l. 5–11.

[6] Based on interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:49. For discussion of this aspect of eschatological doctrine in an eleventh-century Irish context, see, Elizabeth Boyle, 'Neoplatonic Thought in Medieval Ireland: the Evidence of *Scéla na esérgi*', *Medium Ævum*, 78 (2009), 216–30 (pp. 220–21).

[7] As we shall see below, in relation to the idea of 'vision', the Pauline statement that now we see as if through a glass darkly, but that in heaven we shall see 'face to face' (1 Cor. 13:12) was conducive to the use of metaphors based on mirrors and reflection (see, for example, *De tribus habitaculis*, l. 204, 249–55).

Christendom. Or, given the depth and complexity of some allegorical texts, we might say rather that it possessed a common vocabulary which literati across medieval Christendom could at least try to uncover: one reader might not interpret the allegory in the same way as another, but all would know that the words are only the surface carrier of the more profound idea which lies within. To use the metaphor suggested by the author of *De tribus habitaculis*, the words are the 'image of gold in water'; the meaning is 'the gold itself'. There were many different modes of religious thought operating simultaneously and inter-connectedly in eleventh- and twelfth-century Ireland. Scholars have long argued that there was a particular interest in texts which were informed by the literal and historical methods of biblical exegesis.[8] However, I suggest that some of the most challenging and interesting texts produced in eleventh- and twelfth-century Ireland used more abstract thought, particularly allegory and metaphor (in a manner often imbued with the vocabulary of Christian Platonism), as a vehicle for conveying sophisticated moral and theological concepts.

We might consider a Latin poem which, employing the vernacular Irish technique of *dúnad*, begins and ends with the same phrase *Mentis in excessu* ('In ecstasy of mind'). The poem begins:

> In ecstasy of mind through pleasant places in a wide countryside
> It chanced that I seemed to wander with hasty steps:
> Thus gazing at length on wondrous sights and things
> I was held captive. Then suddenly appeared to me
> A woman uttering a stream of lamentable complaints to the skies:[9]

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[8] Hildegard L. C. Tristram, 'Der insulare Alexander', in *Kontinuität und Transformation der Antike im Mittelalter*, ed. by W. Erzgräber (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1999), pp. 129–55; Hildegard L. C. Tristram, 'Latin and Latin Learning in the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 49–50 (1997), 847–77; Erich Poppe, 'Reconstructing Medieval Irish Literary Theory: The Lesson of *Airec Menman Uraird maic Coise*', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 37 (Summer 1999), 33–54 (p. 39); Pádraig P. Ó Néill, 'Old Wine in New Bottles: the Reprise of Early Irish Psalter Exegesis in Airbertach Mac Cosse's Poem on the Psalter', in *Authorities and Adaptations: the Transmission and Reworking of Textual Sources in Medieval Ireland*, ed. by E. Boyle and D. Hayden (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 2014), pp. 121–40.

[9] *Mentis in excessu lati loca ruris amena/ Forte michi subitis gradibus lustrare uidebar:/ Sic ego mira diu rerum spectacula cernens/ Captus eram. Subito michi tunc apparuit una/ Femina que miseras spargebat ad astra querelas.*: 'Versus Allegorici', ed. and trans. by A. Gwynn, *The Writings*, pp. 84–101, l. 4–9.

The poem, as it is preserved in the only extant manuscript copy, British Library MS Cotton Titus D. xxiv (*saec*. XII[ex]), where it is attributed to a bishop Patrick, is accompanied by extensive interlinear glosses. The poem's editor, Aubrey Gwynn, argued that the poem and the glosses were written by the same person, whom he identified as Patrick, bishop of Dublin (d. 1084), but this is something which cannot be proven conclusively.[10] The glossator interprets the allegory for us, and tells us that the wide countryside in which the narrator is walking is 'scripture'. The woman whom he encounters is glossed as *studiositas*. As the poem proceeds, the woman, 'studiousness', mourns her dead husbands and regrets that no man will now take her as a wife. She introduces herself as Egle, and speaks of her three sisters, Esper, Medusa and Arethusa, and the glossator tells us that they are 'intellect', 'memory' and 'eloquence'.[11]

The visionary structure of the poem is reinforced by its conclusion, in which the poet tells of the departure of the woman, Egle, 'study or studiousness', according to the glossator:

> Then did she fly away, taking oath once again to visit
> Our doors: but I, coming home weary, seemed to be once more
> In my own house, whence I had been borne away to these sights of the mind.
> In ecstasy of mind.[12]

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[10] Doubt was cast on Gwynn's identification of the poet as Patrick of Dublin by Martin Brett, 'Canterbury's Perspective on Church Reform and Ireland, 1070–1115', in *Ireland and Europe in the Twelfth Century: Reform and Renewal*, ed. by D. Bracken and D. Ó Riain-Raedel (Dublin: Four Courts, 2006), pp. 13–35 (pp. 33–35); see also, Boyle, 'The Authorship'.

[11] The source for this is Fulgentius: ed. by R. Helm, *Fabii Planciadis Fulgentii V.C. Opera* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1898), pp. 83–107 (p. 97): *Nam et nos in bucolicis ideo mala aurea decem psuimus, scilicet decem eglogarum politam facundiam; nam et Hercules aurea mala de horto Hesperidum tollit; quattuor enim Esperides dictae sunt, id est Egle, Esper, Medusa et Aretusa, quas nos Latine studium, intellectus, memoria et facundia dicimus, quod primum sit studere, secundum intellegere, tertiam memorari quod intellegis, inde ornare dicendo quod terminas. Hinc ergo ornatum aureum studii uirtus rapit.*; trans. by L. G. Whitbread, *Fulgentius the Mythographer* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1971), pp. 119–35 (p. 129, § 20).

[12] *Tum uolat hec iurans iterum se inuisere nostra/ Limina: set rediens ego lassus in ede uidebar/ Nam propria, qua raptus eram ad spectacula mentis/ Mentis in excessu*: ed. and trans. by A. Gwynn, l. 252–5. This conclusion is comparable with other allegorical vision texts, e.g., Alan of Lille, *De planctu naturae*: *Hujus imaginariae visionis subtracto speculo, me ab exstasi excitatum in somno, prior mysticae apparitionis dereliquit aspectus.* (*PL* 210, 482C); 'Accordingly when the

In terms of the text proper, it would appear that the narrator had been literally transported—out of his body—in order to witness these 'sights of the mind', and yet the glossator reminds us that this out of body experience is only metaphorical: the gloss states: 'in ede: i. in carne, that is, in the flesh, because to be outside the flesh is to contemplate those things that are outside the flesh, i.e. incorporeal things. But to be in the flesh is to think about fleshly things, i.e., corporeal things, not to wander outside the mind as is done above' (gloss on l. 253). That being 'outside the flesh' is explicitly stated to be a metaphor for the contemplation of incorporeal matters, and that the glossator can see the 'visionary' element of the text in purely figurative terms, should perhaps be borne in mind by those who seek to interpret vision texts as accounts of historical events, whether as near death experiences or as ecstatic moments of divine inspiration.[13] In this case at least the vision is self-consciously, and self-referentially metaphorical. In this connection, we might consider a late Middle Irish (possibly twelfth-century) poem in which the term *aislinge* ('dream' or 'vision') is used to characterise an unambiguously allegorical text. In the poem beginning 'Aislinge Augustín áin', we read about the following vision:

> Noble Augustine had a vision (*aislinge*) after he had recited the psalms at matins; he saw himself on a plain in flight before eight wolves.
>
> Fleeing from the swift paws of the wolves he went to a small pleasant wood; he found no protection there from the eight rapacious wolves.
>
> Then he came again, as he thought, to a very great wood; he found no shelter in one place or another until he came to one particular tree.
>
> [...]
>
> Augustine writes a clear account which is brought from him to Jerome; Jerome gives his true interpretation and it is brought from him to Augustine.

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mirror with these images and visions was withdrawn, I awoke from my dream and ecstasy and the previous vision of the mystic apparition left me.' (James J. Sheridan, trans., *Alan of Lille. The Plaint of Nature*, Mediaeval Sources in Translation 26 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980), p. 221).
[13] See, for example, Carol Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys: Accounts of Near-Death Experience in Medieval and Modern Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Thanks should be given to the noble Son of the Father—lasting is his fame—that he [*sc.* Augustine] escaped from the jaws of the wolves after rising from his sleep.

The wolves are the eight principal vices—their attack is fierce—they pursue every person on the yellow-surfaced earth.

The little wood is pure constant prayer—lasting its fame—the great renowned wood stands for the psalms including the blessed *Beati*. [...][14]

This poem draws on a number of elements, including other Irish textual traditions regarding the particular efficacy of Psalm 118 in the Greek Bible (or 119 in the Hebrew), that is, the *Beati*.[15] In the verses which follow those just cited, the poet offers an entirely allegorical interpretation of the *Beati*, the Psalm composed in the form of an alphabetic acrostic, and the longest verse composition in the Hebrew Bible. Here what concerns us is that Augustine's *aislinge*, like our Latin poet's 'sights of the mind', is explicitly understood as allegorical.

In this regard, it is worth examining in some depth the Latin poet's (and his glossator's) conception of vision, in its intellectual and spiritual senses. In *Mentis in excessu*, after his encounter with the Hesperides, and with the lionesses—pride and despair—who are defeated by the maidens—humility and hope—our narrator sees five horses:

Then did I see five steeds swiftly through the countryside
Speeding, who reared and threw their rider
Who alone sat and rode these steeds:
For, to his grief, he held them on no bridle.
One of them was far swifter than the wind,

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[14] *Aislinge Augustín áin/ ar ngabáil psalm 'sin tiugnáir/ co faca a bith ar in moig/ oc teiched re hocht conaib.// Luid dochum feda bláith bic/ ar teiched na con croibglic/ nocha fuair a dítin ann / ar in ochtar con craescham.// Ar sin do-luid, andar leis/ co fid romór do-ridis/ ní fhuair a dín thair ná thall/ co ráinic cosin aenchrann.// ... Scríbaid Augustín ord nglé*
berar uaid co Ciríne;/ beirid Ciríne a breith fír/ is berar uaid d'Augustín.// Bertha a buide, buan a blad/ re Mac uasal an Athar/ a thernam a craesaib con/ ar n-éirge dó as a chodlad.// Is iat na coin, cruaid a cath/ ocht n-airig na ndualach;/ a-tát i ndiaid cach duine/ ar in talmain tonnbuide.// Is í in chaill bec, buan a blad/ in urnaigthe glan grésach;/ is í in chaill mór co mbloid/ na psailm 'm in mbiait mbennachtaig.: ed. and trans. by B. Ó Cuív, 'Three Middle Irish Poems', *Éigse*, 16 (1975–6), 1–17 (pp. 3–5).
[15] See, for example, Osborn Bergin, ed. and trans., 'A Mystical Interpretation of the "Beati"', *Ériu*, 11 (1932), 103–06.

And outpassed in speed the birds and fleeting deer.
Coursing over the sea he seeks no ship from man,
And with one leap he rises from earth to highest heaven.
But I wondered to see the rider move more swiftly than the steeds:
For as each of them bounded forward on its own course,
The speedier its flight; the further went its lonely rider ahead.[16]

Significantly, some of this section of the poem appears to be identical with a quatrain of a Middle Irish poem beginning *Is mebul dom imrádud*, which was dated by Gerard Murphy to the tenth century. Murphy's translation renders the quatrain thus:

Without a ferry in their perverse path
they go over every sea;
swiftly they leap in one bound
from earth to Heaven.[17]

In the Middle-Irish poem it is flighty thoughts which travel in this manner, offering a further example of the workings of the mind being described through extended metaphor. We might note the similarity with 'Aislinge Augustín áin', where the vices are portrayed as animals running swiftly across the landscape. In the case of *Mentis in excessu*, the five horses which run swiftly across the landscape are the five senses;[18] and the rider, who can move more swiftly than any of the senses, is the soul. The one horse which is faster than the others, and which can outpass in speed the

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[16] *Tunc ego ruris equos spatium cito quinque uidebam/ Transuolitare, suum qui precipitando ruerunt/ Sessorum qui solus equis insedit eisdem:/ Nullis nanque miser frenis agitabat eosdem./ Ex quibus unus erat multo uelocior Euro,/ Qui superabat aues cursu ceruosque fugaces:/ Qui mare transuolitans nauem nec poscit ab ullo,/ Quique solo celum saltu concendit ad altum./ Set mirabar equis uelocius ire sedentem:/ Nam propriis gradibus cursu quam fertur equino/Vt ciciusque uolat, solus sic longius ibat*: ed. and trans. by A. Gwynn, l. 63–73.

[17] *Cen ethar 'na chlóenchéimmim/ cingid tar cech ler;/ lúath linges 'na óenléimmim/ ó thalmain co nem.*: ed. and trans. by G. Murphy, *Early Irish Lyrics, Eighth to Twelfth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956, repr. Dublin: Four Courts, 1998), pp. 38–43 (pp. 40–1), which seems to me to render *Qui mare transuolitans nauem nec poscit ab ullo,/ Quique solo celum saltu concendit ad altum*. There are other similarities (*is lúaithiu ná in góeth* seems to equate to *Ex quibus unus erat multo uelocior Euro*), and the metaphorical portrayal of the flightiness of thought in *Is mebul dom imrádud* suggests the same intellectual approach as we encounter in both *Mentis in excessu* and *Aislinge Augustín áin*.

[18] Wolves also appear in *Mentis in excessu* but are interpreted by the glossator as demons (l. 152).

birds and fleeting deer, is the sense of 'sight'. But no matter how fast 'sight' can travel, the 'soul' is always faster. The glossator tells us that this is because 'the soul runs more swiftly in thought than it sees or hears or touches and the rest' (gloss on l. 71). And in the next gloss, we learn that the rider, or soul, is always ahead of even the fastest horse because: 'the five senses do not perceive anything except bodily things but the soul knows and comprehends even incorporeal things. The soul even comprehends bodily things which it does not see through the eye of the body' (gloss on l. 73). Thus, although sight is the superior of the five senses, it is still inferior to the *oculis animi*, the eye of the mind.

The idea that sight is the pre-eminent sense derives from Augustine who, for example, in his *De Trinitate* wrote that sight is the sense which exceeds all the rest: *sensus corporis maxime excellit* (*De Trin*. 11.1.1–2). Augustine also tells us that the *oculis animi* exceeds corporeal sight.[19] In *Mentis in excessu*, the superiority of spiritual vision is further articulated in a gloss towards the end of the poem. The poet speaks of the heavenly hosts and the difficulties of articulating their magnificence. He writes:

> Who could sing the silent speech of people who see men's hearts?
> Who the endless abiding joy of the mind?
> Who the united choirs singing hymns and praises,
> And the love that burns in the hearts of each and all?
> Who the lyres and every apt form of melody,
> Psalters and strange harps or threefold organs?
> The golden temples, the market-place, the throne, the seated king.
> Kind, gentle in manner, yet just and mighty,
> Fearful, unshaken, ruling his realms in righteousness?[20]

The gloss on the word Psalter tells us that: 'all these things signify either praise of God or heavenly choirs or certainly the delight itself at the vision

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[19] On Augustine's schema of corporeal, intellectual and spiritual vision, see, Thomas Finan, 'Modes of Vision in St Augustine: *De Genesi ad litteram* XII', in *The Relationship between Neoplatonism and Christianity*, ed. by T. Finan and V. Twomey (Dublin: Four Courts, 1992), pp. 141–54.

[20] *Quis populi tacitam cernentis corda loquelam?/ Quis quoque leticiam mentis sine fine manentem?/ Quisque choros socios ymnos laudesque canentes,/ Omnis et ardentum cuntis quoque cordis amorem?/ Quisque lyras aut omne genus modulaminis aptum,/ Psalterium cytarasque nouas aut organa terna?/ Aurea templa forum cathedram regemque sedentem/ Mitem, more pium, iustum tamen atque potentem,/ Terribilem stabilem, recte sua regna regentem.*: ed. and trans. by A. Gwynn, l. 201–9.

of God'.[21] The association between vocal praise of God, in the form of choirs and, specifically, the singing of psalms, on the one hand, and the beatific vision on the other, is to be found in other medieval Irish eschatological texts. For example, I have written elsewhere about the significance of *teorfégad* ('contemplative vision'), as it is outlined in the eleventh-century vernacular sermon *Scéla na esérgi*.[22] As a whole, the sermon offers significant evidence for the use of complex vernacular philosophical vocabulary, as indicated by the deliberate coining of the glossing calque, *teorfégad*, which emphasises the contemplative and visionary sense of the Irish loanword *teoir*, from Latin *theoria* (as opposed to the sense of 'idea' or 'theory', for which *teoir* is usually employed). Other significant vernacular terms deployed in the text include *folud* ('substance') and *aicned* ('essence', 'nature').[23] For present purposes, it should be noted that in *Scéla na esérgi*, the beatific vision is specifically identified as a counterpoint to the singing of Psalms of praise:

> The just, however, have no other occupation there except what the prophet David promised when he said: 'Happy are the men who live in your house, O Lord, they will praise you and they will wonder at you perpetually through the eternal ages'. It is not through speech, however, or through corporeal external voices that the holy will make this praise of God, but through spiritual, contemplative vision, and by inward examination of their form and their intellect.[24]

The experience of the elect in heaven is thus cast as an active intellectual endeavour. We can observe a similarity between the depiction of the beatific vision in *Scéla na esérgi* and that in the Latin treatise *De tribus habitaculis animae*. There, we are told that in heaven there will be no physical lack, no old age or death or night and no hunger or thirst:

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[21] *Psalterium: aut dei laudem hec omnia significant aut choros celestes aut certe ipsam delectationem uisionis dei*: ed. by A. Gwynn, p. 97; my translation.
[22] Boyle, 'Neoplatonic Thought', pp. 222–23.
[23] Ibid., p. 220.
[24] *Ni dingnet im*[*murgu*] *na fireóin nach monor aile thall acht aní dorairngert in fáith Dauid co n-érbairt. Mongenair don fairind attrebait it* [*t*]*egdais*[*s*]*iu, a Choimdiu, not-molfat 7 not-adamraigfet do grés triasna saeglaib suthainib. Ni ó briathraib immorro nó ó gothaib corpdaib sechtair dogénat na nóim in molad-sa for Dia, acht o theorfegad spirtalla 7 o scrútan inmedónach a ndligid 7 a n-intliuchta*: ed. by R. I. Best and O. Bergin, *Lebor na hUidre. The Book of the Dun Cow* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1927), l. 2673–7; my translation.

but the sight and vision of Christ and the holy Trinity will be sufficient
meat and drink to the people there, and the contemplation and beholding of
His divinity with the pure eye of the mind, and the continual reading (as I
may say) of the Book of Life, truth and high wisdom and the word of God,
which is the sight and vision of Jesus Christ.[25]

With their explicit association of the vision of God with spiritual sight,
intellectual activity, and particularly reading, which lies at the conjunction
of corporeal and incorporeal vision, we can see how the presentation of the
beatific vision in our Latin texts and in *Scéla na esérgi* draws from the
same intellectual tradition. This is also evident in the juxtaposition of
silent intellectual activity with the singing of Psalms and the musical
praise of God. In relation to our allegorical poem, then, the sense of sight
is significant—faster than the other horses—because it enables us to read
Scripture, which brings us close to spiritual vision and thus the beatific
vision.

After seeing the five horses and their rider, our adventurer encounters
seven sisters, i.e., the seven liberal arts. He converses with the three sisters
who can speak—grammar, dialectic and rhetoric—and observes the four
silent sisters—music, geometry, astrology and arithmetic (l. 80–95. And
then he encounters the island of Archipolis, the ecclesial, and
simultaneously eschatological, city, which he describes at length. Towards
the end of that passage he states:

> Then all around I saw woods bearing goodly fruit,
> And by their odour many are sated.
> This fruit preserves unending salvation of him who eats:
> Many are willing to breathe its odour, but few to eat.
> Lo, it is custom for those who dwell in that city
> To break the nut with their teeth and swallow the fruit within.
> For others it is custom to break the nut and give food to those near to them,
> Who sate the hunger of others with the nuts which they are eager to take.[26]

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[25] *Sed cibus et potus erit omnium uisio Christi et sancte trinitatis et contemplatio
puro cordis oculo ipsius diuinitatis, et assidua lectio ut ita dicam libri uite, id est
eterne ueritatis et summe sapientie et uerbi dei, quod est Jhesu Christi uisio.*: ed.
by A. Gwynn, l. 105–9; trans. by E. Boyle.

[26] *Circumquaque dehinc siluas bona poma ferentes/ Conspexi, quorum multi
satiantur odore./ Hec mandentis item seruant sine fine salutem:/ Que spirare
uolunt multi, set mandere pauci./ En aliis illam mos est habitantibus urbem/
Frangere dente nuces fructusque uorare latentes./ Frangere mos aliis esumque
dedisse propinquis/ Qui saciant alios nucibus quas sumere curant.*: ed. and trans.
by A. Gwynn, l. 108–15, and see p. 91 for the interpretive glosses (Gwynn edited
these but did not supply a translation). I have slightly adapted Gwynn's translation

The glossator interprets the island, Archipolis, as the church. On that island, he sees the woods (books) bearing goodly fruit (precepts and commandments). By their odour (knowledge) many are sated. Many are willing to breathe its odour (to know that knowledge) but few to eat (to take it in). It is the custom for those who dwell in that city (the church) to open the nuts (literal meaning) with their teeth (*ingenium*, mode of thinking) to swallow (understand) the inner fruit (spiritual meaning). For others it is custom to break the nuts and give food to their neighbours (to preach to others) who sate the hunger of others with the nuts (mystical precepts) which they are eager to take.

In learned poetry it would seem that such allegorical symbolism could be employed without the need for interpretation. Thus, for example, in the Middle Irish poem on metrics by Cellach ua Ruanada (d. 1079), we find imagery which seems to draw on the same ideas as those expressed in *Mentis in excessu*. The poet, Cellach, refers to 'fields of vigorous poetry', and elsewhere uses the term 'garden' as a metaphor for poetry as a whole. Significantly, Cellach describes the reward of poetry as being 'from the harvest of the fragrant nuts' (*do chnúas na cnó cumraide*).[27] Calvert Watkins interpreted the 'harvest of fragrant nuts' in a brief article on 'The Etymology of Irish *Dúan*', as being primarily indicative of the 'poet-patron' relationship: the poem is a gift which requires a reward, in this case the patron's counter-gift being 'symbolized' in the form of nuts.[28] I do not think that Watkins' explanation is sufficient: the poem itself is an experimental and self-consciously literary composition, which outlines different types of poetic metres and their uses. Each stanza describes a different poetic metre and each stanza is written in the metre it describes. It is hard to see what kind of noble patron would be interested in receiving such an intellectual exercise which seems to me to be directed more to other poets. It is probable that the 'harvest of fragrant nuts' from which Cellach hopes to be rewarded in this case is allegorical, that is, he seeks his reward from the intellectual harvest of knowledge. Mystical nuts are a recurrent motif in medieval Irish literature, most commonly in the form of

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of this section of the poem, changing his 'rind' to 'nut' and 'hidden fruit' to 'fruit within', as I think this more accurately conveys the sense of the Latin.

[27] Liam Breatnach, ed. and trans., '*Sluindfet dúib dagaisti in dána*: a Middle Irish Poem on Metres', in *Aon don Éigse: Essays Marking Osborn Bergin's Centenary Lecture on Bardic Poetry*, ed. by C. Breatnach and M. Ní Úrdail (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 2015), pp. 51–90.

[28] Calvert Watkins, 'The Etymology of Irish *Dúan*', *Celtica*, 11 (1976), 270–77 (p. 274).

the 'nuts of Segais', which confer wisdom on those who consume them.[29] There has been a tendency among scholars to view these nuts rather literally, leading to speculation on kinds of nuts which might cause an altered mental state in those who consume them, and the search for origins in putative pre-Christian shamanic practices.[30] I suggest that it is far more productive to view this motif as a metaphor: as our Latin verse and its interpreter put it, the nut has a hard shell (the superficial meaning), which can be cracked with one's teeth (mode of thinking) to reveal the inner fruit (the 'true' or mystical meaning). One might object that I am imposing a later, eleventh- or twelfth-century interpretation onto earlier texts, but let us consider one early example of the motif, in the 'Cauldron of Poesy', a seventh-century Old Irish text on poetic inspiration.

> As for human joy, it has four divisions: (i) the force of sexual longing, and (ii) the joy of safety and freedom from care, plenty of food and clothing until one begins *bairdne* [bardic craft, 'bardism'], and (iii) joy at the prerogatives of poetry after studying it well, and (iv) joy at the arrival of *imbas* ['great knowledge' or 'inspiration'] which the nine hazels of fine mast at Segais in the *síd*'s amass and which is sent upstream along the surface of the Boyne, as extensive as a whether's fleece, swifter than a racehorse, in the middle of June every seventh year regularly.[31]

Perhaps newly-qualified poets sat by the River Boyne with their fishing rods waiting to catch some mystical nuts as they bobbed past, but we should remember that this is an obscure treatise on poetry, which is couched in the form of one overarching metaphor, that is, the source of poetic ability as cauldron. As Liam Breatnach noted in his edition of the

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[29] See, for example, Whitley Stokes, 'The Irish Ordeals, Cormac's Adventure in the Land of Promise, and the Decision as to Cormac's Sword', *Irische Texte* III.1 (Leipzig, 1891), 183–229, 283 (p. 195, §35), a text which is heavy with allegorical significance, including the metaphorical representation of learning and the five senses. I am not aware of any detailed analysis of the language of this narrative, but it appears to be Middle Irish, and therefore roughly contemporaneous with many of the other texts discussed in the present study.

[30] Proinséas Ní Chatháin, 'Swineherds, Seers and Druids', *Studia Celtica*, 14/15 (1979/80), 200–11.

[31] *In fáilte dóendae, atáat cethéoir fodlai for suidi .i. luud éoit fuichechtae 7 fáilte sláne 7 nemimnedche imbid bruit 7 biid co feca in duine for bairdni 7 fáilte fri dliged n-écse iarna dagf[h]rithgnum 7 fáilte fri tascor n-imbais do-fuaircet noí cuill cainmeso for Segais i sídaib, conda-thochrathar méit moltchnaí. iar ndruimniu Bóinde frithroisc luaithiur euch aige i mmedón mís mithime dia secht mbliadnae beos*: ed. and trans. by L. Breatnach, 'The Cauldron of Poesy', *Ériu*, 32 (1981), 45–93 (pp. 66–67, §11).

text, the key to the metaphor is the idea of the cauldron as a container,[32] a container which exists within an individual. Therefore, the idea that the nuts were metaphors for wisdom or learning of some sort as early as the seventh century seems the more plausible explanation.[33]

Indeed, I would argue that the use and extent of metaphorical thought in medieval Ireland was both deeper and more widespread than I am able to demonstrate in the present study. Metaphor was fundamental to the very building blocks of texts, namely the individual words themselves. By this I mean that the role of metaphor in grammatical theory means that on the level of the individual word, we can potentially observe a whole range of metaphorical thinking at work.[34] This philosophy of grammar was itself influenced by biblical exegesis, thus reflecting the inextricable links between branches of learning in medieval thought. We might briefly observe the conjunction between grammatical and theological learning epitomised in the remarks of the seventh-century Irishman Virgilius Maro Grammaticus:

> To go into the matter more closely, it seems to me that the *littera* is similar to the human condition: just as man consists of a physical portion, a soul, and a sort of celestial fire, so too the letter is permeated with its body—that is, its shape, its function and its pronunciation, which are its joints and limbs, as it were—and has its soul in its meaning (*sensus*) and its spirit in its higher form of contemplation.[35]

That the individual letter or written word is a microcosm of man, leads us back to our eleventh- and twelfth-century texts and there to the idea that

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[32] Ibid., p. 47.

[33] The form of a nut, in conjunction with the interpretation of nuts in Irish etymological glossaries as being sweeter than other fruits, facilitates its being equated with something which requires effort to uncover, but which is beyond all other things: see, for example, *Sanas Cormaic* ('Cormac's Glossary'): *Cnu .i. cainiu .i. millsi oldati na toraid aile*; '"Nuts", i.e., "fairer", i.e., it is sweeter than the other fruit', Early Irish Glossaries Database, Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse & Celtic, University of Cambridge: <http://www.asnc.cam.ac.uk/irishglossaries/concordances.php?main=9&cpFamily =sc&display=fulltext&ref=349#> [accessed 11 November 2018].

[34] Deborah Hayden, 'Aspects of Linguistic Theory and *Grammatica* in Medieval Ireland: a Terminological Approach', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (University of Cambridge, 2010), pp. 198–238.

[35] See, Vivien Law, *Wisdom, Authority and Grammar in the Seventh Century: Decoding Virgilius Maro Grammaticus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 68.

man is a microcosm of the universe. The poem beginning *Constet quantus honos humane condicionis* states that man, in possessing the faculty of reason, stands apart from the rest of creation. The poem explores the nature of the human mind, as proof of man's exalted status, and uses the doctrine of the Trinity to explicate a threefold division of the mind into intellect (*intellectus*), will (*uoluntas*), and something which the author calls *mentio*.

The poem begins with the statement that should one wish to know (*scire*) the extent of the honour of the human condition, one can see it (*uidere*) from the sequence of reasoning which follows (l. 1–2). The poet describes the creation of man, stating that, unlike the rest of creation, man was not formed solely by the word of God.[36] Rather, man is said to be made of a compound nature, comprising both 'sense' (in common with all other living creatures) and 'reason' (something which, among creation, man alone possesses).[37] This compound nature suggests the belief, ultimately derived from Aristotelian thought, that 'sense perception' and 'intellection' are separate forms of cognition, intellectual thought being distinct from, and superior to, sensation.[38] The poet states that God is the animating force of creation governing life and movement, whole and indivisible in all places equally. These lines are mirrored by the lines immediately following, which represent the relationship between the human spirit and the human body as a microcosm of the relationship between God and creation. Thus, man's spirit animates his mortal body giving it life and movement, whole and indivisible in each limb of the body equally. We can see the deliberateness with which this idea of man as microcosm is constructed in the almost exact repetition at lines 27 and 33. Of God animating creation, the poet states: *Vivificando mouens et cunta mouendo gubernans* (l. 27: 'giving life and movement, and ruling all by movement'); of man's spirit animating the mortal body, the poet states:

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[36] *Non hominem uerbo solo deus effigiauit/ Quem facturus erat sic quomodo cunta creauit* (l. 3–4). The discussion of 'Constet quantus honos' offered here is a summary of the more detailed analysis in Elizabeth Boyle, 'The Twelfth-Century English Transmission of a Poem on the Threefold Division of the Mind, attributed to Patrick of Dublin (d. 1084)', in *'A Fantastic and Abstruse Latinity'?: Hiberno-Continental Cultural and Literary Interactions in the Middle Ages*, Studien und Texte zur Keltologie, ed. by W. R. Keller and D. Schlüter (Münster: Nodus, 2017), pp. 102–16.

[37] *Compositum tali mortalem conditione/ Conditor instruxit sensu simul et ratione* (l. 11–2).

[38] Deborah L. Black, 'The Nature of Intellect', in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, vol. 1, ed. by R. Pasnau (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 320–33 (p. 320).

Viuificando mouens et membra mouendo gubernans (l. 33: 'giving life and movement, and ruling the limbs in movement').

From this greater parallel—that is, man as a microcosmic representation of God's relationship with his creation—the poet moves to the specific parallel between God and man, namely that the threefold nature of God is reflected in the threefold division of the human mind: 'Our mind is also much like the threefold Lord' (l. 39). The poet states again that man is separate from creation, for this reason: 'he wills, understands and meditates/ feels and desires, and later recalls in memory'.[39] Of these faculties, he selects intellect, will and *mentio*, as the three fundamental aspects of the soul which reflect the Trinity. Using the vocabulary of Trinitarian doctrine, the poet explicates the nature of the human mind: 'So indeed does one substance signify many things:/ Our intellect is mind, our *mentio* is mind, our will is mind' (l. 62–3). The idea of one substance signifying many things draws directly on debates about the nature and substance of the Trinity, as does his threefold division of the mind: the motif of vestiges of the Trinity being observed in the human soul is a common one in Christian thought, found as it is—most fundamentally—in the work of Augustine, particularly his *De Trinitate*, and, later, in the *Monologion* of Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109).

The poet outlines three faculties of the mind, and tells us that: 'these three are one substance which is called mind' (l. 66). The first faculty of the mind, according to our author, is the intellect. This he equates with God the Father. The second faculty is will, which he equates with God the Son. He then states that the third faculty is *mentio*, which is here equated with the Holy Spirit. Gwynn translated *mentio* as 'memory', presumably following the Augustinian model of 'intellect, will, memory'. But, as I have discussed elsewhere, the word *mentio* primarily means 'calling to mind', 'mentioning' or 'naming'.[40] Goetz's *Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum* gives just two examples of *mentio* appearing in medieval glossaries.[41] The first is a Latin to Greek glossary, in which the word *mentio* is glossed as Greek *anamnesis*, meaning 'recollection', the word which Plato uses to explain the process underlying his theory of epistemology. Therefore, if

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[39] *Scilicet id: quod uult intelligit ac meditatur,/ Sentit et affectat, quod post memoranda retractat* (l. 45–6); for *post memoranda retractat* cf. *mentio*.
[40] Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), s.v. *mentio*. But to a Romance-speaker the primary meaning may have been 'lie, deceit'. See, Boyle, 'The Twelfth-Century English Transmission'.
[41] Georg Goetz et al. (eds), *Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum*, 7 vols (Leipzig, 1888–1923), II, 128.54 and II, 327.19. Cf., Ludwig Bieler in Gwynn, *The Writings*, p. 49, where he suggests that *mentio* could be an 'indirect Graecism'.

we take *mentio* as being equivalent to *anamnesis*, then we should perhaps translate it as 'recollection', with all its Platonic resonances. However, the second instance of *mentio* in a medieval glossary is a Greek to Latin glossary, in which *mneme*, the Greek word meaning both 'memory' and 'calling to mind' is glossed by both words, *memoria* and *mentio* ('μνημη memoriamentio'): here, then, we have an instance of *mentio* being used to gloss a word meaning 'memory'. The significant thing about this particular glossary is that it is preserved in Laon, Bibliothèque municipale MS 444, a manuscript with strong Irish connections, as it contains misplaced Old Irish quire signatures, and had a close association with Martin Hibernensis (d. 875) and his circle.[42] Although this is an early manuscript, from a Carolingian milieu, it does provide us with an Irish link to the use of *mentio* as equivalent to *memoria* ('memory'), through the Greek word *mneme*, which carries both meanings.

Our author states that each of the three faculties—*intellectus*, *uoluntas*, and *mentio*—individually is useless without the other two, but also that the third faculty proceeds from both the intellect and the will jointly. Incidentally, this tells us something about the Trinitarian theology of the author: he implicitly articulates the belief that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, and not just from the Father.[43] So, *mentio* is an act of the intellect, but it is equally an act of the will. If we privilege the Augustinian reading of our poem, this would support the idea of *mentio* as 'memory'. However, the ending of the poem suggests that the author's conception of *mentio* may be a little more complex: our author rejects the opportunity of exploring his conception of the mental faculties

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[42] Paul Russell, '*Graece ... Latine*: Graeco-Latin Glossaries in Early Medieval Ireland', *Peritia*, 14 (2000), 406–20 (pp. 413–15); Carlotta Dionisotti, 'Greek Grammars and Dictionaries in Carolingian Europe', in *The Sacred Nectar of the Greeks: the Study of Greek in the West in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by M. W. Herren (London: King's College London Medieval Studies, 1988), pp. 1–56; Joseph Vendryes, 'Les mots vieil-irlandais du manuscrit de Laon', *Revue celtique*, 25 (1904), 327–81; Emmanuel Miller, 'Glossaire grec-latin de la Bibliothèque de Laon', *Notices et extraits des documents de la Bibliothèque nationale*, 29/2 (1891), 1–230.

[43] This was one of the central issues which led to the eleventh-century schism of the Western and Eastern Churches: see, for example, A. Edward Siecienski, *The Filioque. History of a Doctrinal Controversy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 112–15. However, we cannot use this as a dating criterion for the poem, since belief in the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son had been expressed in the Creed in western Europe since the Councils of Toledo (589) and Aachen (809), although it was not integrated into the Creed of the Roman liturgy until the early eleventh century.

any further; and neither does he move to an exploration of the divine, as one might perhaps expect. Rather, we can observe a shift at line 74, where the author moves from one triad, 'intellect, will, *mentio*', to another: 'thought, word and deed'. The shift signals the beginning of the final section of the poem, which is didactic and moralising. The author tells us that 'holy Scripture teaches us doctrines that are full of life',[44] and that if we do not obey, with service and good living and good conduct, we will not obtain the fullness of our likeness to God.[45] Indeed, in the final lines of the poem the author states that he regards the impure life as erasing (*delere*) the likeness of God in ourselves, but that living according to divine commandment will free mortal man from his physical body.[46] This idea of freedom from the physical body leading to union with the divine, attaining the fullness of man's likeness to God, is unmistakeably Platonic: in Plato's epistemology *anamnesis* ('recollection') is achieved through *katharsis*, freedom from the physical body which is the source of error.

This conclusion to the poem suggests that our author was aware of the ambiguity of the word *mentio*, and that he may have been playing deliberately on its full range of meanings: *memoria* ('memory'), in the sense used by Augustine in his *De Trinitate*, and also *anamnesis* ('recollection'), in the Platonic sense. Additional weight is perhaps given to this Platonic reading by the author's use of Greek terminology elsewhere in the poem: this vocabulary may tie us into a milieu which is drawing on the kind of learning seen in our Carolingian Graeco-Latin glossaries. We might note other ways in which Irish scholars were looking back to Carolingian authorities during the twelfth century: for example, Gille of Limerick's use of Amalarius of Metz, Echtgus ua Cuanáin's adaptation of Paschasius Radbertus, *De corpore et sanguine Domini* and, as we shall see below, the Irish glossed manuscripts of Eriugena's *Periphyseon* and Boethius's *Consolatio Philosophiae*.[47]

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[44] *Pagina sacra docet nos uite dogmata plena* (l. 76).

[45] *Hec, homo, uera dei, cui conformaris, imago/ Est: nunc attendas que sit simi plena litudo/ Moribus ipsa bonis cognoscitur atque gerendo* (l. 84–6).

[46] *Sic igitur uiuat mundo mortalis in isto/ Ut Christo placeat, iam corpore liber ad isto./ Nam quicumque dei speciem delere uidetur/ Vivens impure, miser ha!, miser hic morietur* (l. 104–7). Cf. *De tribus habitaculis animae*: *Sic etiam absentia eius dissimiles ei omni modo facit*; 'So, too, His absence makes people unlike him in every way': ed. by A. Gwynn (l. 207–8), trans. by E. Boyle.

[47] See, for examples, Michael Richter, 'Gilbert of Limerick Revisited', in *Seanchas. Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne*, ed. by A. P. Smyth (Dublin: Four Courts, 2000), pp. 341–47; Elizabeth Boyle, 'Sacrifice and Salvation in Echtgus Úa Cúanáin's Poetic Treatise on the Eucharist', in *Envisioning Christ on the Cross*

The Platonising aspect of 'Constet quantus honos' takes us back to *De tribus habitaculis animae*, which also tells us that it is in heaven that our full likeness to God will be revealed. Comparing the limited extent of our knowledge here on earth in comparison with the knowledge man will possess in heaven, the author states:

> If, however, we recognise from some small part of that light, infused, as it were, through narrow cracks, that these, and all other true things which we know, are true, of what kind and how great will the light of knowledge and of wisdom be there, with which we shall be illuminated when 'we shall see face to face'[48] the sun of truth itself, that is, we shall understand through certain and true knowledge? Whose presence makes those who are present similar to him: for he who will cling to true wisdom, true beauty, true eternity, will thus be wise and beautiful and eternal.[49]

It is physical proximity to God which will cause man's likeness to God, as though man is quite literally a reflection of the divine. This is a contrast to the prison of man's mortal body.

In the texts under consideration here, the use of Platonising philosophical speculation and allegorical interpretation is always pressed into service for moral and didactic ends. In the poem *Mentis in excessu*, on the ecclesial island of Archipolis, the summit is reached by six flights of steps, which the glossator tells us means that heaven is reached by the six works of mercy. We also find this motif of the six works of mercy being six steps into the eschatological church, or heaven, in *Scéla laí brátha*, an eleventh-century vernacular homily.[50] I have discussed *Scéla laí brátha* elsewhere

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in the Early Medieval West, ed. by J. Mullins, J. Ní Ghrádaigh and R. Hawtree (Dublin, 2013), pp. 181–94; Pádraig P. Ó Néill, 'An Irishman at Chartres in the Twelfth Century—the Evidence of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct. F. III. 15', *Ériu*, 48 (1997), 1–35.

[48] 1 Corinthians 13:12.

[49] *Si autem quadam illius lucis particula quasi per angustas rimas infusa hec et alia omnia uera que nouimus uera esse cognoscimus, quali et quanta luce scientie et sapientie illic illustrabimur ubi ipsum solem ueritatis facie ad faciem uidebimus,[49] id est certa et uera scientia cognoscemus? Cuius presentia similes ei facit presentes: qui enim uere sapientie uere pulchritudini uere eternitati adherebit, sapiens utique et pulcher et eternus erit.*: ed. by A. Gwynn (l. 201–7), trans. by E. Boyle.

[50] 'It is then that the just will give this answer to the Lord: "Lord", they say, "when did we see you hungry or thirsty and give you food and drink? When did we see you in need of shelter or clothes and shelter or clothe you? Or when did we see you sick or imprisoned and come to get news of you or to free you?" This, indeed, is the answer that the Lord will give to the just: "Every time", he says, "that you have

as being significant for the sophisticated way in which it adapts the
political philosophy of Augustine to the vernacular in order to articulate
the judicial power of Christ at the moment of universal judgement, and the
nature of 'citizenship' of the kingdoms of heaven and hell.[51] The bestowal
of citizenship is reserved for those who act out the Christian message, and
even those who have sinned in early life can erase or hide those sins
through active imitation of Christ.[52]

In *Mentis in excessu* the woods are 'books', bearing spiritual fruit,
which are 'precepts and commandments', which people want to know, but
not to absorb or internalise. Often there is a temptation to see an
otherworldly or spiritual meaning in even the most mundane aspects of
medieval Irish literature, but in this case the overtly otherworldly elements
themselves need to be interpreted, and that interpretation reveals their true,
moral, meaning to be surprisingly mundane. The glossator tells us that
'intellect fails if studiousness is lacking'; where the poet tells us that in the
city he saw those who were not willing to feast, the glossator tells us that
this means that in the church there are those who are not willing 'to put in
the work'. It is all very well to know doctrine and mysteries and
commandments, but to ensure salvation one has to absorb and enact them,
to live out the six works of mercy. The otherworldly landscape in which
our narrator wanders is, we are told, Scripture. The sense of sight is
paramount, because it is by reading Scripture that we are better able to
achieve spiritual vision. Significantly, we are told that the honey with
which those who wish to feast load their tables, is the narrative and
allegory with which they fill their books. In other words, literature and

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done good to the poor in my name, you have done it to me". Those, then, are the
six categories of mercy by which the kingdom of heaven is purchased. They are
the six clear gateways through which the light of eternal life comes into the church.
Those are the six steps which the saints and the just ascend to heaven.'; *Is and sin
doberat na fíréoin in frecra sa for in Comdid. A thigerna, for iat, cuin
atchoncammárni* [*thú*] *i ngorta no i n-itaid 7 doratsam biad 7 dig dait. Cuin
atchonnarcmár i rrichtain a les tigi aíged no cen etach tú 7 doratsamar aígidecht 7
étach duit, no cuin atconcamar i ngalur no i cumriuch thú 7 táncamár dot fis scél 7
dot fuaslucud. Is é seo immurro frecra dobéra in Comdiu forsna fírénaib. Cach tan
ar se dorónsaith maith arna bochtaib im anmumsa is foromsa dorónsaid. Is íat sin
tra sé hernaili na trócairi o cennaigther ind flaith nemda. Is iat na sé dorsi glainidi
triasa tic solsi in bethad suthain isind eclais. Is iat sin na sé cémend iarsa
frescabat na naím 7 na fíréoin dochom nimi*: ed. by R. I. Best and O. Bergin, l.
2330–40, my translation.
[51] Elizabeth Boyle, 'Eschatological Justice in *Scéla laí brátha*', *Cambrian
Medieval Celtic Studies*, 59 (2010), 39–54.
[52] Ibid., p. 42.

allegory are the spoons full of sugar which help the bitter medicine of morality go down. This didactic mode, perhaps what we might call 'allegorical didacticism', is also clearly visible in the Middle Irish poem *Aislinge Augustín áin*, discussed above. It offered an allegorical interpretation of the particular salvific qualities of Psalm 118 (or 119 in the Hebrew Bible), known as the *Beati*. As we have noted, this is an alphabetic acrostic, with each of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet beginning an eight-line section of poetry, resulting in 176-lines of verse, the longest chapter in the Hebrew Bible. And yet it was this seemingly mechanical, and certainly didactic, Psalm which Irish exegetes chose to raise into the lofty realms of mystical and allegorical interpretation. We have seen that the Psalms themselves were considered integral to the beatific vision in eleventh- and twelfth-century Irish theology, and that the singing of Psalms is equated paradoxically with silent intellectual activity and the direct experience of God. Again, nothing is as it appears to be on the surface: the most didactic, repetitious and mechanical Psalm is given special significance as one of particular mystical meaning and intellectual depth.[53]

In this connection, we might note in the poem beginning *Constet quantus honos* a similar shift away from the purely intellectual sphere of the threefold division of the mind into 'intellect', 'will' and 'memory', towards an emphasis on 'thought, word and deed'. The focus on the importance of doctrine and right action mirrors the allegorical poem *Mentis in excessu*, where the allegory is always resisted by the didacticism of the interpretive glosses. The influence of the 'thought, word, deed' triad[54] is another point of connection between the two poems: in the glosses on *Mentis in excessu*, the glossator explains the image of women giving birth through their mouths as signifying their words, 'because what the mind conceives is given birth to openly by mouth or by deed'.[55]

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[53] But note that, during the same period, we also see the composition of Psalm-commentaries, such as that by Airbertach Mac Cosse, which are far more concerned with literal and historical exegetical interpretation: see, Ó Néill, 'Old Wine in New Bottles'. We should not be surprised that we can see a wide range of exegetical approaches in use in eleventh- and twelfth-century Ireland: it is possible that the various intellectual centres emphasised different interpretive methods, or that the full extent of exegetical approaches were considered to be valid and useful. For the wider intellectual context, see, Henri de Lubac, *Exegese médiévale: les quatres sens de l'écriture*, 4 vols (Paris: Aubier, 1959–64).

[54] On the earlier history of this triad in Irish religious thought see, Patrick Sims-Williams, 'Thought, Word and Deed: an Irish Triad', *Ériu*, 29 (1978), 78–111.

[55] *Ore: i. dicto. quod enim concipit mens id foras ore uel opere parturit*: ed. by A. Gwynn, *The Writings*, p. 93.

Furthermore, the conjunction of 'seeing' (*uidere*) with 'knowing' (*scire*) in *Mentis in excessu*, already witnessed in *Constet quantus honos*, suggests fundamental similarities in their intellectual approach, one which elevates physical and spiritual sight, reading, and intellectual activity, but which never neglects the importance of right action.[56] Indeed, *De tribus habitaculis animae* goes so far as to equate the failure to abide by moral precepts and the inability to choose the right course of action as evidence of insanity, idiocy and madness. Intelligence is reflected in texts, literacy, the written word, contemplation of the written word, and silent intellectual activity, but intelligence finds its expression in moral behaviour, in acts of Christian charity.

The poems were clearly considered to be of sufficient quality to warrant inclusion in English monastic miscellanies. The didactic messages of the poems rendered them particularly suitable for inclusion in such codices. Towards the end of the twelfth century, the rise of so-called 'scholastic humanism', and the renewed interest in Platonic thought, can also help to account for the inclusion of these poems in the various manuscripts in which they are preserved.[57] The fact that *De tribus habitaculis animae* was, in many of its manuscript copies, misattributed to Augustine (and, indeed, one twentieth-century scholar attributed it— entirely mistakenly—to Anselm of Canterbury)[58] shows the extent to which this Irish material participates in a shared Christian Platonism which was widespread across medieval Europe.

There is a significant cluster of twelfth-century manuscripts which attest to the nature of philosophical learning in Ireland at that time. Of these, one of the most important is Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Auct. F. III. 15, which comprises a copy of Calcidius's Latin translation of Plato's *Timaeus* and an epitome of Eriugena's *Periphyseon*. The manuscript is glossed in Latin and Middle Irish, and in a major study published in 1997, Pádraig Ó Néill argued that the glosses suggest a pedagogical function for the manuscript and that they reflect the influence of continental scholastic

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[56] Ibid., p. 88 (l. 63–73).
[57] Peter Dronke, *The Spell of Calcidius. Platonic Concepts and Images in the Medieval West* (Florence: SISMEL edizioni del Galluzzo, 2008); Richard W. Southern, *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Robert N. Swanson, *The Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Winthrop Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century. The Literary Influence of the School of Chartres* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).
[58] Walter Delius, 'Die Verfasserschaft der Schrift *De tribus habitaculis*', *Theologische Studien und Kritiken*, 108 (1937–8), 28–39.

learning.[59] Roughly contemporaneous with that manuscript is Florence, Bibliotheca Medici Laurenziana, MS. Plut. 78.19, another manuscript with clear Irish connections, this time containing a copy Boethius's *Consolatio Philosophiae*, again with interlinear glosses in Latin and Middle Irish. Pádraig Ó Néill, in a detailed study of the Irish glosses in the Florence manuscript, concluded that:

> Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the Irish words is that they ignore the conventional function of glosses, the explaining of hard words, of which the *Consolatio* has more than its fair share. Instead they comment on potential ambiguities of lexicography, grammar and, above all, syntax. It seems likely that they reflect an advanced stage in the study of the *Consolatio*, where the teacher (and students) no longer needed to be concerned about vocabulary and basic understanding of the text.[60]

Another important manuscript is British Library MS Egerton 3323. Folio 18 of that manuscript is all that remains of a larger eleventh- or early twelfth-century Irish manuscript, perhaps containing works on mathematics or other educational texts. The folio which survives (and which, thanks to a marginal note, can be located at Glendalough in the year 1106) contains a work on fractions which includes abstract fractions, or *minutiae intellectuales*, which may have had some philosophical purpose. The second text preserved on the folio, *Cum pasione contraria* (lines 21–39), is a statement of numerical philosophy which draws on Boethius's *De arithmetica*.[61] This chance and fragmentary survival attests to abstract philosophical learning being part of the curriculum in at least one major ecclesiastical centre in eleventh- and twelfth-century Ireland. We can certainly see how the education available to twelfth-century Irish scholars, to which all of these manuscripts are testimony, could have established the intellectual foundations necessary for the composition of the texts discussed here. The influence of Latin literature in eleventh- and twelfth-

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[59] Ó Néill, 'An Irishman at Chartres'.

[60] Pádraig P. Ó Néill, 'Irish Glosses in a Twelfth-Century Copy of Boethius's *Consolatio Philosophiae*', *Ériu*, 55 (2005), 1–17 (p. 15).

[61] For a detailed study of the folio, its contents, and its sources, see the study by Mary Kelly, 'Twelfth-Century Ways of Learning: from Worcester or Cologne to Glendalough', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 141 (2011), 47–65. I am grateful to the author for allowing me to see a version of her article in advance of its publication. The examples of abstract fractions in Egerton 3323 recall the consideration in *De tribus habitaculis* of the relationship between finite and infinite concepts (i.e., 'a long time' and 'eternity') discussed at the start of the present study.

century Ireland was probably much greater than has previously been acknowledged. In a recent ground-breaking study, Brent Miles has shown the extensive interplay between classical literature and vernacular narrative in eleventh- and twelfth-century Ireland,[62] suggesting that the engagement by intellectual elites with Latin culture reached far beyond theological treatises and dense allegorical poetry. Although the history of early medieval Irish philosophy tends to be dominated by the work of named individuals working outside Ireland, such as Eriugena and Sedulius Scottus, it is important to note that works which represented the mainstream of the medieval European philosophical tradition, from Plato to Boethius, Augustine to Eriugena, influenced intellectuals closer to home, and resulted in a vibrant philosophical discourse—composed both in Latin and in the vernacular, in poetry and prose, by authors largely anonymous or unstudied—which sought to understand things above and beyond the reality of life in eleventh- and twelfth-century Ireland.[63]

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[62] Brent Miles, *Heroic Saga and Classical Epic in Medieval Ireland*, Studies in Celtic History, 30 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011).