MEISTER ECKHART'S *NOVA ET RARA*: HIS NOVEL AND UNUSUAL FORMS OF RHETORIC AND THE EMERGING MODERN WORLDVIEW

by

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(Under the Direction of Elizabeth Brient)

ABSTRACT

Meister Eckhart's novel and shocking forms of expression are shown to be responses to fundamental worldview changes in the conception of the individual in the late medieval world. We see this not by looking at the content of his claims, but instead by careful attention to his metaphors and other rhetorical techniques. An historical narrative of the development of the changes in the conception of the individual is provided to properly place Eckhart's own rhetoric in that context. Due to his sensitivity to nonconceptuality and his emphasis on the authentic substance of metaphor, Hans Blumenberg's metaphorology is used to structure the investigation of Eckhart's rhetoric. Lakoff & Johnson, William James and Erazim Kohàk are also used to provide a fuller depiction of how Eckhart's rhetoric works and the nonconceptual aims it has. A survey of Eckhart's commentators is provided, beginning with the greatest remove from Eckhart with the inquisitorial process and moving toward the point of closest approach to Eckhart with Robert K.C. Forman and Cyprian Smith. Finally, a detailed analysis of Eckhart's rhetoric is performed with special attention given to the way in which his rhetoric reveals his conception of the individual. Eckhart is revealed to be forerunner of modernity insofar as

he embraced and forwarded worldview changes that would later be instrumental in giving birth to the renaissance conception of humanity and later, the modern world. This is evident in his rhetorical strategies that fit the needs of his audience even though his cosmos and orthodox mysticism are otherwise characteristically medieval.

INDEX WORDS: Meister Eckhart, metaphor, rhetoric, mysticism, Neoplatonism, medieval philosophy, metaphysics, individual

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Abbreviations of frequently cited works

Critical editions of the Meister Eckhart's works

DW I	*Meister Eckharts Predigten 1-24*, hrsg. u. übers. v. Josef Quint, Stuttgart 1958. ISBN 3-17-061210-7
DW II	*Meister Eckharts Predigten 25-59*, hrsg. u. übers. v. Josef Quint, 1971. ISBN 3-17-071183-0
DW III	*Meister Eckharts Predigten 60-86*, hrsg. u. übers. v. Josef Quint, 1976. ISBN 3-17-002740-9
DW IV.1	*Meister Eckharts Predigten 87-105*, hrsg. u. übers. v. Georg Steer unter Mitarbeit v. Wolfgang Klimanek und Freimut Löser, 2003. ISBN 3-17-017606-4
DW IV.2	*Meister Eckharts Predigten 106-110*, hrsg. u. übers. v. Georg Steer unter Mitarbeit v. Wolfgang Klimanek und Freimut Löser, 2003. ISBN 3-17-017850-4 (final edition with 111-117 not yet published)
DW V	*Meister Eckharts Traktate*, hrsg. u. übers. v. Josef Quint, Stuttgart 1963. ISBN 3-17-071075-3
LW I,1	*Magistri Echardi Prologi. Expositio libri Genesis. Liber parabolarum Genesis*, hsrg. u. übers. v. Konrad Weiss, 1964. ISBN 3-17-071082-6
LW I,2	*Magistri Echardi Prologi in opus tripartitum et expositio libri Genesis secundum recensionem Cod. Oxoniensis Bodleiani Laud misc. 222 (L). Adiecta sunt recensiones cod. Amploniani fol. 181 (E) ac codd. Cusani 21 et Reverensis 72/1056 (CT) denuo reconitae. Liber*

parabolarum Genesis editio altera, hrsg. v. Loris Sturlese, 1.-2. Lieferung, 1987; 3.-4. Lieferung, 1992. ISBN 3-17-009841-1, 3-17-011686-X

LW II *Magistri Echardi expositio libri Exodi. Sermones et lectiones super Ecclesiastici cap. 24, 23-31. Expositio libri Spaientiae. Expositio Cantici Canticorum cap. 1,6*, hrsg. u. übers v. Heribert Fischer, Josef Koch, Konrad Weiss, 1992. ISBN 3-17-001084-0

LW III Magistri Echardi expositio sancti Evangelii secundum Iohannem, hrsg. u. übers v. Karl Christ, Bruno Decker, Josef Koch, Heribert Fischer, Loris Sturlese, Albert Zimmerman, 1994. ISBN 3-17-001085-9

LW IV *Magistri Echardi sermones*, hrsg. u. übers. v. Ernst Benz, Bruno Decker u. Josef Koch, 1956. ISBN 3-17-061207-7

LW V *Magistri Echardi opera Parisiensia. Tractatus super oratione dominica*, hrsg. u. übers v. Bernhard Geyer, Josef Koch, Erich Seeberg; *Responsio ad articulos sibi impositos de scriptis et dictis suis. Acta Echardiana*, hrsg. u. kommentiert v. Loris Sturlese, 2006. ISBN 3-17-001086-4

Abbreviations for English translations of Meister Eckhart's works

EE Colledge, Edmund, and Bernard McGinn. 1981. Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises and Defense. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.

TP McGinn, Bernard, Frank Tobin, and Elvira Borgstädt. 1986. Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher. Paulist Press.

Abbreviations for works by Hans Blumenberg

AAR = AAAR "An Anthropological Approach to the Contemporary Significance of Rhetoric," trans. Robert M. Wallace, in *After Philosophy: End or Transformation*, eds. Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman, and Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 429-58 ["Anthropologische Annäherung an die Aktualität der Rhetorik" (1971), in *Wirklichkeiten, in denen wir Leben: Aufsätze und eine Rede* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1986): 104-36].

CCR = SÜF *Care Crosses the River*, trans. Paul Fleming (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010) [*Die Sorge geht über den Fluss* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987)].

GCW = GKW *Genesis of the Copernican World*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1989) [*Die Genesis der kopernikanischen Welt*. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975)].

LMA = LN *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1985) [*Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, Erneuerte Ausgabe, 1966 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996)].

LMT = LMW "Light as a Metaphor for Truth: At the Preliminary Stage of Philosophical Concept Formation," trans. Joel Anderson, in *Modernity*

and the Hegemony of Light, ed. D.M. Levin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 30-63 [“Licht als Metapher der Wahrheit: Im Vorfeld der philosophischen Begriffsbildung,“ in *Studium General* 10, no.7 (1957)].

LTW = LT — *Laughter of the Thracian Woman: A Protohistory of Theory*, trans. Spencer Hawkins (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2015) [*Das Lachen der Thrakerin. Eine Urgeschichteder Theorie*. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987)].

LWCR — “The Life-World and the Concept of Reality” in *Life-World and Consciousness. Essays for Aron Gurwitsch* (Northwestern University Press, 1972), 425-444.

OD — *Die Ontologische Distanz. Eine Untersuchung über die Krisis der Phänomenologie Husserls*. Unpublished habilitation diss., University of Kiel, 1950.

PM = PZM — *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, trans. Robert Savage (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010) [*Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie*, 1960 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp: 1998)].

SS = SZ — *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence*, trans. Steven Rendall (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997) [*Schiffbruch mit Zuschauer. Paradigma einer Daseinsmetapher* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979)].

WOM = AM *Work on Myth*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985) [*Arbeit am Mythos* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979)].

INTRODUCTION

Meister Eckhart was more of a rhetorician than a conceptual system builder. His words continually orbit around a nonconceptual core, exhorting his readers to have experiences that push them closer to the oneness of God and away from the world of multiplicity and creaturely concerns. His use of unusual forms of expression actively encourages this movement. Consequently, how we understand Eckhart's penchant for novel and unexpected forms of expression continues to be a live topic because of its centrality in interpreting his work. Frank Tobin tells us that "to study Eckhart's language is not to concentrate on something incidental. … [T]o study what he does in practice is, when done rightly, not to study accidental form emptied of essential content, but to achieve insights into content by an appreciation of what he accomplished through linguistic form" (Tobin 1986, vii-viii; see Milem 15n17). As Bruce Milem says in commenting on this passage, "Eckhart plays with words and assertions, extending the scope of particular words and balancing statements against each other. Unless one pays attention to this activity, one risks missing Eckhart's point, which may come through more in *how* he speaks than in *what* he says" (Milem 2002, 14-5). The proposed study aims to address this central element of interpreting Eckhart.

The ultimate aim of this project is to show that aspects of Eckhart's novel and shocking forms of expression are responses to fundamental worldview changes with respect to the conception of the individual in the late medieval world. These changes are an integral part of the emerging modern worldview. Consequently, Eckhart will be

shown as a forerunner of modernity insofar as he embraced and forwarded worldview changes that would later be instrumental in giving birth to the renaissance conception of humanity and later, the modern world. In addition, this characterization of Eckhart will also answer questions about why Eckhart's particular forms of novelty arose at the time that they did. Despite his unusual expressions, Eckhart's mysticism is essentially traditional, part of a lineage that includes Augustine and Dionysius. At base, mysticism points to divine oneness. If oneness could be different for different theological or practical approaches, it would not be oneness. Eckhart's mysticism is 'traditional' in this way. Beyond this, Eckhart's use of Christian ideas, stories and practices is traditional in so far as it continues the orthodox traditions of Augustinian theology and Dionysian negative theology. Though certainly orthodox, the elements from these theologies are less familiar to mainstream thought today. In like manner, some of Eckhart's exegetical practices were more common in his time than they are in ours. These factors, compounded by his self-consciously choosing rhetoric that was meant to shock, cause him to appear more radical than he actually was.

In order to most effectively show that Eckhart's rhetorical choices can be partly explained as responses to the worldview changes in the late medieval world, a number of preliminary steps must be taken to sufficiently depict the cultural situation Eckhart was in and to explain what he generally sought to accomplish with his rhetoric. For the thinkers mentioned in the subsequent chapters, I enlist their help for the purpose of guiding thought, because their ideas are 'good to think with' in the process of understanding Eckhart.

As Hans Blumenberg said of his own speculative narrative of what he calls a 'protohistory of theory,' perhaps the best we can hope for is a story that 'fits' our needs. The notion of 'fit' is a part of the overall *fitness* of a story, measured by how well it fits like a piece of a jigsaw puzzle with our cognitive needs. Such a story is useful insofar as it continues to fit with our needs and helps to produce coherent understanding. Consequently, the particular philosophical systems and ideas of Blumenberg, William James, Lakoff & Johnson, and Erazim Kohàk do not need to be embraced in order for their ideas to be usefully and safely appropriated toward this project's eminently pragmatic end.

Chapter overviews

Chapter 1: Situating Eckhart in Philosophical History

The first step will be to trace an historical arc through Western intellectual history in chapter one which describes the emergence of the notion of the individual as metaphysically significant. Too often, we assume that we can read ancient philosophy through the lens of the modern conception of the individual, not adequately appreciating how this fundamental component of our worldview was substantially different for otherwise ostensibly familiar thinkers like Plato and Aristotle. Further, by showing how the conception of the individual changed over time, we will be able to more clearly identify elements that are genuinely new in Eckhart's thought. I will attempt to show that these innovations and novel forms of expression can be largely understood as responses to the changing needs of his time that were necessary for him to effectively reach his audience.

Chapter 2: Hans Blumenberg's Metaphorology

Since philosophy's relationship with rhetoric has a chequered past, chapter two will set the stage for the rhetorical analysis that follows by building on the work Hans Blumenberg has already done to rehabilitate rhetoric and show how metaphors of various kinds have substantive nonconceptual content and pragmatic effects.

Blumenberg's work will be used in two ways. First, in addition to analyzing the content of what is said and the rhetorical techniques that are employed, Blumenberg's methodological tools help us to look beneath the surface of what is explicitly stated in order to see the ground of thought that gave rise to it. From this ground, fundamental assumptions are built into otherwise ordinary expressions. Seeing how these assumptions change over time enabled Blumenberg to provide an overall account of large scale change in intellectual history. I will use a similar approach to examine Eckhart's work. Second, the tools that Blumenberg developed in his study of metaphors will help to explain how Eckhart's forms of expression are effective. Since mystical speech is perennially concerned with pointing beyond its own concepts and actively antagonizes the attempt to understand it as conveying conceptual information, Blumenberg's tools are more broadly useful for looking at mystical rhetoric. I will focus in particular on three types of metaphors identified by Blumenberg and used effectively by Eckhart: explosive metaphors, absolute metaphors, and non-lexical metaphors.

There is an important limit to be noticed here, however. Blumenberg conceived of cultural change occurring against a minimal backdrop of subjectivity. Blumenberg's most fundamental layer is still one of human experience, the experience of subjects who

think. For Eckhart, stopping at the ground of thought is not to reach what is most fundamental, the level of mystical unity. Before reaching that point, however, Blumenberg's work will be useful in establishing a trajectory which pushes beneath conceptual thinking.

Chapter 3: Eckhart's Commentators

Philosophy has difficulty coming to terms with mysticism. This is partly because it attempts to put terms to it. Chapter three will chronicle a progression of thought in commentary on Eckhart that becomes increasingly close to Eckhart's own. If the aphelion is the inquisition, the perihelion will be in chapter four with the discussion of Cyprian Smith's commentary on Eckhart. This progression is meant to guide our thought similarly, beginning with commonplace philosophical thinking and moving increasingly towards a mode of thought that is sensitive to rhetorical exigencies (kairotic moments) and aims, which ultimately target what is ineluctably nonconceptual.

To see why we must look beyond the layer of what is explicitly stated, it will be useful to consider in greater detail why traditional means of philosophical analysis are insufficient. First, we will discuss why conceptually understanding Eckhart and distilling doctrine from his work results in an unsympathetic interpretation. Second, using Bernard McGinn's work as a case study, it will be instructive to see how the assumptions built into certain ways of speaking about Eckhart can close off possibilities of interpretation.

If it were possible to capture Eckhart's thought using familiar concepts and ordinary argumentation, this would imply that going beyond concepts is unnecessary. In chapter three, I will look at some of the ways that this has been problematic for Eckhart scholarship. Since Eckhart's rhetoric overtly antagonizes this tendency, I will argue that we fail to take him seriously if we ignore his injunctions and attempt to domesticate his ideas.

Eckhart's concepts are important because of what they *do* rhetorically rather than what they explicitly *say*. In a substantial sense, Eckhart's speech loses its primary function by being lifted from its context. Seeing this will shed light on how the inquisitorial process had a flawed method, focused as it was on distilling particular claims by considering particular statements in isolation[1]. This implied a mode of thought that was alien to what Eckhart was trying to do. Once we see that the modes of thinking are mismatched, Eckhart's defense (often thought to be peculiarly inadequate) will look more like a natural response to these ways of misunderstanding him.

Though McGinn is a careful interpreter of Eckhart, his word choice reveals a philosophic encumbrance: the assumption of the persistent atomicity of the individual. By looking closely at the subtleties of his speech in his 1989 article on mystical union

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[1] An inquisitorial process was opened against Eckhart in 1326. He ultimately went to Avignon (the seat of the papacy during its 'Babylonian exile' from Rome, 1309-1377) to appear before Cardinal Jacques Fournier, who succeeded Pope John XXII as Pope Benedict XII in 1334. The process culminated in a set of his propositions being condemned in the bull *In agro dominico* in 1329. Fournier expressed reservation about the method of lifting passages out of context. In fact, he refused to pass judgment on a different trial in the following years for this reason (Tobin 1986, 13). As a master of theology and high ranking Dominican official, it was unusual for someone of Eckhart's stature to undergo this process. It was also unusual for the condemnation to be issued even though Eckhart had died the previous year. In recent decades, the Dominicans have pushed to rehabilitate Eckhart. Timothy Radcliffe, the master of the Dominicans, tells us that in a 1992 letter from the Vatican, Pope John Paul II said there was no need to lift the censure on Eckhart since he was never condemned by name. The condemnation only targeted some propositions that he was purported to have held.

which anticipated his later magisterial multivolume history of Christian mysticism, we will see how his rhetoric consistently builds from the assumption of a coherent and stable individual.

Next, Bruce Milem provides an account that is more sensitive to the nature and significance of Eckhart's rhetorical strategies. Some of his analyses of Eckhart's paradoxes, however, enable the reader to vitiate their rhetorical effect by partially explaining them away as apparent contradictions. Milem's treatment of paradox will help set the stage for chapter four's discussion of paradox in Eckhart's work. Before that, discussing Robert K.C. Forman's ideas will push us further toward an Eckhartian perspective by focusing on the role of experience in his thought.

Chapter 4: Paradox and Immediate Experience

Paradox has a central role in Eckhart's thought and its rhetorical use takes a variety of forms. Building on Cyprian Smith's commentary on Eckhart, chapter four will focus on *the way* Eckhart uses paradox. Specifically, I will argue that Eckhart *insists* on his paradoxes, employing multiple strategies to antagonize our natural inclinations to disarm paradoxes and explain them away, allowing us to rest comfortably with our existing manner of thinking. Lakoff and Johnson's work in conceptual metaphor theory will be recruited to help explain how these techniques work. Paradox will be seen as pushing us in the direction of immediate, nonconceptual experience (Eckhart would say 'without images') and away from our usual mode of experience (with images). The ideas of Erazim Kohàk and William James will help to better characterize what immediate, spontaneous action is and how it differs from thinking in terms of 'images.' This will help

us to understand Eckhart's aims and to appreciate how different such experience is from our usual mode of living in the world. Cyprian Smith provides the closest point of approach of any of Eckhart's commentators to Eckhart himself, and looking at his take on Eckhart will help us to enter Eckhart's 'imaginative horizon,' to borrow Blumenberg's phrase.

The argument for what I call 'connoisseurship' that ends chapter four refers to a deeper sympathy than merely entering into another's imaginative horizon. I contend that mystics may recognize one another by intuitively recognizing the sameness of another's way of seeing. Just as this argument is made by appealing to a similar situation in Zen where we find traditions that capitalize on this phenomenon, understanding connoisseurship also gives us a compelling reason to take Daisetz Suzuki seriously when he recognizes a kindred spirit in Eckhart.

Chapter 5: Novelty and the Spirit of Play

Chapter five will look in greater detail at Eckhart's rhetoric by analyzing the role of novel elements in his thought. Since Blumenberg drew principally upon Husserl for this aspect of his thought, we will begin by describing Husserl's notion of 'harmony' and its relation to the way that we interpret new experiences. Next, we will revisit William James, which will bring into focus the difference between immediate experience and our usual mode of thinking in terms of images. Novelty, especially stubbornly persistent novelty as we find in Eckhart's paradoxes, will be seen to push us out of customary habits of thought and back to immediate experience. Lakoff and Johnson will then help to explain why we find certain metaphors to 'fit' better than others. Since we may characterize Eckhart's

project as his attempt to effect fundamental metaphorical reorientation in his audience, we will by this time have enough pieces in place to characterize the obstacles to such a change. I will argue that changing a metaphor that someone feels to be true is difficult in proportion to the amount of action that the metaphor implies. More action is implied for more fundamental metaphors which affect more of what we value. This will allow us to think of new metaphors in terms of increased and decreased valuation in the same way that Lakoff and Johnson speak of metaphors that emphasize certain connections and diminish others. Finally, we will end the chapter by addressing what Eckhart would likely say about this: the metaphors work because we are naturally inclined to return to God.

Chapter 6: a metaphorological analysis of Eckhart's rhetoric

With the foundation in place, the most detailed consideration of Eckhart's rhetoric can be accomplished. We will walk through a number of Eckhart's major themes. We will begin by examining what Eckhart himself says about rhetoric and his own rhetorical choices. This will lead us into a discussion of what I call Eckhart's 'dialectic of particles,' his use of little connecting words like "in," "from," "through" to both play off of scriptural patterns of usage and also to create subtle parallels between different topics. We will begin looking at specific metaphors by concentrating on those metaphors that have an 'explosive' dynamic, insofar as they guide thought to a point where they can lead us away from our usual way of thinking and into something entirely different. This dynamic is an undercurrent in Eckhart's thought in general and appears in places where it is not immediately obvious.

We will see that Eckhart's repertoire of metaphors is actually quite limited. Consequently, it is possible so see underlying patterns in usage, both when he uses a metaphor in a slightly different way and also when he does not use them when we expect him to do so. We will give particular attention to metaphors of desire and personal experience. At this point, we will be in a good position to consider Eckhart's anthropology in greater detail. An analysis of the dynamic of activity/passivity and the *vita activa*/*vita contemplativa* will be particularly important for seeing how Eckhart's rhetoric evidences a new conception of the individual. This will be most clear in Eckhart's rhetoric surrounding the birth of the Word in the soul.

Chapter 7: The Metaphorical Groundwork for the Development of Modern Thought

The nominalists in general, and Ockham in particular, advocated the compression or pruning of the hierarchy of being. While Eckhart relied on this hierarchy as part of his cosmology in an ostensibly medieval way, his notion of the individual as divine and of God as present in all things actually pushed in the direction of the compression of the ontological hierarchy.

Indeed, for each of the topics in this chapter (cosmology, natural knowledge and curiosity, theology), Eckhart at first looks medieval. Once we peer beneath the surface, however, we find that his account of the individual, insofar as he or she is divine, undermines the otherwise traditional-looking structure. His account of 'living without a why' continues this trend. His view of the cosmos is Aristotelian and consequently embraces teleology, especially with respect to creation existing for man's benefit and all

aspects of the world benevolently designed to lure us back to God. Nevertheless, this teleology unravels as Eckhart describes what it is to live without a why.

Eckhart was more concerned with the practical matter of guiding souls back to God. Truth (and goodness and the rest of the transcendentals) are beneath God and thereby cannot be the highest concern. Further, Eckhart's account of divinity itself and ethics besides is likewise intensely practical. This includes his account of Christ and Eckhart's relative lack of concern for the historical significance of Christian history. This is a virtue that, alongside others, I argue makes Eckhart peculiarly relevant and fitting for people today, a topic that I will explore in closing in the epilogue.

Conclusion

I hope to accomplish a push in the direction of reorientation of philosophical tendencies, away from leveling cultural differences in order to translate ideas into comparable forms. Instead, by emphasizing continuity and demonstrating subtle changes in what is most metaphysically fundamental, more sympathetic readings are enabled. This is done by analyzing rhetorical devices in order to gain insight into the tendencies for thought that produced such writing and made it intelligible to others. Blumenberg was right to push for a metaphorology of this kind. Instead of doing typical textual analysis, analyzing concepts, and thinking in terms of definitions in order to translate the argumentation into a form that is acceptable to our own conception of what an argument is, we should look beneath the concepts and attempt to understand the way in which the modes of expression reflect the needs of the cultural milieu. For Eckhart in particular, once we see that his unusual expressions fit the needs of his time, we can look past his 'new and

unusual' style and see more clearly that his message is itself not so 'new and unusual' (*nova et rara,* LW I:149).

If this project succeeds, it will not simply show Eckhart to be a forerunner of modernity. Rather, it will hint at the possibility that the germs of the modern worldview were already present in a substantial way in thinkers who are otherwise often recognized as being distinctly medieval. My aim is to provide a subtle and sympathetic reading of Eckhart, while suggesting that Blumenberg's tools provide an effective means for describing how the unusual rhetorical techniques that he uses in his mystical speech suitably addressed the needs of his time.

CHAPTER 1

SITUATING ECKHART IN PHILOSOPHICAL HISTORY

To best understand how the novelty in Eckhart's speech is a natural consequence of casting traditional mysticism in a form that is appropriate to changing historical conditions, we must first describe the salient aspects of those changing conditions and situate his thought within them. This will be done by tracing an arc through intellectual history which describes the way that the notion of the individual has become ontologically inflated over time. Questioning the nature of the individual can be awkward for us as moderns because contemporary philosophy does not often question what it means to be human, preferring instead to assume that everything in mental experience is fully the province of the individual. Instead of emphasizing difference by cataloguing theological and philosophical positions, historical trends are more easily seen by emphasizing continuity in the changes to the underlying ground of thought that enables the disagreements to occur at all. When properly situated, it will be easier to see that Eckhart was part of the development in the ontological inflation of the individual and that he anticipated future developments. Ultimately, we will see that while much of what Eckhart does is traditional (even the parts that are unfamiliar to us), the "new and unusual" residua are specific to changes in the conception of self. This is more than a philosophical change or metaphysical proposition that can be assented to or denied. It is a part of the "subterranean stratum of thought" that is constitutive of self and world understanding for this period (PM 1). When expressed, it resulted in statements that

carried enough of the scent of heresy to arouse suspicion. To see that the rhetoric was more of a problem than the metaphysics, we need only notice that the propositions censored by the bull *In agro dominico* drew primarily from Eckhart's *vernacular* works, where his rhetoric differed from his Latin works while the content remained the same.

A useful way of thinking about intellectual history starting at least with the Ancient Greeks is to conceive of a continuum between unity and multiplicity, much like Plato's divided line metaphor in the *Republic*. On one side is the world of things, finite in time and space, ephemeral and changing. On the other is the divine, not bound by time and space, eternal and unchanging. Of particular interest for understanding Eckhart is the way in which the conception of the individual comes to inhabit more and more of the space along the continuum, participating more in the divine unity without ceasing to be spoken of as an individual that also inhabits the realm of multiplicity. Many of the changes in this history can be drawn out by asking the question: at what point should we stop speaking of the individual as individual?

There are many implications of the ontologically expanded individual that are not obvious. For example, the capacity for spontaneous action is a natural consequence of individuation. When we read about the life of action (*vita activa*), we most often and naturally connect this with the *vita activa/vita contemplativa* question rather than the notion of the individual. In fact, however, spontaneous action is enabled by the individual's capacity for creativity. As the individual is less subject to the influence or 'possession' (as will be described below) of outside forces and consequently loses his or her individual control, the ability of the individual to contain and therefore be responsible for spontaneous action increases. In other words, the individual no longer

ceases to be individual in those situations. Therefore, when we see Eckhart ennobling the active life of Martha over the contemplative life of Mary, we may understand this as a direct consequence of the inflated individual capacity for self-created impulse to action without ceasing to be individual. By Eckhart's time, Mary's humble effacing of her individuality in contemplation is no longer a prerequisite for approaching the divine. With the ontologically inflated individual who is capable of spontaneous action, the divine may be approached by remaining within oneself and exercising one's own creative power for spontaneous action as divine. The individual does not have to be left behind if the conception of the individual is inflated to include more than the ephemeral world of change.

1.1 Historical arc

1.1.1 Pre-Homeric times

In traditional societies, the individual is not at all in a place of privilege. What is individual is transitory, part of the world of change. In a cyclical conception of time, the individual life has meaning insofar as it reenacts or participates in what is archetypal and beyond the profane world of change[1]. Mircea Eliade describes an example of this: "'A man told me that when he went fish shooting (with bow and arrow) he pretended to be Kivavia himself.' He did not implore Kivavia's favor and help; he identified himself

[1] One might object that the Greek gods and the deities of traditional societies had more individuality than what we see later. Gods took the form of people and some people, especially heroes and emperors, became gods. However, to say that a hero or king is divine is to speak of them in terms of inhabiting the sacred (archetypal) rather than the profane (particular). As Joseph Campbell remarks in describing the relation of the kings of traditional societies to the stars, "the king and his court are the heavens themselves on earth" (Campbell 1991, 404). In this way, the king qua king is not wholly individual insofar as he fulfills his archetypal role.

with the mythical hero"[2] (Eliade 2012, 33). Insofar as an individual participates in what is archetypal, he or she *ceases* to be individual. In this way of thinking, how could one be both universal and individual[3]?

1.1.2 Classical Greece

The alteration of the conception of the individual from Homer to Plato can be traced in large part through the change in the use of the word *psyche* (soul). This point is more clearly seen by going into more detail on the variety of words that are involved in this transition, building from David Claus' work. It is clear in looking at the collection of words that describe various feelings, thoughts, vitality and mental strength that what we think of as a "person" was to them a loose, decentralized collection of many forces and actions. The words also show in large part that the referents were to tangible, temporal events and states rather than abstract, universal ideas. For Homer, the soul was a kind of life-force, something that could be lost and if the soul leaves the body, the person dies. It was more of a motive force than an individual soul. Things with souls move on their own and with apparent purpose (they are *anima*ted). In the sixth century, 'soul' was used to describe anything living, including plants and animals (and, for Thales, also including magnets). By the end of the fifth century, it was common to speak of the soul

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[2] The quoted passage is from F.E. Williams, originally cited by Lucian Lévy-Bruhl in *La Mythologie Primitive*. Chapter V of Lévy-Bruhl's book describes many instances of this kind. As he says in recounting another story, "quand un homme va faire la cour à une femme, s'il connaît le nom de Maraï … Il ne murmure pas: «Maraï, aide-moi» … Mais il pense, même sans rien murmurer: «Je suis Maraï en personne, et je l'aurai»" (Lévy-Bruhl 1975, 164). Interestingly, he begins the section by saying, "Il est difficile – et peut-être vaut-il mieux ne pas trop y réussir – de tirer une participation tout à fait au clair" (Lévy-Bruhl 1975, 161). He is right, of course, precisely because the participation is itself paradoxical, blending the time-bound world of particulars with the timeless world of myth (for Eliade, *in illo tempore*, in mythical time - that is, outside of time).

[3] Though this may be clear, I am trying with this rhetoric to describe pre-classical times and also to foreshadow later developments. The idea of Christ as man and God was objected to on similar bases in the years that featured the Arian controversy.

with reference to sensual pleasures like food and drink. During the fifth century, the soul came to be thought of as the source or the bearer of moral qualities. This period of time also saw the Pythagoreans and their talk of the immortality of the soul, a significant contrast to the Homeric shades which roamed the underworld after death.

As with religion in traditional societies, the Greek gods were archetypes of a kind, forces in the world that could possess the ephemeral individual and move it in a particular direction. For example, the Greeks told the story of Arachne and Athena. Though Athena was the goddess of spinning and weaving, Arachne took credit for the beautiful tapestries she wove. Since the Greeks knew Arachne owed her skill to Athena, Arachne was hubristic for taking credit for what was not rightfully hers. Even in prosaic circumstances, the gods were perpetually involved in what we might call the individual's mental life.

Gorgias appeals to something like *enthousiasmos* in his *Encomium of Helen*. Gods possess the individual in a way that makes certain thoughts, feelings and actions not wholly individual. "If then the eye of Helen … gave to her soul an eagerness and response in love, what wonder? If love, a god, prevails over the divine power of the gods, how could a lesser one be able to reject and refuse it?" (Matsen, Rollinson and Sousa 1990, 34). This is one of Gorgias' arguments for the moral exculpation of Helen, a line of reasoning that is only coherent if Helen temporarily loses her identity as a moral agent when she is overpowered by a god.

Significance and value was achieved for Plato just as it always had been for traditional societies with similarly cyclical conceptions of time. The individual was at the lowest point in the ontology, limited to the world of change. The individual had

significance insofar as he or she could be taken up into (participate in, be possessed by) the archetypes. Where we see a change with both Plato and the emerging monotheism of the Hebrews/Egyptians is in the inflated importance that the most fundamental and overarching principles have. In terms of Greek ritual life, Ouranos and Gaea did not figure as prominently as many of the 'lesser' deities that were more clearly relevant to daily life. With Plato, however, the Form of the Good occupied the place of privilege. As well, the goal for the philosopher was not merely to participate in the Forms as Eliade's hunter did with Kivavia. Instead, it was to contemplate and breakthrough in one's 'knowledge' (a term that meant far more for Plato than it typically does for us). Plato describes this sudden flash of insight into the Form of Beauty in the *Symposium* (210E, 211B), as insight by way of contemplation in the *Phaedrus* (243E-257B) and as a spark of insight that feeds upon itself and grows in the seventh letter (341C). Of course, we should not expect Plato to talk of *union* with the Good (he spoke of *theoria* instead[4]). Plato's conception of the individual was one that inhabited the world of change (even if it was a winged soul, as we read in the *Phaedrus*, which ascends to communion with what is higher). Naturally then, the identity of the individual is lost as we ascend the ontological hierarchy. Going down the hierarchy instead of up, we can also say that the lower levels are *more individuated* and that their individuation is their defining characteristic. Given that setup, how could an individual that has so much

[4] McGinn mentions this with the implication that there is a distinct difference between Platonic mysticism and later Christian mysticism, though McGinn does recognize that Plato is a mystic. However, it is not so clear that this is a difference in mysticism so much as it is a difference in the *manifestation* of mysticism when it finds expression in a particular worldview. As stated in the introduction, if ineffable oneness differed from one mystic to the next, it would not be oneness.

particularity as to be at the lowest rung be said to ascend the chain while maintaining its individuality?

Another barometer for change in the conception of the individual is the notion of love/desire. For Plato, "because *erōs* always involves a deficiency of some sort, it could not be ascribed to the divine world. In Plotinus, erotic love has an ambit both more cosmic and more transcendental" (McGinn 1992, 47). McGinn continues, "But in recognizing that *erōs* is not defined by need, Plotinus made a major breakthrough in classical thought that enabled him to speak of a Supreme Reality in which seeker and sought become truly one" (McGinn 1992, 48). Thus, the modern conception of individual 'will' could not have arisen with Plato since he regarded eros as belonging to the contingent world of manifestations. As well, Plato's highest Form could be Good or Beauty (or Justice, perhaps, if the transcendentals are convertible for Plato as they were for the medievals), but it could not be Love, as we see so poignantly several centuries later in the Gospel of John.

In Book IV of the *Republic*, Plato describes justice in the ideal city as analogous to justice in the individual soul. The rulers, guardians and people correspond to the rational, spirited, and appetitive parts of the soul. His analogy is revealing since it tells us that in the soul that is not fully just, the parts of the soul are relatively autonomous and in constant competition. For Plato, unlike what we see later, there was no faculty of will or any overarching faculty that subsumed the others. The rational part of the individual soul participates in divine reason by coming to know the Forms, rather than entirely ceasing to be individual. In other words, the soul can now be thought of as at least partly divine. Indeed, in the *Theaetetus*, Plato defines the destiny of person to be

"likeness to God so far as possible," which clearly anticipates the Christian *imago dei* (Greer 1979, 25). In his description of the winged soul in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates says, "the mind of the philosopher only has wings, for he is always, so far as he is able, in communion through memory with those things the communion with which causes God to be divine" (249C)[5]. This discussion takes place in Socrates' talk of madness (*mania*). The philosopher has the highest kind of madness, which, he tells us, is the highest of all 'inspirations,' *enthousiaseon* (*entheos*, possessed by a god). The use of these terms is significant since 'divine madness' (*theia mania*) is how Plato, and the Greeks generally, understood the actions of seers like the Pythia, who spoke from something higher than themselves as individuals by being possessed by gods[6]. With Plato, since the individual is in some sense still individual while also participating in what is beyond the level of individuality, there is a tension, well known to Christianity: how can someone be both individual and divine?

For Plato, the individual was thought to be the kind of thing that could – and *should* – engage in philosophy, which involved personal understanding and insight into the *logos* (ordering principle) of the created world with the vision of the Good. McGinn says that Plato's "analyses of the roles of both knowing and loving in the ascent to the vision of the Good anticipate much that is later found in Christian mystical theory" (McGinn 1989, 61). The similarity is that much closer when we notice that the differences in expression are largely due to the different conceptions of the individual.

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[5] We can see some foreshadowing of Eckhart in the line that follows, "Now a man who employs such memories rightly is always being initiated into perfect mysteries and he alone becomes truly perfect."
[6] Descriptions of this kind occur in both the *Phaedrus* and the *Ion*. Plato does not use the term *ἔκστασις* ('ecstasy', literally, 'to stand outside of oneself'), but the connection with the Pythia implies something quite similar.

The recognition of this underlying similarity may have been what led later Christian thinkers like Augustine to declare that he had found all of Christianity in the Neoplatonists except for the Incarnation (*Conf.* VII.9.13; cf. O'Donnell 2012, 416). Eckhart mentions this passage from the *Confessions* and extends it by saying that we see the glory of the incarnate word wherever a Form is manifested (*In Ioh*. n. 125; LW III:108.9-13). This is part of Eckhart's overall view on extra-Christian sources, as exemplified by his statement, "Moses, Christ and the Philosopher [Aristotle] teach the same thing, differing only in the way they teach" (*Comm. John* n.185, LW III:154-5; EE 27)[7].

We should also notice the role of verisimilitude in Plato. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato creates the term "truthlikeness" (273D). In the *Timaeus*, we hear that things which only appear to be true have a way of disorienting us and causing confusion (48D). "Likelihood," by contrast, is deemed a "representative" of the truth and it can at least lead us to the truth if we "stay the course" (56A). Thus, Plato's "likely story" in the *Timaeus* which ostensibly justifies his use of myth is understood to be near truth and to lead us to it. This means that truthlikeness has a moral utility for Plato, leading us to the Good. This harmonizes with his overall conception of knowledge as ethically salutary. To foreshadow what we will see in the next chapter, Blumenberg's use of "truth" and treatment of verisimilitude is apropos since the question of truth and truthlikeness gets at the heart of what metaphor is. Metaphor tries to be like truth in a different form and thus leads us to it.

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[7] Here, Eckhart makes a much stronger statement than Augustine since his observation is tantamount to recognizing a complete continuity between Platonic philosophy and Christian revelation. This is rendered most coherent, I believe, in terms of my notion of 'connoisseurship' that I will take up in a later chapter.

With Aristotle, the soul is split into intellective (rational) and desiring (nonrational) parts. It is still possible to have an action that is voluntary (*hekousion*), while not being chosen (*prohairesis*, determining the means to achieve a rational end that is set by *boulesis*, desire). This points to a lack of an overarching faculty of choice. Translating from Greek to Latin, we get *voluntarium* from *hekousion* and *voluntas* from *boulesis*. Though the two terms are unrelated in Greek and their connection is rejected by Aristotle, later Latin authors like Aquinas were led to connect the two (*Eudemian Ethics* 2.7.1223b29; ST Ia.IIae.6.5; as cited by Kahn 241).

With the Stoics, instead of a competing array of desires, there is the *hegemonikon*, the 'commanding faculty.' The faculties are abilities of the mind rather than relatively autonomous desires that compete with one another. Further, *synkatathesis* ('assent' or 'consent') plays an important role in Stoicism since this is the final gatekeeper to action, making it a forerunner of the concept of an individual *will*. As Aquinas says, "Acts are called voluntary because we consent to them," and also, "Consent belongs to the will" (*ST* Ia.IIae.15.4; as cited by Kahn 247).

As the concept of the individual continues to change from this point forward, the development in the concept of will is useful for tracing the inflation of the individual. A turning point is evident in Epictetus' formulation of Stoicism. Epictetus took Aristotle's notion of *prohairesis* that was previously not central to Stoicism and spoke of it as though "we *are* our *prohairesis*" (Gill 2008, 46)[8]. This is accompanied by another shift in emphasis. The divine logos for Epictetus is describes as a "personal 'will of Nature'

[8] Gill, Kahn and Sorabji all refer to Epictetus' *Discourses* 1.1.23. The tyrant says, "'I will put you in chains.' 'What did you say, man? Put *me* in chains? My leg you will put in chains, but my will (*prohairesis*) not even God can conquer'" (as cited in Gill 46).

(*boulema te phuseos*) or 'will of Zeus'; and his own *prohairesis* is described as 'a part of God which he has given to us'" and one that should be made like the divine will (Kahn 254, citing Epictetus *Diss*. 1.1.27; cf. 4.7.20). This anticipates later Christian theological writers who wrote that we are made in the image of God insofar as we have will and intellect[9].

1.1.3 The Emergence of Christianity

As the scope of the individual expanded and it became increasingly possible to speak of the individual as being divine, it also became possible to speak of the divine as being more like an individual. The idea of the Incarnation and the idea that man is created in the image of God are only feasible if the scope of the individual and the divine are not wholly exclusive. In fact, early arguments against Christ's dual nature stemmed from the older worldview's inability to think of the individual as being divine without losing its individuality.

Further, we can see differences that evidence a shift in the conception of the individual in the practice of early Christianity. McGinn tells us that "Christian mysticism forms a continuous tradition of a distinctively exegetical character" (McGinn 1992, 3). This is important since the tradition of regarding exegesis as a religious activity was not more than a few centuries old. This practice therefore evolved for the Hebrews in parallel with the evolution of the notion of the individual for the Ancient Greek philosophical tradition. Not only were the texts themselves seen as important, but the act of interpreting them was a kind of meditation. Though McGinn does not say it, this

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[9] For example, in the *Summa Theologiae*, the discussion of the human will (Q. 82) follows that of divine will (Q.19) and the will of angels (Q.59). His notion of human will is built from the model of divine will (see Kahn 245).

marks a point of significant departure from the polytheistic systems and older religious systems where the rites and rituals themselves were the religious activities. More intellectual activities like textual interpretation depend on the perspective of the interpreter, meaning that the individual reading the text plays a more central role. With the ancient mystery religions that flourished alongside Christianity in the ancient world, we see a focus on individual experience and transformation rather than mere archetypal reenactment. It is in this way that Christianity inherited of the mysticism of the ancient mystery religions. The mystery religions provide a midpoint between the older polytheistic systems and the burgeoning, more philosophical monotheism.

Apocalyptic writing in general, and Jewish apocalyptic writing in particular, is a natural outgrowth of the increasingly linear conception of history in the first few centuries before Christ. Jewish exegetical practices (corresponding at least in part to Platonic *theoria*) increasingly emphasized the inner life of the individual as individual. Ancient Greek religion and Judaism are case studies (or perhaps better, two inflections of a larger cultural complex which is itself a case study) in the transition from cyclical to linear history, in other words. While Jewish and Greek factions were evident politically and socially, the worldview of the two demonstrates much greater commonality.

The apocalyptic writings were stories about people who were seekers, having a decidedly more individual context than older First Temple Jewish stories (McGinn 1992, 11). Revelation also changed during this time from a living oral tradition to a fixed written one. From this point on, from around 200 B.C.E., we see a rise in the exegesis as a religious practice, which hinges upon individual insight, not revelation whereby the individual is temporarily put aside. With the emphasis on individual insight, we might

notice that it is natural for allegorical and other ‘deeper’ meanings to be sought. These meanings are ‘deeper’ insofar as they move beyond the level of interpretation necessary for the practice of participatory rites. In such rites, the details of practice are what is described, not the inner mental life of the individual. By contrast, Jewish exegesis of this time did not focus only upon practice, but upon individual insight. The idea of the resurrection of the body that appeared during this time also points to the changing trend. The relation that the individual had to his or her religion had changed fundamentally.

Along with this came a notion of authorship that is fits with the newly inflated significance of the individual. If the individual steps aside when receiving revelation and participating in the archetypal, then there no substantive debate about authorship or pseudonymity can arise, only questions about the authenticity of revelation. Alongside the fact that sacred books are not as easily modified as an oral religious tradition, we see crystallization of the canon in a way that would have been unnecessary in a cyclical history. We will have occasion to return to the question of pseudonymity later on.

Philo of Alexandria, a contemporary of Christ, is perhaps the most recognizable Jewish example of advocating the search for deeper meanings in scripture. Philo’s attempt to harmonize the differences between Jewish and Greek philosophical practices testifies to their commonality as much as it does to their differences in the details. In the century that followed, we also see the more clearly individual-centered is the Song of Solomon. Such erotic imagery shows the extent to which the emphasis on the individual had progressed since it would not have fit with the older religious tradition. It implies

inner experience and the search for insight and union with God. It does not imply rite and ritual.

1.1.4 Origen

Though it traditionally is not spoken of in this way, since writers like Rowan Greer recognize Origen alongside Plotinus as "one of the founders of Neoplatonism," we may sensibly describe the development of Neoplatonic thought as happening *within* and as *part of* Christianity rather than being a wholly philosophical development that is added to Christian history as an alien influence (Greer 1979, 5). Such descriptions are often avoided for preference of thinking about Christianity as having an atomic and stable identity. With Origen, we have an author who Eckhart may have read in the original and from whom he took much influence. Consequently, for our purposes, it is useful to see that Eckhart's appeals to authority for some of his rash sounding ideas were justified. This allows us to see that what was new and unusual in Eckhart's thought was at least *not* what he had in common theologically with Origen. We must, therefore, look in greater detail at Origen so as to properly characterize the similarities with Eckhart.

Before looking at the parallels, a few concepts from Origen's metaphysics will provide a backdrop for understanding the necessary aspects of his thought. Origen is Platonic in his theology. For him, things are material in proportion to their distance from God (cf. Greer 1979, 210-1; *On First Principles* IV.4.6). Thus, the ephemeral body weighs down and is ultimately unnecessary for the rational soul, which understands (a divine activity since it is incorporeal) and is closer to God. He goes so far as to assert that the particular body we have now will not be resurrected. Indeed, so long as we are tied to the body, perfection is impossible and temptation to move further from God is

ubiquitous. By moving toward the understanding and away from the material world, including the body, man begins to return to God both by grace and by his own doing (foreshadowing future issues with Pelagianism, though Origen himself had nothing of the sort in mind).

Origen understands the Word as a mediator that unifies God and creation (Greer 1979, 9). He sees God the Father as the primary One, the Son/Word as subordinate as the image of the Father (the Father is the archetype for the Son), and rational souls are the image of the Son (the Son is the archetype for souls, the Neoplatonic 'mind' and Platonic demiurge). Origen argues that 'production' understood as the generation of animals cannot apply to the Son being produced from the Father. He tells us,

> the Son is not generated by a production from Him, as some think. For if the Son is a production of the Father and production is defined as the sort of generation by which the offspring of animals or of men are accustomed to come into existence, then necessarily both He who produces and He who is produced will be bodies. For we do not say, as the heretics suppose, that any part of God's substance has been turned into the Son or that the Son has been generated from the Father from no substance at all, that is, outside His own substance, so that there would be a time when He was not. But we remove all notion of corporeality and say that the Word and Wisdom is generated from the invisible and incorporeal God apart from any corporeal passion (Greer 1979, 205; *On First Principles* IV.4.1)

Production creates separate beings (where matter is the distinguishing principle, as in Aristotle, and the notion of existence applies to beings alone, as Eckhart would later

say). Though Eckhart opposed Aquinas in these matters, his metaphysics was closer to Origen than it was to anything new.

So, we see a Neoplatonic hierarchy of being. This subordination in his account of the Son is compatible with Origen's Platonism, but it would come to be rejected by many of the later church fathers, ultimately being rejected at the Fifth General Council of 553 even though Origen's "image of" dynamic was like Eckhart's insofar as it did not imply any corruption or difference. Origen tells us that image and likeness do not imply corruption (citing Col. 1:15, 2 Cor. 4:4, where Christ is called the 'image of God'), else Christ himself would be less than God (Greer 1979, 215; *On First Principles* IV.4.10). Thus, our being made in the image of God does not imply corruption in and of itself. As with Eckhart, though there is a hierarchy, God is present at all times in all things, a setup that flows into Origen's notion of the *apokatastasis*, the eventual return of all things to God (the *reditus* which is the opposite of the Neoplatonic emanation, *exitus*, of creation). This parallels and may have been the authoritative support Eckhart had in mind for his contention that there is no distance between spiritual things and understanding them (since God himself is understanding), as we hear in his wood/eye example in Sermon 48[10].

For Origen, our love for God comes from his creative love. The individual's love is still appetitive, but there is something non-individual about the love for God, just as we see later in Augustine (Greer 1979, 26). This is true for understanding as well, since Origen tells us it is noncorporeal and thus universal. Souls that turn away from God are

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[10] Eckhart tells us that when his eye sees a piece of wood, they are united in the act of seeing, but they are not united in essence. It is different for spiritual things, he tells us, as understanding and essence are one since spiritual things are immaterial.

immediately given bodies because, for Origen, turning away from God implies corporeality (Greer 1979, 12). This is sensible since division is a falling away from unity and is only coherent if there is a substrate in which the division can take place, as with Aristotle's matter being the differentiating principle. This was a problem for medievals as well who wanted to maintain that angels were different beings even though they were incorporeal. This led to some curious solutions around Aquinas' time. For Origen, as it would be later for Eckhart, the celestial hierarchy had levels defined in proportion to something other than being since God's being was still God's and not the creature's.

The esteem with which Origen holds Hellenistic philosophy is easily seen with his claim that the truth found by the philosophers is the same truth to be found in Scripture (Greer 1979, 6; see the above discussion of Plato for similar passages in Augustine and Eckhart). When Eckhart echoes the same sentiment, his account is a return to Origen. While this may seem outlandishly different than received Christian teaching, if, as Origen and Eckhart both assert, understanding is divine, then the philosophers were merely pursuing what was most purely divine in searching for insight into the universal (what is 'first' and 'last' in Isaiah, Origen parallels with first principles in philosophy). Since Plato refers to a rather mysterious process by which flashes of insight occur (see the previous description of *theia mania* and the spark), by relabeling this as 'grace,' we may not be far at all from orthodoxy.

For Origen, God informs creation but He is not contained by it. In other words, as Greer puts it, "God's transcendence implies His immanence; and the very fact that He is not limited by the creation enables Him to fill all things with His presence and power" (Greer 1979, 8). Once again, we see Eckhart's ideas presaged in Origen. Though the

individuals themselves would later be reconceived as intensively infinite and would occupy a different portion of the ontological space between God and creation, the dynamic by which God was immanent in all things even with the presence of a recognizable celestial hierarchy was already present in Origen. As we will see later in this chapter, modifications to the hierarchy of being were part of the tumultuous changes in theology for Eckhart and Ockham in the early part of the fourteenth century.

Origen saw contemplation of God as the end of the Christian path. He thought of activity as purgative preparation for contemplation and vice versa. Although Origen's pragmatic focus tends toward favoring activity (a form of the *vita activa*, perhaps), this is not the same endorsement of the superiority of the active life that we hear from Eckhart. Nevertheless, it is salient that Origen's (and the later Cappadocians') vision of the Christian life was more active and not inferior to the contemplative as we began to hear from Evagrius Ponticus and Dionysius in the fifth century (Greer 1979, 27).

Origen's notion of the inner and outer man is of particular interest since it points directly to his understanding of the interior life of the individual and thus to his understanding of what an individual is. The very idea that God could be aware of our inner life implies that the inner psychic life of the individual had become a matter of some import (cf. Greer 1979, 216; *On First Principles* IV.4.10). Origen's inner man is the soul which is the *imago dei* while the outer man is the corporeal portion of his being (Greer 1979, 19; cf. Origen's *Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs* and Rom. 7:22). Further, like Eckhart, Origen does not separate philosophical contemplation from lived experience. That is, pragmatic considerations are never far from his mind. Rowan Greer tells us that "Origen is not concerned with mere abstraction but with a

truth embodied in a living community" (Greer 1979, 6). Action, for Origen, is a natural byproduct of desire (love). This love is the vehicle by which one returns to the Father. This is unmistakably experiential. This is how Origen understands the divine love in the Song of Songs, as we read, "if anyone has been able to hold in the breadth of his mind and to consider the glory and splendor of all those things created in Him, he will be struck by their very beauty and transfixed by the magnificence of their brilliance or, as the prophet says, 'by the chosen arrow' (Is. 49:2). And he will receive from Him the saving wound and will burn with the blessed fire of His love" (Greer 1979, 223; *Prol. Comm. Song of Songs*). Interestingly, Origen identifies this love with both *eros* and *agape*, even though the term *eros* (as Origen rightly observes) is peculiarly scarce in the New Testament. Recall that for Plato, *eros* could not be divine since it properly belonged to the ephemeral world of manifestations. For Origen, however, we witness an expansion of this notion when he says that God could be equally well called *eros* as John calls him *agape* (Greer 1979, 228; *Prol. Comm. Song of Songs*). This signals a change in the notion of the individual since his *eros*, which previously was not suitable for the divine since it had a lower ontological status, now appears in Origen as a perfectly good substitute for *agape*/*caritas* as a transcendental which may be thought of as God.

Since individual *eros* is now appropriate for God, we should not be surprised that the notion of individual perfection in Origen is likewise expanded. Origen describes the possibility of revelation that is beyond St. Paul's experience where he says,

> you will know as friends[11] ... For friends learn not by enigmas, but by a form that is seen or by wisdom bare of words, symbols, and types; this will be possible when they attain to the nature of intelligible things and to the beauty of truth. If, then, you believe that Paul was caught up to the third heaven and was caught up into Paradise and heard things cannot be told, which man may not utter (2 Cor. 12:2, 4), you will consequently realize that you will presently know more and greater things than the unspeakable words then revealed to Paul ... For in God there are treasured up much greater visions than these, which no bodily nature can comprehend, if it is not first delivered from everything corporeal (Greer 1979, 50; *Ex. Martyrdom* §XIII).

Here, Origen describes exactly where he differs from the earlier tradition, “There are realities that are so great that they find a rank superior to humanity and our mortal nature; they are impossible for our rational and mortal race to understand. Yet by the grace of God poured forth … these realities have become possible for us” (Greer 1979, 81; *On Prayer*). We find similar passages in other places where he describes the deepest level of meaning in Scripture for “those who are perfect” is the “secret and hidden wisdom of God” as described in 1 Cor. 2:6-7 (Greer 1979, 182; *On First Principles* IV.2.4). Nevertheless, our corporeality holds us back as individuals for Origen. This is quite natural since his conception of individuation implies differentiation, which is a fall away from God and thereby implies matter. As with Plato, the two are simply exclusive, even if Origen does describe how man participates in God’s wisdom

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[11] Eckhart describes this same scriptural passage and idea in a very similar way especially in Sermon 10, also in Sermon 29 and *Comm. Sap.* (LW II 561.8-10), *Comm. Ioh*. (LW III 313.13, 568.8).

by his adopted sonship. The missing link is Origen's conception of unending progress. As he says, "no matter how far a person advances in his investigation and makes progress by a keener zeal, even if the grace of [203] God is within him and enlightens his mind (cf. Eph. 1:18), he cannot arrive at the perfect end of the truths he seeks. No mind that is created has the ability to understand completely by any manner of means, but as it finds some small part of the answers that are sought, it sees other questions to be asked. And if it arrives at those answers, it will again see beyond them to many more questions that they imply must be asked" (Greer 1979, 202-4; *On First Principles* IV.3.14-5). This is similar to the infinite approach described by Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory Nazianzus.

Still, Origen leaves doors open for further mystical speculation. If we participate in God's wisdom as adopted sons and God's wisdom is unitary (i.e., as it is God, it cannot have parts), then mortal or not, our participation in this wisdom seems to imply more than a foretaste. Similarly, when Origen cites Gal. 2:20 which says, "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me," he does not connect this to the discussion immediately preceding this one on the impossibility of created intellects having divine wisdom (Greer 1979, 206; *On First Principles* IV.4.2). As with Augustine's similar rhetoric that we will visit shortly, a reader who is familiar with Eckhart may expect to hear the *in quantum* principle in the very next breath.

In addition to those ideas just mentioned which foreshadow Eckhart, we also see a kindred spirit in spiritual or anagogical interpretation of Scripture between Origen and Eckhart. Not only was Origen famously willing to interpret Scripture in novel ways, the direction he took was in many ways the same as Eckhart's. As Greer describes Origen's

approach, “Origen’s allegorical interpretation does not so much dissolve temporal sequence as catch it up into eternity” (Greer 1979, 32). In other words, the historical side becomes entirely secondary to the underlying spiritual message, which needs to be relevant for the individual in the present moment. As Origen says in a passage that recalls Eckhart’s ostensibly novel and radical formulation in Sermon 101, “Who would dare to say that what is written ‘by the Word of God’ is of no use and makes no contribution to salvation, but is merely a narrative of what happened and was over and done a long time ago, but pertains in no way to us when it is told” (Greer 1979, 248; *Homily XXVII on Numbers*). Throughout his works, Origen makes plain that the spiritual interpretation is the highest level. In many cases, the Holy Spirit intentionally included contradictions and impossibilities to prod us to seek out the spiritual meaning (Greer 1979, 187-8; *On First Principles* IV.2.9). As he plainly says, “since what first appears cannot be true or useful, we might be called back to examine the truth to be sought more deeply and to be investigated more diligently, and might seek a meaning worthy of God in the Scriptures” (Greer 1979, 188; *On First Principles* IV.2.8). Further, the ostensibly prosaic meanings like those we find in the legal texts are merely a “veil” for spiritual meanings in which “certain ineffable mysteries are revealed to those who know how to examine accounts of this kind” (Greer 1979, 184; *On First Principles* IV.2.8). Finally, there is symmetry between Origen’s unsystematic approach and his view on the utility of such things in pursuing the highest spiritual matters:

> everyone who is concerned with truth should be little concerned with names and words (cf. Tim. 1:4), because different nations have different customs about words. And he should pay more attention to what is meant than to how it is

> expressed in words, especially in the case of great and difficult matters … there are some things the meaning of which cannot in any way rightly be explained by any words of a human language (cf. 1 Cor. 2:4), but they are made plain by a purer intellectual apprehension rather than by any properties words have. As well, the understanding of divine letters must be kept to that rule by which what is said is judged not according to the common character of the word but according to the divinity of the Holy Spirit, who inspired their writing (Greer 1979, 204-5; *On First Principles* IV.3.15).

Such a sentiment could have easily been included in Eckhart's defense and seems to inform the spirit of his writing.

1.1.5 Augustine

Bernard McGinn tells us that the question of the divine and human in Christ (Christology) was the most important issue for orthodoxy between 400 and 700 (McGinn 1994, 12). The conception of the self was central: could Christ be human and God? With any of the distinctions Augustine draws in his theology, we must bear in mind that doctrine is a means to an end, not an authoritative end in itself (*De Trin.* VIII.iii.7). Augustine's conception of the self is most evident by looking at his account of the conversion of the will in the *Confessions* and his notion of the *imago dei* in *On the Trinity*.

For Augustine, occurrent desires are the product of a perverted and fractured will. Our will was first corrupted by Adam's original sin. Thus, desires arise in us for things that harm us, i.e., move us further from God (absolute goodness) and toward evil (the absence of being). When all parts of the will are aligned, action follows. Repeatedly

willing to pursue sinful desire strengthens such pathological habits that hold us in bondage (like prisoners chained in a cave). When the reasoning part of the soul sees the destructive nature of sin and resolves to fight it, a war of will ensues and creates the possibility for a situation where the conscious will is entirely confident in what it believes, but struggles in vain against ingrained habits. From here, all movement away from corrosive, worldly desire is a move toward God and comes only by the grace of God. As one approaches being able to will wholeheartedly against carnal desire, one's will aligns with God's will. Experiences here are not such that "I see God" but that "God sees himself" (*Conf.* XIII.31). And so, through the Son and with the Holy Spirit, one sees how God became man so that man may become God - by extinguishing one's worldly, personal will and by becoming transparent to God's will. Since this progression is both argumentative and chronological, it proceeds roughly in order, beginning in Book VII and continuing through Book VIII of the *Confessions*. The turning point for Augustine's wrestling with the problem of evil was his realization that he had a will and that the will was the source of sin (*Conf.* VII.iii.5). Augustine says, "[t]he consequence of a distorted will is passion. By servitude to passion, habit is formed, and habit to which there is no resistance becomes necessity" (*Conf.* VIII.v.10). So he tells us, it was 'not I' that brought this about 'but sin which dwells in me' (Rom. 7:17,20).

Augustine's use of *consuetudo*, "customary action" or "habit" is similar to our use of habit, though more broadly construed. He shares our general thinking that repetitive action becomes habitual and, importantly, no longer requires will for action being easily activated and difficult to stop once in motion in proportion to the strength of the habit: "in large part I was passive and unwilling rather than active and willing" (*Conf.* VIII.v.11).

Augustine saw the desires as arising independently of the individual's will on a momentary basis.

As with many of Augustine's seemingly firm theological stances, the expression of his philosophy of will is at all times rhetorically situated in opposition to the Manicheans. To avoid a Manichaean conclusion, Augustine cannot say that man has one bad will and one good will as if they were two natures within (*Conf.* VIII.x.22). Instead, Augustine suggests that one's soul can be pulled in different directions by opposing portions (*voluntates*) of the will within it (*Conf.* VIII.v.10). Ultimately, Augustine will say that if something is "wholeheartedly" willed (*toto vult*, entire will; *Conf.* VIII.ix), then it is acted upon: "For as soon as I had the will, I would have had a wholehearted will. At this point the power to act is identical with the will. The willing itself was performative of the action" (*Conf.* VIII.viii.20).

Augustine's conversion is a chronicle of his aligning his will to God's will. This process is only necessary since the human will is naturally fragmented, being drawn both in spiritual and worldly directions. Further, Augustine marveled that although he willed to move away from carnal habits, he found himself unable to do so (*Conf.* VIII.i.2). This naturally sinful state is fallen and cannot be from God. Thus, Augustine posits *original sin*, which enables him to say that naturally sinful dispositions (habits) are still "of my own choice" (*Conf.* VIII.v.10, VIII.v.11) "because I was a son of Adam (*Conf.*

VIII.x.22) [12]. Note that the idea of original sin becomes necessary for Augustine after thinking through to the end the notion of the fallen will.

Since he allies with St. Paul in thinking that moral prohibitions only water the desires[13], Augustine chose not to oppose reason to desire and make it a test of will. Rather, he preferred to recognize the desire for God as the deepest desire. The desires arise outside our control (i.e., no habits of desire), thus we need intellectual activity to open up possibilities for desire and we need faith, as we read in *De Trinitate*, since it provides motivation where knowledge is lacking. Loving God is possible because, although we cannot love what we do not know, we are told to "first love by faith" because "something can be loved which is unknown if it is believed" (*De Trin.* VIII.iii.6). As he says, people can become what they see "by cleaving to that same form which they behold, in order to be formed by it" (*De Trin.* VIII.iv.9). In other words, habit via repetition is necessary because the initial experience of understanding and simply willing at a particular moment are not sufficient. This limits the scope of knowledge in a manner that would have been foreign to Plato. Will reoccupies the space created by that limit.

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[12] If we are overly concerned with the individual soul qua individual, then his argument seems strange. However, understood in the context of the Platonists (likely, Plotinus in particular) whose words, where "in all the Platonic books God and his Word keep slipping in," the fallen world is the world of multiplicity where individuals matter less than the return to the divine, the One, as manifest in the divine portion of the soul (VIII.ii.1). Augustine is careful, however, to maintain separation between creature and creator and insist that it is not the soul that is divine. Instead, according to his notion of grace, the closer one gets to God, the more the will becomes God's will and God "sees" himself. It is salient that Augustine uses the Plotinian three stage model: *corporis*, *sensibus*, *anabasis* - separation from the corporeal world, movement within the soul, and passage to the divine.

[13] Romans 7:7-8: "I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting."

Turning now to *De Trinitate,* for Augustine, God is more present to us than other minds (as he established in *Conf.* X) since we cannot completely know other minds: "There now, he can already have God better known to him than his brother, certainly better known because more present, better known because more inward to him, better known because more sure" (*De Trin.* VIII.v.12). We can be "more sure" of our knowledge of God because we find God by looking within our minds and, as established in *De Trin.* VIII.4, nothing is better known to us than our minds.

Will, however, not only characterizes conversion, God's will is also God himself. In the second half of *De Trinitate*, Augustine says we can come to understand God by moving inward and understanding ourselves since we are created in *imago Dei*: "The God within is the God above" (*Hom. on Ps*. 130.12). As this process culminates, our "seeing" of God is God seeing himself[14], just as Augustine's will became "wholehearted" and aligned with God's will. Since "the will and power of God is God's very self," (VII.iv.6; cf. *Enneads* 6.8.13) by speaking of a union of wills between creature and creator, we approach what Augustine describes in a letter to Paulina c.413, "the person who is able to see God invisibly can adhere to God incorporeally" alongside a quotation of 1 Cor. 6:17, "whoever adheres to the Lord is one spirit [with him]" (Letter 147, as cited by McGinn 1992). To turn toward God (*conversio*) with one's will is implicitly divinizing.

Further, as we may love an object of faith and thus God may love himself through us, Augustine likewise observes that we know love in the moment that we love. It requires no further reflection to say that we love or that we love loving. As well, to love is

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[14] "When people see these things with the help of your Spirit, it is you who are seeing in them," and so on (XIII.xxxi.46).

to desire unity with the beloved. Still, this implies a separation between lover and beloved. It is this separation, though that Augustine finds to be a shortcoming of the trinity of love (*De Trin.* VIII.x.14).

In the end, Augustine simply says, “There you are, God is love,” referring to 1 Jn 4:8 and summing his discussion, “Why should we go running round the heights of the heavens and the depths of the earth looking for him who is with us if only we should wish to be with him?” (*De Trin.* VIII.v.11). In other words, why should we search the classical heavens and hells (given the contemporary conception of the earth in the middle, heavens above and hells below) if the answer lies within us? Augustine is here dramatically characterizing (and thereby exhorting) the refocusing of desire from without to within.

So, with Augustine, we see movement toward interiority, development of the concept of the individual will and divine will, including the theological innovation of original sin. Still, the individual will progresses by grace alone and yields to God’s will not only in aligning the competing human wills with God’s will, but also in allowing God to love and know himself through the individual. This yielding to God’s will echoes Plato’s characterization of the refocusing on understanding and the climbing of the ontological hierarchy as one approaches knowledge of the Good, while cultivating virtues which involve the governing of the competing appetites by reason. Still, what Augustine does with the will would have been foreign to Plato, which signals it as the point at which Augustine clearly inhabits a different cultural climate which includes a different notion of the self and the life of the mind. Augustine, unlike Plato, conceived of an overarching faculty of will.

1.1.6 Neoplatonism

By Plotinus' time, we see a milestone in the ontological inflation of the individual: Plotinus identified Forms for individuals (*Enneads* V.7). This made Platonism even more compatible with Christianity and its emphasis on the individual soul[15]. Thus, Boethius said in picking up on this idea, that Plato has the Form of *Platonitas* because Plato has a property of being the individual that he is above and beyond the peculiar combination of attributes that he possesses[16]. For Plotinus and Porphyry, as with Origen, the material world (including the body) comprised an obstacle to attaining to the superior, immaterial heights of the contemplation of universals. Only with later Neoplatonists like Iamblichus and Proclus do we see the push toward 'theurgy,' which was the Neoplatonic appropriation of pagan rites to put the individual in contact with the divine through worldly things. The highest kind of theurgy in Proclus is characterized by negative theology, mystic silence and faith (*pistis*, which simply means to go beyond 'knowledge,' *gnôstikôs*, because knowledge is not enough). The culmination of negative theology for Proclus is the negation of negation, just as it is for Dionysius (see his *Mystical Theology* ch.5) and Eckhart.

The account of causality and emanation in Neoplatonic philosophy directly affected the ontological status of the individual. As Proclus describes the most important

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[15] David Yount tells us that although Plato's "one-over-many" rule (one Form for many manifestations) from *Parmenides* and *Republic* Bk. X seems to exclude the possibility of there being individual Forms, in fact Plotinus specifically endorses this aspect of Plato's thought (Yount 2014, 126). Even if Yount is right that Plato does not explicitly exclude the possibility of Forms of individuals, it seems unlikely that he would have shared Plotinus' view on this.

[16] "since 'Platonicity' is referred to Plato only, when we hear the word 'Plato,' we are led with our thoughts to a single person and to a single particular substance" (Moreschini 2014, 57). *quoinam Platonitas in unum convenit Platonem, audientis animus 'Platonis' vocabulum ad unam personam unamque particularem substantiam referat* (*Commentariorem in librum Aristotelis Perihermeneias, edition secunda II*, c.7).

aspect of this, “Every effect remains in its cause, proceeds from it, and reverts upon it” (*Elements of Theology* §35, trans. Dodds). Created individuals, therefore, instead of being separate from the One and mere manifestations, remain in the One and return to it. Rather than being a mere imitation or shadow that evanesces and returns to the nothingness from which it came, individuals instead return to the One, just as Origen described in his notion of *apokatastasis*. This points to an increased valuation of the individual. Further, as emanations from the One, individual beings owe their being to Being, so to speak. Divine unity is, therefore, still present in the individuals since those individuals are emanations of the divine. This divinization of creation makes the realm of multiplicity itself into something divine, insofar as its being derives from divine Being.

Clearly, if individuals remain in the divine, are reflections of it and seek to return to it, little distance must be crossed to say that an individual can be both man and God, individuals are images of God, and they seek to return to God. In Christianizing Neoplatonism and making the Neoplatonic One into the Christian God, Dionysius could declare that all of creation was a ‘theophany,’ that is, God revealing himself in all of creation (cf. Duclow 2006, 7). Similarly, if moving from creature to creator is a matter of effacing the constraints (the *contraction*, as Cusanus would later say) of self upon Being, then the method of apophatic theology is employed not only to describe or ‘name’ God, as Dionysius might say, but to thereby effect a return to Him. As with Dionysius, one attempts to *name* God in order to come to ‘know’ Him, which implies approaching Him and moving away from multiplicity.

Some Neoplatonists extended *eros* to be the desire to produce beauty rather than just to possess it. At that point, *eros* could sensibly be applied to the gods or even

to the first principle. Unlike Plato's conception of *eros* as a mediating force, Dionysius saw *eros* as the force that made us want to be like God. Bernard McGinn goes as far as saying that Dionysius' conception of *eros* as more than a merely mediating force was his greatest contribution to Christian theology (McGinn 1992, 166).

Overall, like Proclus, Dionysius is remarkable more for his influence than for his innovations. Both Proclus and Dionysius are significant figures though, since their influence extended by historical chance to have enormous impact on the medieval world. Proclus' work was transmitted in part by way of the *Liber de Causis*, which enjoyed success partly due to the misattribution of its authorship to Aristotle, a mistake that persisted until Thomas Aquinas noticed the similarity after reading William of Moerbeke's translation of Proclus' *Elements of Theology* in 1268. Medieval thinkers regarded Dionysius as having apostolic authority since the writing was attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite, one of Paul's converts in Athens (Acts 17:34).

1.1.7 Eriugena

Eriugena's anthropology evidences significant change in terms of the development of the notion of the individual. Dionysius and the other Neoplatonic thinkers described a celestial hierarchy whereby lower forms had only mediated access to those that were higher. Augustine talks about the "mid-rank" (*medietas animae*) of the soul (*Against the Manichees* 2.9.12): "The tree of life planted in the middle of paradise signifies the wisdom by which the soul should understand that it is ordered in a certain middle range of things" (Duclow 2006, 91; cf. Plotinus *Enneads* IV.8.). At the same time, Augustine tells us that "Between our mind, by which we know the Father, and the Truth, that is to say, the inward light through which we know Him, no creature intervenes" (*nulla*

interposita creatura)" (*De vera religione* 55,113 (CCSL 32:259) as cited in Duclow 2006, 77). Eriugena echoes this in saying, "between our mind and Him no nature intervenes" and that we contemplate God in perpetual circular motion "with no intervening creature" (*Periphyseon* 531B-C, *Commentary on John* SC180; as cited in Duclow 2006, 77). Though Eriugena sounds like Augustine, his anthropology goes further: "For by taking on human nature, Christ not only lifted it up 'to a parity [*aequalitas*] with the angelic nature, … But also exalted it above all angels and heavenly powers, and in short, above all things that are and all things that are not'" (Duclow 2006, 81). Duclow tells us "Christology thus completes Eriugena's apotheosis of humanity" (Duclow 2006, 81). Eriugena appears to be inconsistent on this point. On the one hand, he ostensibly limits humanity to the level of the angels: "The human intellects of the holiest theologians ascend to the height of their [the angels'] contemplation, as Paul was taken up, but they neither exceed their excellence, nor are they more deiform than they" (Ex 6, 146-51; as cited in Duclow 2006, 82). On the other hand, he makes an exception for John the Evangelist, saying that he "passes beyond every created heaven and every created paradise, that is, every human and angelic nature" (*Homily*, 225C, SC 151:218-220; as cited in Duclow 2006, 82). Further, Eriugena remains Platonic about the body, saying that in the end, "the whole of human nature will be poured back into intellect alone, so that nothing in them will remain except the intellect alone by which it will contemplate its Creator."[17]

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[17] *Tota siquidem humana natura in solum intellectum refundetur, ut nil in ea remaneat praeter illum solum intellectum, quo creatorum suum contemplabitur* (Periphyseon 874B; cf. 872B-875B). This is part of Eriugena's account of the general return by which corporeal things return to the incorporeal and all

Duclow rightly concludes that Origen's account of creation makes creation *ex nihilo* more rightly called creation *ex Deo* for Eriugena, something we could say equally well for Eckhart. Thus, all living things are theophanies, which is paradoxical since they are created and God is beyond createdness. Instead of conceiving of God as Being itself, God is beyond being while at the same time being wholly present in each individual. His account of physical nature as theophany elevates the natural world. And his account of the human mind as imago dei insofar as it empties itself of worldly knowledge and thus acquires learned ignorance (making itself as formless as God is) elevates man.

This paradox is present in the fourfold division which frames Eriugena's *Periphyseon*. He enumerates the four possibilities of created/uncreated things that create/do not create. God is uncreated, he tells us, and He both creates (as efficient cause) and does not create (as final cause). Eriugena explains that the distinction creates/does not create is an artifact of the "double direction (*intentio*) of our contemplation" (*Periphyseon* 527B). All four possibilities come back together in unity by the metaphor of divine self-creation (Duclow 2006, 31; *Periphyseon* 516C, 452A-B). In addition to the similarity between divine self-creation and Eckhart's birth of the Word, Eriugena even takes time to describe the disciple's shock at hearing such a thing and says that "like almost everyone else, I was unfamiliar with this view before and had not even heard of it. If it is true, anyone would immediately shout and proclaim: 'And so God

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matter reverts to incorporeality in a solely intellectual existence. This is where humanity achieves its originally planned for status as a perfect image of God, without the division of the sexes and all materiality. Further, Eriugena describes a special return by which the elect are deified and become entirely one with God.

is all things and all things are God.' Such a judgment will be regarded as monstrous" (650C-D, as cited in Duclow 2006, 31) just as Eckhart described his own teaching, "at first glance some things from the following propositions, questions, and expositions will appear monstrous, doubtful, or false"[18].

Eriugena has a metaphor in which he describes a parallel between the hierarchy of the liberal arts and the cosmological hierarchy: earth/history, water/ethics, air/physics, fire/theology (Duclow 2006, 46). He tells us that dialectic works because it comes from the actual ordering of the universe (the logos of the cosmos), not because it is a human creation (748D-749A; Duclow 2006, 47). The ordering principle of the universe provides the universe with structure and informs the content of the lower Forms. By associating human cognition with this overarching logos, Eriugena's metaphors do something powerful by showing us how human thought is effectively the creative speaking of the Word by God, just as increasing abstraction for Plato implies the ascension of the ontological continuum toward the Good. For Eriugena, there is something divine about the work that symbol does, like Marie-Dominique Chenu claims of Dionysius (Duclow 2006, 62). Thus, we hear Mary Brennan and John O'Meara saying that Eriugena sometimes speaks *in divinis*, from God's point of view, just as C.F. Kelley said of Eckhart (Duclow 2006, 123; Kelley 1977)

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[18] *nonnulla ex sequentibus propositionibus, quaestionibus, expositionibus primo aspectu monstruosa, dubia aut false apparebunt, secus autem si sollerter et studiosius pertractentur.* (LW I:152.3-5). Eckhart goes on to describe how such things are actually found in the highest authorities, including Scripture itself, just as I attempt to show in this chapter.

1.1.8 Eckhart's contemporaries

As we approach Eckhart's time, we see many similarities between his thought and that of his contemporaries and immediate predecessors. This is especially true with Albert the Great, who was Thomas Aquinas' teacher and perhaps Eckhart's as well during his time at the Studium Generale at Cologne. Gordon Leff says that Albert "is the first Christian who is prepared to accept a rational treatment of natural phenomena; the first in the West to take over Maimonides' distinction between faith and reason" (Leff 1958, 208). The increasing separation between faith and reason was characteristic of the overall motion we see in the thirteenth century. For Albert, the practice of theology should orient one toward loving and enjoying God. Beatitude is only available in the afterlife. We perceive things through the representation that we receive upon seeing it (like Roger Bacon but contra Peter Olivi, who said that we cannot describe vision in this way else we would not see the thing itself, but only the representation). However, in seeing God, there is no representation or intermediary. With all of this, we see Albert drawing a line between our knowledge of the physical world (when investigating the natural world he famously says that God's miracles are nothing to him) and the knowledge of God through theology. This provides a clue as to the status of inquiry into the natural world, something that is made possible if the physical world is not an immediate given (*adequatio intellectus ad rem*, the intellect is well matched to things), thus creating space for the possibility of a lesser form of knowledge that is the province of the individual.

Albert's treatment of being also foreshadows important themes in Eckhart. "Albert's view of the non-being of creatures taken in themselves as the necessary

correlative of the flowing out of all things from the Principle was to be taken up by Eckhart among others" (McGinn 2005, 17). This is what Armand Maurer had in mind when he said that, regarding the condemned proposition that creatures are nothing (have no existence) in themselves, Eckhart works from Albert's model of soul (Maurer 1974, 37)[19]. Albert says that there are two ways of considering the soul, as it is in itself as a pure formal reality and as the soul is the form of the body. As the form of the body, the soul is diffused in the body. The soul is in the body just as any form is in its manifestations without itself being material.

For Aquinas and Albert, God willed individuals as well as universals, a crucial move away from Ancient Greek metaphysics and toward the elevation of the individual (Heimsoeth 1994, 207). Individuals were part of the perfection of creation. Alongside Albert, Thomas Aquinas saw individual difference as adding to the world's beauty and as manifesting the fullest expression of God's will (Heimsoeth 1994, 201). Albert described God as a divine font which was "overflowing" (*ebullitio*) into the world, an idea that Eckhart also used (see McGinn 2005, 16).

The early thirteenth century saw an expansion in thought about our mental life and how we know ourselves. For Thomas Aquinas, the mind is only manifest to itself when it interacts with the outside world in experience (i.e., in any embodied act). Even our knowledge of ourselves, contra Albert, is not preexisting or above the level of individual experience. Instead, it is a product of it. Thus, for Aquinas, human nature is essentially embodied. This makes inquiry into the physical world a positive thing since

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[19] For example, see Sermon 80, where Eckhart repeatedly refers to St. Albert while talking about the union of the soul with God.

such inquiry makes self-knowing possible. Further, Aquinas described each person having a single Form (the soul) rather than being a mixture or multiplicity of Forms. Instead, for the sake of the unity of the individual, he said that the single Form manifests many powers.

For Aquinas, the agent intellect (active intellect) is particular to each individual. We come to knowledge by a power that was given to us by God but is, nonetheless, individual. A number of thinkers around Eckhart's time reacted against Aquinas and reasserted that the uncreated light in the soul could clearly and directly come to know things. In other words, they reasserted Platonism by putting the knowledge of things in their forms and outside of their material manifestations. Aquinas and other contemporary Aristotelian thinkers pushed to place the source of knowledge in the material, with all the concomitant limits[20].

With Aquinas' equation of the form of an individual to his soul, we have a leveling of the ontological status of the individual with respect to material reality. Its being is wrapped up in material reality and it knows only the material world by way of concepts abstracted from the material world. This is in contrast to the Augustinian approach which sees the intellect as superior to the body ontologically. So, we see Aquinas saying that we abstract the concept of God from the material world while Henry of Ghent argues that we can abstract the concept of God from the concept of being itself.

Duns Scotus criticized them both on this point by saying that this inappropriately draws the analogy between the created world and God (Leff 1958, 265). Thus, contra

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[20] A clearer example of this and one from Eckhart's own lifetime was William of Ware (d.1300). He described knowledge through intellectual abstraction (natural light of the intellect) rather than through divine illumination.

Aquinas' attempt at synthesizing faith and reason, Duns Scotus emphasized their difference. Leff describes this point, "It was one of Duns's most emphatic assertions that the theologian and philosopher are not, and never can be, the same" (Leff 1958, 264). By making so much of faith inaccessible to reason, he effectively cut reason loose and gave it free reign with natural phenomena. Since he left nature for reason and claimed the rest for faith, he implied that faith played no role in thinking about natural phenomena.

Returning to the Forms of individuals, we see a similar elevation of individuals in Richard of Middleton, who claimed not only that there were forms of individuals but also that individuals were the goal of creation. After all, God grants eternal life to *individuals*. Richard contended that the individual is individual because it is deprived of divisibility (it is literally *in* + *dividual*). Duns Scotus disagreed, claiming that the individual must have something positive about it rather than being merely a privation of divisibility. He tells us that God wills individual differences as much as he does species and genera. Individuals crown his work and are higher than other things. As well, contra Aristotle, the individual cannot be only the result of a mixture of form with matter. That is, matter cannot be the individuating principle. Individuals must be positive forms in themselves. Duns Scotus describes individual difference as formal, his well-known notion of *haecceitas*, 'thisness,' which is the indivisible unity that makes an individual an individual. Instead of individuals being particular manifestations of Forms that happen to inhabit a particular position in time and space, Duns Scotus argues that individuals are not intelligible by merely appealing to their parts or manifestations of humanity. Socrates is more than a particular manifestation of humanity – he is Socrates. We recognize such

an individual differently than we recognize a commodity like a pear, which is arguably important to us for the kind of thing that it is rather than the individual that it is. By contrast, we recognize in Socrates a personality and individuality that is not reducible to any combination of features.

The Augustinians generally described, as Bonaventure did, the ascent of knowledge from particular things to God himself. This involved a movement up the divided line and climbing the ontological ladder to the form of the good itself. Eckhart, by contrast, was more concerned (as Eriugena was) with the divinity inherent in being itself. He compressed the hierarchy of essences that one had to climb and thereby enabled one to go directly to God without intermediaries. The compression of the hierarchy of being was not limited to Eckhart alone. William of Ockham is representative of the push to prune the ontological tree down to almost nothing for theology *and* the physical world. Ockham trimmed the ontological tree of real entities by eliminating universals (collapsing it vertically) and by recognizing only substance and quality (collapsing it horizontally), leaving only individuals and their qualities.

Once individuals were fully enriched with significance, the scales could tip in the other direction and the individual could come to the foreground while God retreated to the background. This is the transition where God became the *deus absconditus*, the 'hidden god.' Blumenberg sees this transition as a product of nominalism as a turning point in Christian history. Once the verisimilar forfeits its commensurability with absolute truth, it separates from it and can be considered a new kind of knowledge. When probability gained a firm foothold and the 'truth' of mathematical knowledge was empirically demonstrable, truths of the natural world gained a means of standing on

their own. Instead of focusing on how the change in the conception of the individual paved the way for the God to become distant from the world of things, Blumenberg instead traced the cause back to the insistence upon the absolute omnipotence of God and the inability of particulars to influence him. The reasons for his not focusing on the individual may derive from his own notion of the individual, as will be discussed in chapter two.

William of Ockham can easily be made to look more modern than he is if we endue his thought with the significance of ushering in the transition to the modern world. For our purposes, his infamous ‘razor’ is not as significant as his near elimination of the gradations of being. Ockham's razor is methodological, not metaphysical (Keele 2010, 96). In fact, Ockham rejected metaphysical razors entirely (Keele 2010, 104). It tells us how to reason well in metaphysics, but it does not tell us anything about metaphysical reality. Ockham also allowed for self-evident experiences to count as knowledge and register in his ontology (Keele 2010, 103). In other words, his nominalism did not imply skepticism like Descartes or Quine. Further, Ockham maintained that God makes things with more than he needs to, but these are not subject to the principle of parsimony: God willed it, so it is worthwhile. In light of these aspects of his thinking, we can perhaps understand why Duns Scotus objected that we cannot do without the universal to the extent that Ockham claims since that would make knowledge impossible and we would fall into skepticism.

Eckhart’s generation saw the increased questioning of the way in which we come to know things and how we should understand what knowledge is. For Peter Aureole, like William of Ockham, only the individual was real. Our concepts deal with how things

appear to us, not with the things themselves. In this way, concepts are the province of the individual, rather than requiring divine intervention or something supra-individual like the active intellect to create understanding. This puts more of what we recognize as an individual's mental life in the domain of the individual and less clearly affected or intermixed with the divine. This makes the thing known separate from the process for knowing. That is, the intellect is not *aedequatio* to the thing known (Leff 1958, 282).

The question of secondary causes also demonstrates a change in the notion of the individual. For Aquinas, every secondary cause was from itself and equally from God. Ockham and Bradwardine took the opposing extremes. For Ockham, it was from itself. For Bradwardine, it was from God, almost to the exclusion of its own impetus. So, once God has acted as a primary cause, we see some questioning more seriously whether or not the secondary causes were the province of the individual rather than God. This possibility is only coherent with a changed conception of the individual and a departure from received tradition, which emphasizes the persistent role of God even in the free actions of rational individuals. For example, Paul tells us "he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:27-8, cf. 1 Cor. 12:6, 2 Cor. 3:5, Is. 26:12; see Freddoso 1988). It is against this backdrop that we may most readily understand where the differences are between Eckhart and his predecessors and contemporaries.

1.2 Eckhart's theology in historical context

As Eckhart said in his defense, he drew many of his seemingly radical ideas from standard church authorities. However, as John Connolly noted, Eckhart's inquisitors were more concerned with the idea of God being within us than they were with his lack

of concern with the role of the historical crucifixion in salvation (Connolly 2014). In other words, his inquisitors honed in on Eckhart's rhetoric of the individual, especially insofar as it was a part of sermons that were given to uneducated people. We will look briefly here at some of the strong links that Eckhart rightly pointed to between his ideas and those of his predecessors. If Eckhart points to an authority as saying the same thing, it is worth taking note of any significant differences between Eckhart and that authority since the differences will likely exemplify changes in culture and rhetoric. For now, we will describe Eckhart's theology and its historical context and leave aside questions of rhetoric for subsequent chapters. First, however, a bit of contemporary history will flesh out the details of the social backdrop.

Gordon Leff says that mysticism became a veritable movement at the end of the thirteenth century and its center was Cologne (Leff 1958, 299). Bernard McGinn likewise tells us that mysticism of unity really came to the fore in the thirteenth century (McGinn 2005, 120). Finally, Kurt Ruh called Eckhart's era the *kairos* of German vernacular mysticism. This is all to say that Eckhart was hardly alone in the direction of his thought. Albert the Great, who was active in Cologne and may have been Eckhart's teacher in the Studium Generale there, developed a Neoplatonic theology that recalled Eriugena. During Eckhart's formative years, his fellow Dominican, William of Moerbeke (d. c.1286) produced translations of some of Proclus' important works. Eckhart may have been in his twenties when William produced translations of three of Proclus' short treatises and his voluminous *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*. In 1270 and again in 1277, Étienne Tempier, the Bishop of Paris, issued condemnations of Averroist and Aristotelian doctrines, some of which ostensibly targeted Aquinas. Though Proclus' star

waned a bit after the condemnation of 1277, he was still, as Loris Sturlese put it, “a privileged discussion partner” for the German Dominicans (McGinn 2005, 46). In short, Neoplatonic thought remained a live topic of conversation during Eckhart’s formative years. After Eckhart’s first stint as a Master in Paris in 1302-3, he was made Provincial of the new province of Saxony from 1303-11. Pope Clement summoned a general council from Avignon in 1308 which met in Vienne from Oct 1311 to May 1312 to deal with the Free Spirit problem among other issues. The heresy of the Free Spirit refers to a collection of ideas, though perhaps never sufficiently organized to warrant being called a ‘movement,’ that includes: the belief that the perfected soul was entirely one with God, the Church’s intercession was not necessary, the perfected person was above sin and was above the moral prescriptions of the church. The beguines (lay religious women who lived communally, but outside the official monastic orders) enjoyed sanction for a century despite their tension with the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) and Second Council of Lyons (1274) which prohibited new forms of religious life. They came under fire only after the publishing of the Clementine Constitutions by Pope John XXII in 1317. The beguines/beghards who resisted institutionalization and wandered as mendicants received the greatest suspicion. It was also during this time that Marguerite Porete, the writer of *The Mirror of Simple Souls* was burned at the stake in 1310. Eckhart may have stayed at the house of her inquisitor in the following year when he returned to Paris for his second appointment, an honor he shared only with Thomas Aquinas. Finally, he was in contact with spiritual women in convents in Germany in the years following. This created the possibility that Eckhart’s thought was influenced by them, something that has been much pursued. However, Bernard

McGinn's assessment seems most reasonable in concluding that we have no compelling evidence for influence in that direction[21]. Throughout his life, in Paris, Cologne and Avignon, Eckhart was in the heart of the theological and mystical thought of his time.

We see Eckhart pushing the mystical thought of his time further with his ideas of 'boiling' (*bullitio*) and 'boiling over' (*ebullitio*). Eckhart described the intradivine generation of the persons of the Trinity as 'boiling[22].' God's superabundant goodness 'boils over,' resulting in creation. In explaining *ebullitio*, Anne Hunt says, "While Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas had recognized Trinitarian vestiges in everything in creation, and Bonaventure the trinitarian structure in everything in creation, Eckhart presses further and articulates an understanding of *all activity* as essentially trinitarian in its structure and dynamism" (Hunt 2010, 84).

All activity is trinitarian because *bullitio* is the "cause and exemplar of creation," of *ebullitio*[23]. The key to understanding this is in his idea that a form and what is informed share an essence: "Note that an image properly speaking is a simple formal emanation that transmits the whole pure naked essence" (Sermo XLIX; TP 236). Consequently, "a form and what it informs make up no number" (Sermo IV; TP 210). That is, the informed's being formed takes place via an *internal* principle, not as a result of an *external* cause. For Eckhart, since efficient and final causes require multiplicity and

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[21] However, Eckhart's use of *viriditas* (greenness) is intriguing. He uses this term in much the same way that Hildegard of Bingen did (Davies 1991, 57).

[22] As will be discussed at length in the analysis chapter, it is important that boiling is an *activity* rather than something passive. As our return to God through the birth of the Word in the soul mimics this *bullitio*/*ebullitio* pair, it is accomplished in an active fashion within the multiplicitous world, not merely through world-renouncing contemplation.

[23] *causa et exemplar creationis* (Sermo XXV, LW IV 236.7-8)

action from outside, they are external. For the act of creation itself, referring to the *logos* of John 1:1, Eckhart says, “the reason of things is a principle in such a way that it does not have or look to an exterior cause, but looks within to the essence alone. Therefore, the metaphysician who considers the entity of things proves nothing through exterior causes, that is, efficient and final causes” (*Comm. Gen* B.4; EE 83).

As we read some of Eckhart’s ostensibly unusual exegeses of Scripture, we also do well to bear in mind his place in the tradition of allegorical interpretation. Eckhart follows Augustine in saying that “every true sense is a literal sense”[24]. Further, “The literal sense is that which the author of a writing intends, and God is the author of holy scripture.”[25] As Duclow says, “Here Eckhart blurs all distinction between literal and parabolical meanings” (Duclow 2006, 171).

Eckhart’s notion of detachment by turning away from our desires for worldly things and the activity of discursive reason recalls the work of Bernard of Clairvaux, William of St. Thierry, and others (Murk-Jansen 1994, 25). As vernacular preaching came into its own in the thirteenth century, the term *religion* came to be applied to the lay population as well, bringing with it a different language which Eckhart both helped to form and used (White 1975, 7-8).[26] As Davies summarized the situation, “elements which had seemed to be entirely [Eckhart’s] own are actually the common property of a

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[24] *omnis sensus qui verus est sensus litteralis est* (*Prol. Par. Gen.*, LW 1,1 449.7-8; cf. EE 93; cf. ST Ia.1.10; *Conf*. 12.31.42).
[25] *»sensus« etiam »litteralis, quem auctor scripturae intendit, deus autem sit auctor sacrae scripturae«* (Prol. Par. Gen., LW 1,1 449.6-7, quoting Aquinas ST 1.q1.a10).
[26] For example, although Eckhart uses the language of the Minnesingers, which was in the German vernacular, he “never leaves us in doubt that this secular love vocabulary has now been restored to a theological purpose, but has, at the same time, lost none of the meanings that had accrued to it during its secular use" (TP xvi).

number of theologians who were all working at approximately the same time and in the same geographical area" (Davies 1991, 93). Most of the terms which we think of as distinctively Eckhartian were appropriated from previous thinkers and given their own meaning in Eckhart's work. For example, Boethius refers to a "spark" which may have influenced Eckhart's use of the term (*Consolation* 3.11.27). Conceptually, Eckhart's listeners may have been familiar with quite similar ideas in the work of Dietrich of Freiburg.[27] Even the birth of the word in the soul, the concept that drew the most attention at his trial, was a used by early Christians to describe baptism and is found in Gregory of Nyssa and the Greek Fathers (Brient 2002, 172; McGinn 1989, 75). Similarly, the desert (*einöde*) and wilderness (*wüste*) were used by others in the late medieval Rhineland school of mystics in apophatic contexts (Dietrich 1994, 31).

1.2.1 Physics and being, compressing the hierarchy, in quantum

Eckhart saw all creatures as having their being directly from God and that their being belongs only to God. This means that God is present in his entirety in the smallest part of even the lowest of creatures. By the fifteenth century, individual things would come to be seen as infinitely rich. By endowing each created thing with the richness of God's infinity in its being, Eckhart helps to lay the groundwork necessary for this development (Brient 2002, 184).

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[27] "There are many echoes in particular of Dietrich of Freiberg in Eckhart's thought: the primacy of knowing over being, the wholly dynamic and transcendent character of our intellectual substance and, not least, the belief that we are at our core linked in an immediacy to God through the principle of participation in his divine knowledge" (Davies 1991, 92).

In a rare passage where Eckhart addresses physics[28], he says “To be set in motion denotes an imperfection. Accordingly, the more perfect something is, the less it participates in motion and place … whatever has existence fully is immutable, for example God. But whatever has only a part of existence is mutable” (q.4; Maurer 1974, 68-9). Eckhart says very little of cosmology. By this nearly complete omission of what is otherwise a staple in medieval theology, we should understand that his references to cosmology and physics are subsidiary to his concern for the overall Neoplatonic metaphysics of flow, whereby the created world flows from God and ultimately returns to God. In other words, even on the rare occasions when he mentions physical or cosmological principles, they are used primarily as examples and alternative approaches to his primary themes. For example, Eckhart tells us “in every superior being there exists [every inferior] as such; and insofar as the former exists, to that extent does the latter. So there must be an order in nature, which consists in nothing else other than the relation of superior to inferior. Water, for example, moves downward and upward through the motion of the moon, and that motion is swifter and more delightful” (q.5; Maurer 1974, 74)[29].

1.2.2 Esse est deus: Eckhart’s ontology

We are never far from God in Eckhart’s ontology. We must remember that although Eckhart refers to greater and lesser degrees of existence which implies an ontological hierarchy, the connection between the individual beings and God for Eckhart is one that

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[28] As Maurer observed, “The fourth Question raises a problem in the philosophy of nature: Can there be motion without a terminus or end? This is an unusual topic for Eckhart. To judge from his literary remains, he seems to have almost completely ignored this branch of philosophy” (Maurer 1974, 24).

[29] Eckhart makes the same point in a similarly offhanded manner in referring to Ptolemy in his *Commentary on Exodus* (n.152; TP 92).

is without intermediaries. Eckhart cites Augustine (*Conf.* I.3) and says that God is immediately present in His entirety to each thing (q.5; Maurer 1974, 98). It is on this point that we see a divergence in rhetoric between Eckhart and Augustine, as will be taken up in chapter seven. Eckhart goes further and tells us that it works this way with substantial forms as well, "The soul with its whole self, without an intermediary, is immediately present to, and informs, the whole living body" (q.5; Maurer 1974, 99). This recalls the common maxim, used by Eriugena and known to Augustine and Boethius: *omne quod in deo est deus est* - all that is in God, is God (Duclow & Dietrich 122).

Eckhart's description also recalls Eriugena. As Duclow describes Eriugena's view, "Prior to all differentiation, the causes coincide in the Logos as the one 'Word, Reason and Cause' of all things. … 'all things in the Word are not only eternal, but are actually the very Word Itself'" (Duclow 2006, 57; citing *Periphyseon* 641A). Thus, an individual thing is a being insofar as we may speak of limits to its existence which puts it further from God while at the same time, it is never separate from God in its being. In the *Book of Causes* XXIII §180, we read that things receive the first cause in proportion to their capacity to receive it: "by 'being' I mean only 'knowledge,' for to the extent that the thing knows the First Creative Cause to that extent it receives of it and takes delight in it" (Brand 2012, 39). This defines the hierarchy and makes existence the differentiating principle by the proportion to which things are receptive to the God (Maurer 1974, 100).

For Eckhart, however, the being that God gives does not become the creature's exclusive property. God does not depart from it or separate from it. Yet it is also part of what the creature is. This makes the individual both created and divine. Eckhart

straddles this difficulty with his *in quantum* principle: insofar as (*in quantum*) man is created, he is ephemeral and imperfect; insofar as he understands, he is just, he is good, etc., there is no separation between him and the divine. Eckhart thus preserves the rhetoric of Platonic ontology while simultaneously raising individual beings to God by way of their being which is God's Being. Individual existences, as imperfections, become rather like the traditional Platonic theodicy: their lack/imperfection has no existence just as there is no Platonic Form of evil. This is a natural consequence of Eckhart's compression of the hierarchy: all Forms less than God himself obtain a kind of phantasmal quality and do not have their own existence apart from the oneness of Being. As Eckhart says, individual things are thereby "created nothings"[30]. For Eckhart, we might say, even though he preserves a kind of hierarchy, individual things are simply not as substantially individual. This is less a matter of theological reasoning than of rhetorical implication. The net effect is that he blurs the boundary between the individual and God.

Eckhart is at pains to limit *being* to refer only to individual beings of the created world (q.2; Maurer 1974, 52). This makes being not convertible with God in the same way that justice and goodness are. Thus, existence is God (esse est deus) insofar as all beings have their being from God. It is not the case for Eckhart that God is existence (Deus est esse) insofar as God is not the existence of any created thing qua created.

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[30] Maurer describes the situation like this: if God alone is existence, how do creatures exist? "Creatures exist within existence, that is to say within God and through the divine existence. Eckhart's justification of this bold stand engages him in some of his most abstruse metaphysical speculation" (Maurer 1974, 33-34).

God is created things qua Being (existence in general) but God is not created things qua created things (existence in particular)[31]. As Eckhart says, “existence is through itself and by itself the principle of distinction [between things]” (Maurer 1974, 100). Even though this is the case, individual things still look rather like phantasms since, as he says, inferior things (effects) owe everything to the superior things and this is the order of the world.

Albertus Magnus says that something exists when it stands outside of its cause[32]. So, existing things are caused things. God is not caused, so he cannot be defined by existence. In other words, Eckhart has St. Albert and Henry of Ghent as allies in opposing Aquinas in this way on being. Eckhart takes the further step and reverses Aquinas by saying that ‘existence is God’ (*esse est deus*) instead of Aquinas’ ‘God is existence’ (*deus est esse*), a move that is not so radical and new when considering contemporaries other than Aquinas.

This is a quintessentially mystical move. As we will see in looking at Robert Forman’s ideas in a later chapter, mysticism can be thought of as the progressive erasure of our assumptions and conceptual distinctions by ‘unthinking’ and methodically challenging the foundations of our worldview and way of being in the world. I would add

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[31] This point does not have widespread agreement since Eckhart’s *esse est deus* thesis appears to be in tension with his contention that the being of all things is God. I believe the tension can be resolved by appealing to the difference between the kind of existence that differentiates things (being) and existence in general (Being). God has nothing to do with differentiation and the descent into multiplicity implied by separating particular beings. That is, to exist as a particular thing (being) implies a falling away from God and is thus not God. However, to exist at all is to participate in existence in general (Being). The idea of Being adds nothing to God while the idea of being would add something and thus cannot be God.

[32] In doing this, he breaks apart existence into *ex* + *sistere*, meaning ‘to stand out’ as in, to stand outside of its cause, in the same way that Richard of St. Victor did (Maurer 1974, 17).

color to this idea by way of another metaphor: the assumptions and concepts that previously looked real and substantial to us are progressively shown in mystical writing to *evanesce* by losing their ultimately illusory reification. The thing that we previously thought to be so certain and so real still remains - but it remains as a kind of phantasm that no longer has existence in itself, from itself and through itself, as Eckhart might say[33]. This evanescence is the mechanism by which we may understand Eckhart's notion of *detachment* as well. Our attachment to 'images' has strength that derives from our assessment of the substantial and meaningful reality of the images. As the images ontologically deflate and become phantasmal, the habit of attachment naturally atrophies.

With Duns Scotus' treatment of *haecceitas* in mind, we can see Eckhart commenting on contemporary issues in his *Parisian Questions* while also extending the discussion in his characteristic fashion,

> existence belongs to the whole and only to the whole. And because the whole is one, so also is existence one. ... the part does not have existence, for there are many parts, and all are one, for existence is one. Hence the part as such has no existence; but it has existence only through the relation it bears to the whole as to existence. The part, lacking the whole, is non-being, but as related to the whole it has existence (q.5; Maurer 1974, 72-3).

Just as parts have their existence only in the whole, individual beings have their existence only in God. Things that are parts, accidents or effects owe their existence to

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[33] This trope is one that will be explored in greater detail in chapter seven.

their cause, which in the end is God. Eckhart tells us that “in each mixed body there is only one substantial form” (q.5; Maurer 1974, 71). If the soul is the Form of the body and the soul is the image of God who is its exemplar, we once again see no distance between individual rational souls and God insofar as they are considered in their essence (i.e., as rational). For Aquinas, being is the perfection of all things, even the forms (Maurer 1974, 35). For Eckhart, God is beyond being. Rational souls are divine insofar as they understand. We know this since understanding is indeterminate and is not a being (q.3; Maurer 1974, 54) and since “Understanding is a sort of conformity to God or deification, for God is understanding itself and not existence” and it is uncreatable (q.3; Maurer 1974, 59). Understanding is superior, given the principle that one thing is better than another if it “is the exact reason why we are pleasing to God. This is understanding: one is pleasing to God precisely because he understands, for if knowledge is taken away absolutely nothing is left” (q.3; Maurer 1974, 59). This is Eckhart’s understanding of the *imago dei* and the way in which mankind straddles the divide between the creaturely and the divine: with understanding. In this way, he appears thoroughly Dominican.

It is worth observing that by pushing toward a compression of the celestial hierarchy by emphasizing God’s presence without mediation, Eckhart is part of the mounting opposition to much of what was traditional teaching at that time. Dionysius and Proclus (by way of the *Book of Causes*) both conceived of the world in terms of an ontological hierarchy. Eckhart can say (and does say, pointing to the standard authorities) that he does as well, though his continued emphasis on the lack of intermediaries and creatures as created nothings is a characteristically scholastic clever

middle ground between the Neoplatonic celestial hierarchy and Ockham's radical pruning of the ontological tree.

1.2.3 The active life: man as creator

Eckhart's emphasis on individual action, even with total humility and obedience, is perhaps the clearest evidence of how his rhetoric prepares for and presages later developments in the conception of the individual. Spontaneous activity can happen in proportion to an individual's ability to self-generate action. At the extreme, such an individual would be completely individuated, completely isolated from other individuals (as with Leibniz' monads and Valentin Weigel's account of spontaneous individual action; see Heimsoeth 1994, 208). We can only say that a thing *acts* rather than being *acted upon* when that thing is sufficiently individuated. Recall Aristotle's conception (since many of Eckhart's contemporaries would have had Aristotle in mind) of motion which is when potential becomes action. Turning potential to action is one way of speaking of God's act of creation since it is self-moving, not influenced from the outside. Similarly, man's free will is self-moving and his reason can be as well, for Eckhart, if he strips himself of all the created nothings that prevent his will from becoming God's will. His is a new theology of action, made possible by man sharing God's divinity. That the individual is still spoken of as individual throughout gives us reason to think that Eckhart thinks about man as a *creator*. Indeed, this is the way that Eckhart speaks about man in Sermon 52:

> For in God's own being where God is above being and above distinction, there I myself was, there I willed myself and knew my own self to create this man.

> Therefore I am my own cause with respect to my being, which is eternal, and not with respect to my becoming, which is temporal.[34]

This represents a *maximum* of creative capacity since it is God's own creative capacity. In other words, we should not be disappointed that Eckhart did not speak of our ability to create mundane things like spoons (to recall one of Cusanus' examples) since he spoke of man as being a creator in the highest sense. That may be too simple, however, since Eckhart did not consider anything less than God to be a creator, "nothing that is this or that is the first and universal cause of everything, nor does it create" (Maurer 1974, 101). Cusanus was, after all, working with an epistemology that evolved in the century after Eckhart.

Up to the Late Medieval period, any knowledge that went beyond sense perception was assumed to be knowledge of the universal. Since our minds are well matched to what we perceive, there is no need for approximate knowledge. As Blumenberg tells the story in the *Legitimacy*, the idea of the *deus absconditus* resulted in the legitimation of theoretical curiosity and the unknowability of the material world (knowledge only through approximation). "The modern age began, not indeed as the epoch of the death of God, but as the epoch of the hidden God, the *deus absconditus* - and a hidden God is *pragmatically* as good as dead" (LMA 346). Eckhart again represents a preparatory stage for this. Although Eckhart did not go so far as to speculate on knowledge by approximation, such thinking was facilitated in his wake with

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[34] *wan in dem selben wesene gotes, dâ got ist obe wesene und ob underschiede, dâ was ich selbe, dâ wolte ich mich selben und bekante mich selben ze machenne disen menschen. Her umbe sô bin ich mîn selbes sache nâch mînem wesene, daȝ êwic ist, und niht nâch mînem gewerdenne, daȝ zîtlich ist* (Sermon 52, DW II:502.7-503.2)

his anthropology of man as divine and as creator. Approximate knowledge became a possibility with the fading of the pregivenness of the natural world. This transition did not occur without resistance, of course. Blumenberg quips that “It is characteristic of such situations that every defense of the existing state of affairs goes in the wrong direction” and, finally, that such defenses “miscarried profoundly” for the transition to the modern age (LMA 346, 347). This is not actually all that surprising. If the change is already in the air, the expressions of defenses will necessarily include the change in their thinking, thus appearing to and in fact contributing to the opposite of their intentions. In Eckhart’s case, we have less of a defense than we have a deemphasizing by omission. The medieval views of man and knowledge constituted part of the inertia that had to be overcome to enable the emergence of the modern age. Eckhart participated in this transition in two subtle ways. First, he omitted or downplayed elements of the medieval worldview that were later to be overcome. Second, his anthropology pushed in a direction that was compatible with the changes that were happening.

The transition from adequate to approximate knowledge happened because of the change in the conception of the individual. If the soul can take any form and knowing is being like the known (Aristotle), then adequate knowledge is implied. However, knowing is limited to mere approximation when the soul itself cannot be all things. It cannot therefore be like them and so it must approximate them. Eckhart stands squarely on the medieval side of this so far. However, once the particulars of the natural world are enriched, the soul is no longer assumed to be able to become them through knowledge, as it was for Aristotle. Thus, the move toward the intensive infinitization of particulars also enables modern conceptions of approximate knowledge. Since

Eckhart's rhetoric of the individual enables him to speak of the individual as individual even with God's Being, we may recognize Eckhart as an intermediary step between the medieval and modern notions of self, with the concomitant consequences for epistemology.

Eckhart is part of the clearing of one of the most significant roadblocks to the modern conception of creativity: the idea that man cannot produce anything, that God is the only rightful possessor of active intellect. Eckhart himself would not have been interested in exploring the consequences of this for worldly creation of things (like Cusanus' spoon maker) because, for Eckhart, all worldly preoccupation of that kind is simply a species of attachment. Eckhart enabled thinking about man as creator because of his metaphorics, not because of his explicit theological arguments, just as we see with the intensive infinitization of particulars. His mysticism was fundamentally traditional, while his metaphorics contained important elements that facilitated the transition to a new era of thinking about what humanity is. Although Eckhart did not argue for the legitimacy of curiosity and approximate knowledge of the natural world, he spoke in a way that cleared the way for more modern developments.

Eckhart does not speak much at all of knowledge of the natural world, practically eschewing this application of the topic of knowledge altogether. This may be a distant echo of Roger Bacon's important separation of moral knowledge which is reserved for God and natural knowledge (LMA 387). In those terms, Eckhart only concerns himself with moral knowledge. Though he does not reassert this division (which surely would have been a topic of conversation in his university education), by addressing only the divine, moral knowledge, Eckhart downplays the significance of knowledge of the

physical world. This indirectly helps Bacon's cause and furthers the development toward modern thought. Blumenberg tells this story in terms of God's truth receding from view as his absolute transcendence is overemphasized, which results in humanity reverting to pursuing its own truth about the natural world. Contra Blumenberg, we can describe the situation in the late medieval world as Socrates was described by Cicero: "Socrates was the first who called philosophy down from the heavens"[35]. As the ontological hierarchy was compressed by Eckhart and Ockham, though in different ways[36], the sphere compresses to a circle and the poles become the center, to borrow an image from Eckhart's *Sermo* XXIV,2. Man 'rises' in a manner of speaking as the hierarchy compresses.

1.2.4 Pseudonymity and *auctoritas*

To round out the history of the individual and bring into focus the way in which medieval authors thought of originality and creative work, we must address the question of pseudonymity. First and foremost, pseudonymous writing was an entirely different phenomenon in the ancient world than it is today. When we think about the use of a pseudonym, the most obvious things that we can say are a result of our valuation of the individual as a meaningful entity. Being possessed by a god (or by the Holy Spirit, in Christianity, so as to let the Father speak through you, as with Augustine) effaced the identity of the person doing the speaking as to render his or her identity relatively unimportant and entirely transparent to the deity. In other words, they did not assume as

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[35] *Socrates autem primus philosophiam devocavit e caelo* (Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* V.10).
[36] Eckhart worked to compress the Neoplatonic hierarchy while Ockham pruned the Aristotelian hierarchy. Though both worked to modify scholastic ontologies, they worked against the two different major branches of scholastic thought at the time.

we often do that a person claiming to speak in the name of a god could only be *merely* a person claiming to speak in the name of a god. Instead, the divine was understood in a way that allowed for personal identity to be effaced. This in particular is something that we moderns, I believe, have a lot of trouble relating to and understanding.

So when we hear McGinn say that “The apocalypses are written texts claiming to be both inspired and ancient, claims based on the use of pseudonymity, that is, ascribing a piece to a seer or holy man of the past. Thus, an apocalypse is a new book pretending to be an old one,” we may be too easily inclined to sympathize with McGinn’s flippant use of the term “pretending” and its concomitant connotations (McGinn 1992, 12) . Given my description above, my divergence from McGinn on this passage may be plain: “Pseudonymity, common in both Jewish and non-Jewish literature of the time, indicates a belief that revelation was in the distant past and is fixed in written texts, and it also implies that those who sought to identify themselves with the heroes of Israel's past felt that they could claim an equally inspired authority for writings issued in the seer’s name” (McGinn 1992, 13). I would change this and say instead that it is not merely a matter of a people seeking “to identify themselves with the heroes of Israel’s past.” It is that their inspiration was *on par* with and thereby *essentially identical with* the past figures. Questions of identity are moot since the function and significance are identical. In other words, if one speaks from the same spiritual place as a famous figure, then it makes sense to do away with pretenses and say that your words are not your own – they are theirs. Rhetorically, we intuitively understand part of the significance of this readily. If you believe, for example, that the book of *Divine Names* was written by Dionysius the Areopagite, then your reception of it will be colored by your

esteem for that figure and reverence for words that derive from that source. In ministry, Augustine would have been in the best position to recognize and understand (since he was an ex-professor of rhetoric) that the way in which speech is received (the rhetorical situation) is greatly affected by the use of pseudonymity. The problem with the modern intuitions is that we tend to think of pseudonymity as a kind of lie. Rhetorically, there is an important sense in which the objective truth of what is said (I use this phrase only to emphasize the absurdity) is secondary to the effect that the words have on the listener. In other words, if a sermon causes one to realize as Aquinas did that regarding words and concepts, “all is straw” compared to the experience that was had, then what difference does it make if the statements made were true? If the experience is what counts, then the means are mere tools. In fact, Eckhart made use of this sort of rhetorical benefit by his (amusing) trope of saying “A master once said” when referring to himself. There is also a sense in which philosophical dialogues (Plato and Kierkegaard in particular) usurp some of this power and leverage the same phenomenon. Theatrical performances as well involve a setting aside of identity and temporary assumption of another persona for the purposes of a particular rhetorical and dramatic end. This is easily underestimated and misunderstood now. Joseph Campbell tells a story about this in his discussion of the metaphor “John is a deer” being different from the simile “John is like a deer.” Our conflation of the two derives from our all too facile assumption that personal identity is something fixed and permanent, incapable of being any more than figuratively superseded for a time.

1.3 Conclusion

By presenting the historical narrative in this way, we should see that: 1) the idea of what the self is ontologically and where its boundaries are with respect to the divine was changing during Eckhart's time, and 2) while Eckhart cited authorities who indeed did express the same themes in their theology, the rhetorical differences between Eckhart and those authorities may be explained in large part due to the changes in the notion of the individual.

With the historical background in place, we are now ready to describe the primary tool that will be used in analyzing Eckhart's rhetoric: Hans Blumenberg's metaphorology. Since analyzing rhetoric can be as unfamiliar as questioning the conception of the self, Blumenberg will help to guide us in a productive direction for thinking about understanding the historical position and significance of Eckhart's rhetoric.

CHAPTER 2

HANS BLUMENBERG'S METAPHOROLOGY

If I must point to individual pieces of Blumenberg's thought that are useful for the present study, then the clear choice is to appropriate his metaphorological tools. This cannot and should not be accomplished by excising them from their philosophical context. This is not only because the context is essential to understanding them. It is because Blumenberg's thought pushes us as readers in a direction that is more generally useful and not easily found in other accounts of the history of philosophy. Blumenberg insists that the ground of conceptual thought is not itself conceptual. In other words, our attempts to answer fundamental philosophical questions have been frustrated not because we lack the appropriate conceptual apparatus, but rather because the questions themselves point to the nonconceptual ground of thinking that makes conceptual thought possible. The idea that our world of concepts does not have epistemological primacy and cannot thereby serve as a sound foundation for claims to truth is a part of Blumenberg's thought that is fundamentally compatible with the direction of thought that Eckhart implored his audience to go. Blumenberg also pushed for a rehabilitation of rhetoric, conscientiously pitting his rhetorical theory against Plato and others throughout the history of philosophy who have opposed rhetoric as not being philosophically substantive. Eckhart's modus operandi is to point beyond the conceptual by means of rhetoric. The rhetoric itself is experiential, compelling his audience to proceed through certain steps of action and thought. This cannot be boiled down to

concepts without losing the experiential component. This makes his rhetoric a proper object of philosophical study. Further, Blumenberg and Eckhart seem to have had similar views on the philosophically substantive *pragmatic function* of rhetoric vis-à-vis nonconceptuality. With that similarity in mind, we must also note a dissimilarity in that Eckhart's nonconceptual ground is mystical unity, a kind of metaphysical absolute that Blumenberg does not recognize. Though Blumenberg must be left aside at a certain point when discussing mysticism, his overall trajectory of thought is in harmony with the first steps that mystics exhort us to take away from our usual worldly habits of conceptual thinking. For both Blumenberg and Eckhart, the conceptual is ontologically posterior to the nonconceptual and therefore the conceptual is understood as a pragmatic tool which is capable of carrying our thought over to the nonconceptual.

To situate Blumenberg's metaphorological tools within his overall philosophical enterprise, it will be helpful to connect his ideas with his major influences. He makes a provocative statement to close *Shipwreck with Spectator*, "the sea evidently contains material other than what has already been used. Where can it come from, in order to give courage to the ones who are beginning anew? Perhaps from earlier shipwrecks?" (SS 78-9). This is made more explicit in his discussion of how science is ineluctably metaphorical, where he quotes Otto Neurath as saying, "Our actual situation is as if we were on board a ship on the open sea, and it were necessary to replace different parts of the ship during the journey" (CCR 89). Perhaps we are to infer that Blumenberg's own philosophical enterprise must likewise be built from pieces taken from previous systems. In fact, if we look at his description of the current uses of the shipwreck metaphor, we should notice that Blumenberg's own philosophy fits well with the version

of self and world orientation that current metaphors serve. While he was intensely aware of the implications of being historically situated, “his usual oblique manner” often precludes his overtly making claims and connections that are nonetheless clearly implied (Adams 162). For example, in his 1971 essay “Observations on Metaphors” he explicitly talks about ‘paradigm’ as a metaphor but nowhere mentions his own use of it in *Paradigms for a Metaphorology* where the word was centrally important (Adams 162). Fortunately, it is possible to briefly sketch the skeleton of Blumenberg’s philosophical project even though he resisted the “barbarous nakedness” of unornamented[1] expressions of philosophical system building that is “the characteristic stylistic feature of [contemporary academic publications]” (PM 47).

After providing a concise depiction of Blumenberg’s overall philosophical framework, his principle influences will be discussed and tied to the elements of that framework. This will provide a sound foundation for the next section of this chapter, which will describe his metaphorological tools that will be used in analyzing Eckhart’s rhetoric. Finally, the point of departure from Blumenberg will be laid out. It will be shown that although there are important differences between my use of Blumenberg and his own work, the divergence is limited to an aspect of the discussion that does not preclude the general applicability of his thought to Eckhart’s rhetoric. In fact, the contrast with Blumenberg occurs at a sufficiently subtle level such that the process of describing that point itself will provide a useful direction of thought for the remainder of

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[1] Blumenberg opposed the philosophical view of rhetoric as ornament. Since he likewise avoided unornamented expression in his own writing, it seems fair to conclude that he implied that his own writing was ultimately metaphorical. While this may be true for his larger enterprise and is a tantalizing possibility, there is also clearly a benefit to boiling down his thought into a small system of ideas and concepts, even if this reduction is purely pedagogical and may serve as an introduction only.

the analysis. It will also facilitate understanding where some commentators of Eckhart have taken a wrong turn, which will be taken up in the next chapter.

2.1 The philosophical backdrop of Blumenberg's metaphorology

Starting at the beginning, in *Work on Myth*, Blumenberg puts forth a necessarily provisional, speculative story about human origins. I will present an expanded version of that here, including important details from some of his other works. Explaining the sources from which these elements derive will be instrumental in understanding the position of metaphor in Blumenberg's thought.

> As the first humans moved from the trees to the openness of the savannah, they were cast into a position of anxiety. This anxiety resulted from their relative physical defenselessness and their lack of instincts that were appropriate to the new environment. They took up weapons with their hands, which were freed by their upright posture, and used those weapons to overcome physical deficiencies by fighting at a *distance*. Similarly, early humans developed culture to overcome the instinctual deficiencies and likewise to put the fearful unknown at a conceptual distance. Once it was at a safe distance, the representations of it could become aesthetic objects, retaining interest in part because of the persistence of the fear latent within them. From this point, human evolution was driven by culture rather than biology.
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> The fundamental ground of thought is unknowable and mysterious. Even without knowing its origin, we can at least see that the *function* of conceptual thought is to guide behavior. Our consciousness is constituted by the coherence of our world orientation. This demands that we make the world familiar to

> overcome the anxiety that comes from the threat of the unknown. Ritual, which is quintessentially behavioral, first addresses this need, followed by myth, which supports and justifies ritual without the rigid constraint of exact copying. With anxiety held at bay, aesthetic interest can be added as well to myth. The myths that meet the challenge of overcoming anxiety get passed on. Properly functioning myths make things unquestionable. When they no longer fully function in this way and anxiety comes to be felt in the form of questions that need answers, metaphor arises. Metaphors are akin to myth in function, but they are consciously created devices. Typical conceptual thought involves using concepts with familiar rational relations that remain within the usual domain of their ideas: fire heats things and cooks food. Metaphors create conceptual disharmony by connecting otherwise unrelated domains: there is a fire in my heart. By connecting dissimilar domains, metaphors can allude to experiences and abstractions that are too complex for normal concepts or to the nonconceptual ground that makes conceptual thought possible and comprises the background of our lived experience. Since we must maintain coherence of our world orientation, we are motivated to resolve sources of disharmony like metaphor.

Let us now unpack this story. Knowing that Blumenberg participates in the tradition of German philosophical anthropology and that he takes many of his cues from Husserl (beginning with his dissertation in 1950) goes a long way toward explaining his otherwise puzzling use of terms and assumptions. Blumenberg also regularly responds to his predecessors and contemporary critics without directly naming them. He further

borrows some of the assumptions and technical vocabulary of Husserl's phenomenology without providing inline definitions of the terms. He assumes a great deal of his readers.

One assumption that structures his thought is that lived experience has a nonconceptual foundation which comprises the "substructure of thought" (PM 5). Throughout *Paradigms*, Blumenberg makes his pragmatic aim clear. He explicitly says that metaphors function by guiding thought rather than relating to a particular conception of truth. Consequently, Blumenberg's own speculative narratives should be understood as 'provisional' insofar as their goal is pragmatic and also to indicate that other narratives might be more useful toward this end[2]. Where his rhetoric is not explicitly pragmatic or provisional, we should perhaps infer that a stronger claim is being made.

Such is the case with his notion of the 'absolutism of reality.' Though Blumenberg is generally skeptical of historical constants, especially in the *Legitimacy*, the anxiety that we experience as a result of being forced to confront a threatening and unknown reality (like Heidegger's *thrownness*) is the common backdrop for all experience. His location of *Angst* so close to the foundation of what it is to be human also recalls

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[2] When Blumenberg calls his story to begin LTW a "protohistory," there is an echo of his discussion of Descartes' "provisional" knowledge which opens *Paradigms*. Though Nicholls rightly connects Blumenberg's acceptance of speculative narratives to Freud, it is perhaps also possible to connect his provisional narratives to Descartes' "rushing ahead" and recognize that by rushing ahead of what is known or even knowable, the provisional stories *guide thought* and prepare the way for later progress. Interestingly, Eckhart makes a similar move (though certainly with a different metaphysical backdrop) in Sermon 3, *Nunc Scio Vere*. There, he says, "knowledge rushes ahead of [understanding], rushes ahead and breaks through, so that God's only-begotten Son can be born" (*bekantnisse diu* [Vernünfticheit] *loufet vor, si vürloufet und durchbrichet, daz dâ geborn wirt gotes einborner sun*. DW I:49.1-2. Later in the same sermon, he reiterates the point, saying that "knowledge pushes forward and breaks through," *dringet und brichet durch.* DW I:52.9-10).

Heidegger (see Nicholls p.24 and ch.4). Though most creatures are well suited to their environments and can get by unthinkingly and thereby move by instincts that fit well with their environments, man is a “creature of deficiencies” (*Mängelwesen*) and must find other means, principally by way of culture and reason (AAR 429). The ‘creature of deficiencies’ idea reveals his own lineage in philosophical anthropology, tracing most directly to Arnold Gehlen (1940), perhaps to Herder and, ultimately, to Plato’s *Protagoras* (see Nicholls p.16 and ch.2). One might say that from the onset man is not at home in his environment and must artificially create familiarity and the comfort that comes with understanding one’s place in the environment and knowing what to do in it. As David Adams points out, Blumenberg flirts with the absolute by providing us with a likely story, indulging his natural curiosity for the starting point (*terminus a quo*) of humanity. We should keep in mind the significance of this being a “likely” story or one that has verisimilitude (truth-likeness), for reasons that will become clear upon looking more closely at his treatment of the metaphorics of truth in *Paradigms*. His willingness to provide an origin narrative also contrasts curiously with his debt to Ernst Cassirer’s functionalist philosophical anthropology, though Blumenberg does share this propensity with others, like Schelling, in the history of philosophical anthropology. Blumenberg generally sides with Cassirer, who focused on the products (*terminus ad quem*) of human history rather than their origins, in contrast to Heidegger’s concern with the question of being and his explicit focus on metaphysics. Blumenberg’s speculative account of human origins should be understood as a kind of response to the well-known debate between Heidegger and Cassirer at Davos in 1929, where Heidegger’s concern with the *terminus a quo* directly clashed with Cassirer’s focus on the *terminus ad quem*.

While Blumenberg is closer to Cassirer than Heidegger, his willingness to tell such a speculative story of human origins may locate him between Cassirer and Heidegger. His speculative story can also be understood as a response to Husserl. Blumenberg's dissertation argued that Husserl's phenomenology failed because it did not see how deeply history ran into being itself (see Nicholls 103). That is, we cannot 'bracket out' our tie to history, a point that Heidegger emphasized. This is a significant objection to Husserl since, if it holds, Husserl's attempt to establish philosophy on firm ground fails.

Though Heidegger expressed an affinity for Eckhart and looked for a metaphysical ground, Blumenberg by contrast thinks of our need for orientation in the world as a pragmatic concern, one that constitutes an effective "stance" that implies behavior (PM 126). Our orientation to the world, both felt and reasoned, is a "leap into the void" and is ineluctably mysterious, as Robert Savage describes it, rather than being grounded in divine unity or something like Schelling's notion of the Absolute (PM 131; see also Nicholls 139). This lack of metaphysical grounding explains why Blumenberg interprets history without regard for metaphysical absolutes. Such points of grounding are, for Blumenberg and other pragmatically inclined thinkers, only supplemental tools that subjects use to meet their needs. If the individual has primacy, then the talk of a metaphysical absolute like divine unity is just one possibility among others. But if the absolute has primacy, then the very possibility of conceptual thought, and indeed of multiplicity in general, is posterior to the absolute. It is the difference between a conception of an individual who collects many truths and a truth *in which* an individual lives. As we will see later, since the subject always has primacy for Blumenberg, it more generally implies a misinterpretation of thinkers like Eckhart, for whom such

metaphysical grounding is prior to the individual. Insofar as we can talk of a subject who experiences, however, Blumenberg's ideas are most useful.

As we continue to follow his historical narrative, myth expresses and reinforces our orientation to the world. Crucially, this level is fundamentally *nonconceptual* for Blumenberg. It is the experiential base, the "substructure of thought," which makes conceptual thinking possible (PM 5, cf. PM 139). When speaking of myth, we can sensibly speak of orientation and fulfilling needs. Thinking in terms of questions and answers is foreign to myth (SS *92*, WOM 126). This constitutes Blumenberg's response to other theorists of myth who, like Cassirer, relegated myth to a prescientific stage, describing it as (badly) attempting to explain the world in a way commensurate with what science does.

Blumenberg sees Thales' "all is water" idea as a turning point since it presupposes a question in need of answering[3] (SS 92). As myths acquire meaning and content by mingling with reason and we begin thinking in terms of questions and answers, Blumenberg calls such ideas *metaphors* (PM 119). Absolute metaphors point to the same nonconceptual ground and pragmatically guide thought by providing self and world orientation. As Blumenberg describes the difference, "The difference between myth and 'absolute metaphor' would here be a purely genetic one: myth bears the sanction of its primordial, unfathomable origin, its divine or inspirative ordination, whereas metaphor can present itself as a figment of the imagination, needing only to disclose a possibility of understanding in order for it to establish its credentials" (PM 78).

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[3] Nicholls (2015) tells us that he and Robert Segal (1999) have challenged this, claiming that myth also 'answers' questions in a certain sense. Blumenberg already recognizes this, however, in saying that "[myths] make things unquestionable" (WOM 126, as cited by Nicholls p.19).

The difference is “genetic” (recall the connection to Husserl’s layered account) because myth and absolute metaphor serve the same *function* for different historical circumstances. This makes metaphors something “late and derived” and not ubiquitous (SS 88). Again, following Cassirer, historical continuity is found in terms of *function* rather than *substance*.

Using Blumenberg’s terminology from the *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, functional continuity is described in terms of *reoccupation* (*Umbesetzung*) rather than *transposition* (*Umsetzung*) (LMA 65, as cited by Nicholls 18). This distinction is at work in Blumenberg’s central thesis in the *Legitimacy*: the modern age’s thought is legitimate because it was a reoccupation of function rather than a transposition of substance. This enables him to deny Karl Löwith’s claim that modernity illegitimately appropriated and ‘secularized’ medieval theology.

Blumenberg’s conception of metaphor is bounded on one side by what is nonsensical and on the other by what is symbolic and can be explained purely by concepts. As he says, “Metaphor requires each of its elements to be interpreted according to its function” and not its substantial content, “otherwise it lapses into *allegory*" (PM 126). Metaphor, therefore, identifies the area of meaningful nonconceptuality between nonsense and concepts that Blumenberg says that the History of Concepts (*Begriffsgeschichte*) has ignored because it “is constitutively incapable of conceptualizing nonconceptuality” (Blumenberg’s “Observations on Metaphors” 163 as cited by Savage, PM 138). The content or “truth” of the nonconceptual referent of absolute metaphor “is essentially *pragmatic*: it induces an attitude, a stance or behavior that may be classified with broad generality as ‘mystical’”

in Wittgenstein's sense of ‘mystical’ as being unsayable (PM 126). When an idea comes to serve the purpose of providing a point of orientation and guides thought, Blumenberg calls this metaphorization (PM 116). He is careful to avoid implications of historical progress, however, and clearly states that metaphors can transition to become concepts and vice versa (PM 99).

2.2 Blumenberg on metaphor

Blumenberg sets his program in opposition to Descartes (and implicitly, Husserl), being emblematic of those who purport to put an end to rhetorical ornament and build a firm foundation for entirely conceptual knowledge (PM 1). In contrast with this indubitable conceptual foundation for truth, Descartes spoke of rushing ahead (*précipitation*) with provisional conjectures before certainty could be established. For Blumenberg, the foundation of our talk of truth is necessarily nonconceptual. Further, he recognizes no firm basis from which we can establish such knowledge. As Adams recognized, Blumenberg changed Kant’s question of “What can we know?” to “What was it that we wanted to know?”(165). Ultimately, Blumenberg’s metaphorology helps us to understand why we wanted what we wanted to know (SS 82). Blumenberg takes his cue from Kant and Cassirer’s use of Kant in *Substance and Function* by insisting upon the importance of the relations between things and the way that metaphor is productively suggestive of such associations (PM 4). Kant calls the reception of immediate, particular experiences ‘intuitions.’ Communicating these experiences to others is a straightforward matter of pointing to empirical examples and recreating the same sense experience for the other person. To communicate abstract ideas, we must communicate the ‘schemata’ that describe the mechanics and relations that constitute

the ideas. Again, the other person pieces together the relations that comprise the schemata and recreates the experience of understanding the abstract idea. In both cases, the content is straightforwardly communicable to another person since they depend on existing ideas and ordinary sense experiences. Kant allows for other things, however, that cannot be represented adequately by an 'intuition.' Such things, he says, must be communicated through representations that have the "'form of the reflection' in common with the intended referent" (PM 4). Since the content cannot be communicated straightforwardly, we must provide cues that incite a kind of thought that is similar to the desired understanding. Such things, which Kant calls 'symbols' and Blumenberg equates with metaphors, accomplish a "transportation of the reflection" by transporting (recalling that, in Greek, *μεταφορά* comes from *μεταφέρω* which is *μετά* "across" + *φέρω* "I carry") the recipient to a new experience of understanding.

Metaphors grab our attention by disrupting the "normal harmony" of our understanding of the world (SS 82). Blumenberg borrows this notion of *harmony* from Husserl. Our minds work to build and maintain a 'harmonious' view of the world where each element fits with the others to form a complete and coherent picture. As Blumenberg describes it, for Husserl, a disruption to that harmony "would be fatal for the consciousness whose existence depends on its concern for identity" (SS 83). As Robert Savage says, Blumenberg might agree with Nicholas of Cusa in concluding that the unity of the human mind is constituted by its conjectures (PM 145). Metaphors like Quintillian's *pratum ridet*, "the meadow laughs," create disharmony. We connect the two otherwise separate spheres of landscapes and laughter by way of shared associations and perhaps novel relations. Not just any combination of ideas can be a viable

metaphor however. Using the life-world (*Lebenswelt*), another of Husserl's concepts, Blumenberg tells us, "The life-world must always already have contained relationships … so that metaphor's forcing of consciousness could be endured," or 'tolerated' as he says earlier (SS 84). Since our subsequent understanding of the metaphor comes through a nonconceptual reinterpretation, Blumenberg says that we understand it and restore harmony "by means of a trick of reunderstanding" by thinking the two disparate spheres together (SS 83). Notice that with this description of metaphor, we attempt to unite otherwise disconnected spheres of thought by means of shared associations. However, the impulse to think different ideas together also characterizes our initial inclination for thinking about paradoxes. With some paradoxes, instead of experiencing success in thinking the two ideas together, the conceptual incompatibility of the two creates a more significant disharmony, ultimately pushing us toward a new way of thinking. As we will see, Blumenberg addresses such cases under the heading of "explosive" metaphor (*Sprengmetapher*).

Blumenberg only provided some detail on how metaphor suggests *new* relations. I will expand upon this in chapter six when talking about Eckhart's rhetoric and its ability to inspire new understanding, especially where that new understanding questions Blumenberg's assumptions. In Blumenberg's thought, because metaphors have legitimacy beyond mere ornamentation and provisionality, the imagination that is responsible for their creation likewise has newfound importance. As he says, metaphors imply a reconsideration of the relation between logos and imagination (PM 4, cf. PM 78). Imagination becomes "a catalytic sphere from which the universe of concepts continually renews itself" (PM 4). Given Blumenberg's reverence for Goethe, on this

point we might hear an echo of Goethe's fourth and final age of history as the age of imagination (LMA 380). It is with this idea of rhetoric as genuinely substantive in a way that points toward the nonconceptual ground of thought that Blumenberg's direction of thought facilitates understanding Eckhart's rhetoric. Blumenberg tells us, "The more we move away from the short distance of fulfillible intentionality[4] and orient ourselves toward total horizons that can no longer be traversed and fenced off in our experience, the more impressive the use of metaphors becomes; to that extent, the 'absolute metaphor' is a limit" (SS 84). In other words, the need for and legitimacy of rhetoric increases as we attempt to get at what is most fundamental. This insight will be important when looking in detail at Eckhart's rhetoric. Insofar as the referent of metaphors cannot be understood in terms of our current repertoire of associations that comprise our consciousness, the metaphors must become "more impressive," more *nova et rara*.

In addition to studying the history that metaphors have which chronicles their change in function, Blumenberg intends for the study of metaphor to also include how we display "courage" (*Mut*) when "the mind preempts itself [*selbst voraus*, loosely: rushes ahead of itself] in its images, and how its history is projected in the courage of its conjectures [*Vermutung*]" (PM 5, PZM 13)[5]. As with his other remarks that close chapters, the surprising additional color added by the previously unmentioned idea of 'courage' is revealing. We should understand courage relative to the threat that

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[4] 'Intentionality' should be understood here in Husserl's (and ultimately, Brentano's) sense as a technical term that describes the ineluctable activity and directedness of consciousness of most experiences (see Forman 1999, 70-1 for the relation of this concept to mysticism).

[5] The original text reads: *aber sie will auch faßbar machen, mit welchem Mut sich der Geist in seinem Bildern selbst voraus ist und wie sich in ihm Mut zur Vermutung seine Geschichte entwirft*

metaphors pose to the harmony that sustains and constitutes our consciousness. Further, we should look to his use of the term “significance” (*Bedeutsamkeit*) in *Work on Myth*. Significance “arises as a result of the representation of the relationship between the resistance that the reality opposes to life and the summoning up of energy that enables one to measure up to it” (WOM 75). We are courageous insofar as we muster energy to combat with metaphor the anxiety ensuing from our encounter with the absolutism of reality. Here, as in many other places in Blumenberg’s work, we should notice an implicit value judgment. The courage that we have in creating metaphors and working with them is not only a good thing (courage is a virtue, after all), it is a form of *self-assertion*, the principle quality that defines the transition to the modern world for Blumenberg.

The revision of Blumenberg’s conception of rhetoric that occurred between his 1960 *Paradigms* and the 1971 “Prospect of a Theory of Nonconceptuality” essay expands the role of metaphor. In *Paradigms*, he explains that metaphors were a way of testing “experimental conceptions” since terminology was not yet consolidated (SS 81). Some concepts are empowered as we learn more and can thereby functionally replace old metaphors. However, he tells us that metaphors cannot be solely understood by investigating the difficulties in forming concepts (SS 82). Concepts are not always the desired end product, but rather “connections with the life-world” (SS 81). The connection with Husserl’s life-world also provides a clue to how Blumenberg’s development paralleled Husserl’s. Just as elements of the life-world were not so easily bracketed out for Husserl, so we see that metaphors perform a more foundational function beyond being merely provisional preparations that help to guide thought on the

road to concept formation. As Blumenberg says, metaphors not only facilitate conceptual thinking, they guide thought and provide orientation to the life-world, looking for the "gestalt" of things rather than only their Kantian "form" of reflection (SS 88, 96-7)[6]. In other words, instead of only communicating the "form" or way of thinking that is involved, he now sees metaphors as pointing to foundational elements of the pragmatic stance we take in self and world orientation.

We see a similar line of thought expressed in *The Laughter of the Thracian Woman*, where Blumenberg describes the value of speculative stories and unashamedly provides one even though he flatly says that we can ultimately know nothing of the real circumstances for the origin of theory:

> We will have to continue to do without the protohistory of theory because we cannot know anything about it. … *A* protohistory of theory cannot replace *the* protohistory of theory. It can only recall what has eluded us. Given that this is only *a* protohistory of theory, there could also have been a different one. But not easily would another one have claimed the vacant position with a better fit – and thus claimed it so obstinately. This obstinacy against fading, against merely lasting without value, indicates the 'quality' of the moment that followed thinking itself and does not cease to go after it. It is a story that has stood the test of history. Instead of offering to tell what no one can know, this story can at least offer an account of what sustains the strangeness that something like 'theory' exists at all (LTW vii).

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[6] We have another play on words here since *gestalt* in German also means 'form' or 'shape.'

Clearly, Blumenberg envisions the role of his provisional narrative of the protohistory of theory as performing a function that is similar to metaphor and myth: where his story has “fit” (with needs, in response to the ‘questions’ of our age) and has “obstinacy against fading” insofar as the process of cultural selection will favor it because of its fit. The idea of “lasting without value” is, as the translator notes, an allusion to Heidegger’s notion of the “presence at hand” of a thing that has become useless (LTW vii, note ii). Blumenberg wants to insist that his speculative account of the protohistory of theory obstinately remains *functional* for us due to its “quality,” a Husserlian concept which describes the certainty with which an object appears to us. His story is speculative and necessarily provisional, ‘rushing ahead’ and providing a story about a portion of intellectual history that we ultimately cannot know for certain. It does not matter whether or not we can verify his ‘history’ as having actually happened. The act of telling the story involves us intimately in the consideration of what the conditions *might have been* for the development of theory. This thought experiment at least serves to *guide* thought and provide a sound basis on which one might adopt a *stance* toward the speculative history in the form of understanding or belief. This approach mirrors Freud’s use of “scientific myth,” which we are justified in using “if it proves able to bring coherence and understanding into more and more new regions” (as cited in Nicholls 244). Insofar as such stories rush ahead of concept development and prepare the ground for it, they perform a function similar to what metaphor does. Further, where the understanding engendered by the stories helps to constitute a ‘stance’ and to thereby imply behavior in the form of thinking about the topic, the stories parallel the function of absolute metaphor. This makes Blumenberg’s origin stories *metaphorical*. Blumenberg’s own

stance toward Husserl's genetic account of human origins can be thought of along similar lines: Blumenberg's own genetic story of human origins helps us think about the genesis of the outer layers of human thought. By gaining insight into the outer layers, we may more clearly see the innermost layer, the nonconceptual substructure. His origin stories, therefore, help us to understand thought as metaphorology helps us to understand metaphors. Metaphor, he tells us, cannot be aware of itself without losing its power. Blumenberg implies, however, that the power of his origin stories and metaphorology is instead aided by our insight into the mechanics of thought itself and even into the mechanics of how those stories function to catalyze insight. In other words, unlike metaphor, we do not vitiate the power of Blumenberg's philosophy by examining how it works. This is significant since his origin stories and metaphorological analysis share a similar function with metaphor: they all have value in guiding thought. Blumenberg appropriates Husserl's thought but substantially alters some of his fundamental assumptions. My appropriation of Blumenberg will function similarly.

Having situated the idea of metaphor in Blumenberg's thought, we will now look to describe the different kinds of metaphorological tools that he identifies in *Paradigms* and puts into practice there and in his other works.

2.2.1 Metaphorological tools: absolute metaphor

For Blumenberg, absolute metaphors are "foundational elements" that "resist" conversion back to "authenticity and logicality" (PM 3). Absolute metaphors have substantial nonconceptual referents insofar as they refer to the ground of thought which makes conceptual thinking possible. This is why they cannot be "dissolved into conceptuality" (PM 5). This ground is the substructure of thought, constituting our

orientation to the world and internalization of cultural values. Our understanding of the idea of truth ineluctably points to this ground. Since absolute metaphors are used by different people over time with different nonconceptual referents and potentially different functions, by recognizing the historical continuity of particular metaphors, Blumenberg can chart the history of changes in worldview.

By Blumenberg's account, absolute metaphors emerge as 'answers' to fundamental existential needs that take the form of 'questions.' Notice, of course, that the rhetoric of 'questions' implies that they have 'answers,' which tells us a lot about how Blumenberg sees the transition from myth to metaphor. In the *Legitimacy*, he speaks of the historical continuity of questions. In fact, he goes as far as saying that reoccupation[7] results in having different answers to "identical questions" and involves only a "minimum of identity" in terms of historical continuity (LMA 466)[8]. When questions originally arise, they already have answers. When those answers lose their viability over time, the questions have an inertia or "problem pressure" that allows them to persist,

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[7] There is a real sense in which Blumenberg's rhetoric of reoccupation, for all its value and intellectual interest, can be seen to be somewhat misleading since it encourages thinking of the form "A reoccupies the position of B." This simple swap pushes us in the direction of creating artificial liminal conceptual boundaries which distract us from noticing subtle ebbs and flows of underlying value structure that inform the more superficial surface movements. In other words, Blumenberg is right (and in keeping with the spirit of his times, standing historically alongside the structuralists) in taking our attention away from the superficial historical phenomena of dates, individuals and institutions – but one can go another layer deeper and speak of more fundamental movements. Insofar as I am suggesting a slight modification to his thought, it is worth saying that this constitutes an implicit acceptance of his reoccupation dynamic as being legitimate in its intellectual utility.

[8] At certain times in his rhetoric about change, he seems to have particular thinkers in mind even though they are not explicitly called out. Here, Kuhn's incommensurability thesis may very well be the target since it is in this portion of the text that Blumenberg first mentions and criticizes Kuhn. This is further motivated by the nature of the criticism he levies against Kuhn. He says that Kuhn's analysis of science is limited by reserving a rationality for itself. This rationality is presumably the basis for being able to talk sensibly about science at all. At the same time, Kuhn held paradigms to be incommensurate, creating a tension that centers on this question of the special place of rationality in his system.

leaving us with “residual needs” (*Restbedarf*, *LMA* 60, 65). While myths “make things unquestionable,” when myths no longer adequately perform this function, absolute metaphors arise in response to this “problem pressure” from questions that are “*posed* in the ground of our being,”[9] created by our existential anxiety (WOM 126, LMA 65, PZM 23). So, existential anxiety in the face of the absolutism of reality is at the fundamental level of what it means to be human. The anxiety gives rise to different questions that take their form relative to specific historical contexts, reflecting the needs of that time. Just as existential anxiety cannot be brushed aside, so too do the questions demand to be addressed. Absolute metaphors fill the vacuum created by myths no longer adequately quelling anxiety. Since this all occurs at the nonconceptual level, Blumenberg can claim that metaphors “do not admit of verification,” that their content is “theoretically undecidable” and that metaphors “do not say anything truthful at all” because their referent is prior to conceptual thinking (PM 13, 14).

As we saw in chapter one, the intellectual history leading up to Eckhart was traced so as to bring out the important factors that had to change in order for the modern perspective on knowledge and science to emerge. Blumenberg’s own metaphorological practice as found in his analysis of the idea of truth over time serves to reveal what differentiated ancient from medieval and medieval from modern attitudes toward truth and knowledge. This will also serve to elucidate what important elements

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[9] “Absolute metaphors ‘answer’ those supposedly naïve, in principle unanswerable questions, whose relevance quite simply lies in that they cannot be eliminated, because we do not *pose* them, but rather find them *posed* in the ground of our being” [Absolute Metaphern ›beantworten‹ jene vermeintlich naiven, prinzipiell unbeantwortbaren Fragen, deren Relevanz ganz einfach darin liegt, daß sie nicht eliminierbar sind, weil wir sie nicht *stellen*, sondern als im Daseinsgrund *gestellte* vorfinden] (PZM 23, my translation; cf. PM 14).

were in the transition from medieval to modern thought, which will provide a framework for the analysis of Eckhart's rhetoric that will follow.

2.2.2 Metaphorological tools: background metaphorics

Blumenberg gives the name *background metaphorics* to the study of the worldviews that inform the use of metaphors. The idea of background metaphorics is an attempt to get at the lived reality of the nonconceptual substrate of "genuine thinkers," to get into their heads, so to speak, as opposed to the way in which "academic routine uproots concepts and suspends them in idiosyncratic atomism" (PM 63). The thrust of background metaphorics militates against the pigeonholing of a particular thinker's ideas to enable comparison with others and, ultimately, to facilitate the telling of an historical narrative. We should hear echoes of Nietzsche's "On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense" essay here in describing the pruning of individuality for the purpose of concept creation. Blumenberg himself seeks to avoid this with his account of the historical continuity of questions. He tells us that the minimum constants referred to by reoccupation are neither "the classical constants of philosophical anthropology" nor the "'eternal truths' of metaphysics" (LMA 466). In doing this, he is clearly referring to the debate between Heidegger (representing metaphysics) and Cassirer (representing philosophical anthropology). Blumenberg's constant material should not be understood to be metaphysically reified or even hypostasized. As we will see in the next chapter, Bernard McGinn's explicit appeal to this kind of conceptual leveling creates problems for his interpretation of mysticism. For particular thinkers, Blumenberg tells us, their use of metaphors reveals both how they are culturally situated and also what comprises the individual character of their thought:

> With every thinker one finds metaphors that seem to belong more to the epoch than to him. Occasionally, they expose the background of the thinker's technical questions and technical decisions. By moving him into a horizon of his contemporaries – perhaps by showing him as subjected to a Zeitgeist – metaphors, however, remain informative by displacements and disfigurations that can still be added to them and that let the force of a particular individual be grasped vis-à-vis the universal. But there are also metaphors that appear to only personally befit their author. More than anything else, the accuracy of such metaphors collects into an image what otherwise could only be derived diffusely and presumably from complete works. They stand as if in the center of a horizon and illustrate the uniqueness of the relation between a person and the situation. It remains a stroke of luck to find such metaphors and to pause before them, hesitating the way one hesitates at the mere inkling of a significant revelation. Familiarity with the work alone is not sufficient for this. It could be something like a phenomenological act that displays itself out in moments and, against the rules, on the level of the singular (CCR 75-6).

Metaphorics can work even with terminological statements if they require an implicit metaphorical backdrop in order to be understood, even with scientific data collection. Blumenberg discusses the moon landing (that was not to happen for another nine years) and says that we might have to try and understand what was said about it by first understanding the background metaphorics of the culture from which the statements came (PM 62). Interpreting writers requires us to enter "into the author's imaginative horizon" so as to engage in "reconstructing his 'translation'" of experience to concepts.

When this happens, it will "'dawn' on us" (PM 62). So, we are undoing the original 'translation' into language so as to get at the original experience.

For example, when Blumenberg discusses how truth is spoken of through time, he tells us that Aquinas' ostensibly innocuous statement that "Cognition is the result of a truth" is actually loaded with a particular conception of truth as having its own force to compel. Specifically, he says, "Thomas can make truth the efficient cause (not the formal cause!) of knowledge" since cognition is compelled to action by truth (PM 10). Blumenberg says that this notion of truth belongs to the "metaphorical background" and is the paradigmatic example with which he introduces the idea of nonlexical metaphors.

2.2.3 Metaphorological tools: nonlexical metaphor

Though Blumenberg's practice of grouping a number of related rhetorical elements under the heading 'metaphor' is useful, we should not worry about straining the term (i.e., is this *really* a metaphor?) or departing from it entirely when speaking of related rhetorical phenomena. Such is the case with Blumenberg's idea of *nonlexical* metaphors. As Blumenberg says, "metaphors … do not need to appear as such in the lexical sphere of expression" and may instead arise when "a collection of statements suddenly coalesces into a meaningful unity if the leading metaphorical representation from which the statements were 'read off' can be hypothetically ascertained" (PM 10). Such 'metaphors' are implicit in the text, as he says, according to the "implicative model" (PM 10). Since metaphors have the function of referring to a kind of reflective thought which refers to something nonconceptual, it is reasonable to extend the notion of metaphor in this way to include rhetorical techniques which serve the same *function* without overtly using particular words or images. In fact, the more fundamental the

material to which metaphor refers, the less likely it is to appear as the sole referent or to even appear lexically at all. In addition to metaphors becoming “more impressive” as the most fundamental layer is approached, their subtlety and hiddenness likewise increases.

The systematic *omission* of a particular topic can constitute a motif which makes a substantial commentary in just this way. When a rhetor speaks of a particular topic in a certain way, we expect other connections to be made as well. The absence of these connections or even the overt departure from the usual way of speaking about them constitutes an offense to our expectations and creates disharmony and discomfort, which implies the need for conscious attention to resolve the discord. The use of familiar images in unfamiliar environments performs a similar function. All of these rhetorical devices are instances of making the familiar unfamiliar. Associating something unfamiliar with something familiar offends our expectations (which derive from habits of thought) and creates a disharmony that is functionally the same as the disharmony created by metaphor.

Ostensibly ordinary manners of speaking can also point to this sort of ‘metaphor.’ Blumenberg touches on this when discussing the background metaphorics of scientific data. In places where theory is the most blind to implicit assumptions (and ostensibly engaging in a purportedly objective measurement of data is certainly of this kind), we can expect to find reference to the most fundamental layers. Similarly, in Eckhart, some of the more prosaic (and perhaps, less intentional) of his prose will provide some of the clearest signs of fundamental worldview shifting.

In apophatic discourse, speaking of the failure of an idea or image to adequately describe its object, and thus to miss the mark, is another rhetorically significant device that approximates the function of absolute metaphor. For example, Blumenberg describes Plotinus' derivation of the circular motion of the sky from the circular motion of the soul. The motion of the sky fails in its attempt to imitate the motion of the soul. As Blumenberg says, "its mimesis can hit its target only in missing it" (PM 122). This, he tells us, "is an exact representation of the function of 'absolute metaphor'" in that the sky's "reproduction is *at the same time* a metaphor for what it reproduces *and* a metaphor for its failure to reach its goal" (PM 122). In other words, it serves to refer and it also serves to highlight the fact that it fails in referring because such reference is impossible. We will see a similar sequence in Eckhart in his shiftiness and looseness of terminological definition and usage.

2.2.4 Metaphorological tools: explosive metaphor

A *paradox* can be described as a device where two ideas are put together that are incompatible with one another. An explosive metaphor (*Sprengmetapher*) is effectively a type of paradox where one idea is beyond the normal horizons of meaning for the other and a direction of thought is thereby implied toward the horizon. Instead of containing an explicit contradiction, explosive metaphors have an inherent air of reasonableness that compels the reader to pursue thought in a particular direction. At the horizon, discursive thought is inadequate to resolve the tension and the metaphor 'bursts,' breaking through to a new mode of thinking.

The idea of explosive metaphor depends directly on the phenomenological notion of *intentionality* as the directedness of consciousness. Explosive metaphors function by

guiding the mind in a particular direction, which translates to affecting its intentionality and thereby motivating it to resolve disharmony in the desired way. So, instead of depending on the 'truth' of a claim to have an irresistible force that compels us to think differently, metaphor functions according to the rhetor's art of persuasion and surreptitiously compels the mind to move in a particular direction[10]. As Blumenberg says, "metaphor is capable of movement and can represent movement" (PM 122).

This makes explosive metaphors fundamentally *experiential* instead of conceptual. For example, in the *Book of the XXIV Philosophers*, we read that "God is an infinite sphere whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere"[11]. The idea of God as an *infinite* sphere, one of Eckhart's favorite examples, is also the example chosen by Blumenberg. As we read in *Paradigms*:

> What we are here calling 'explosive metaphorics' … draws intuition into a *process* in which it can keep up at first (for example, by mentally doubling and then continuously redoubling a circle's radius), only to be compelled to give up – and that is understood as meaning to give itself up - at a certain point (for example, by thinking a circle with the greatest possible radius, a radius of infinite magnitude). The aim is to make transcendence something that can be 'experienced' as the limit of theoretical apprehension, and *eo ipso* as a challenge to heterogeneous apprehensive modes (PM 123).

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[10] I am using the phrase "art of persuasion" intentionally here to contrast with the discussion of whether the rhetor's persuasion was an art (*τέχνη*, a skill or craft) or knack (*ἐμπειρία*, a practice or experience with something without knowledge of its principles) in Plato's *Gorgias* 462b. As many commentators have noticed, Blumenberg seeks to rehabilitate rhetoric in a manner that, at times, overtly opposes Plato's arguments against rhetoric.

[11] *Deus est sphaera infinita cuius centrum est ubique, circumferentia nusquam*

As Blumenberg rightly recognizes, Cusanus' *docta ignorantia* is not knowledge, but a praxis (LMA 490). In addition to a praxis pointing to method rather than knowledge in itself, the desired end of that praxis is not knowledge, but experience. As Blumenberg says of the *coincidentia oppositorum,* "language is a medium that can only be brought into relation to the truth by taking itself as provisional and tending continually toward the point of its self-suspension" (LMA 490). The point of language's self-suspension strains the conceptual limits inherent in speaking of a 'point.' Points are comparable because of what they have in common. However, the point of language's self-suspension is where the metaphor bursts and one is carried beyond conceptuality. It is this same sense that we see in the notion of God as an infinite 'sphere.' As with the Cusan's mathematical metaphors, the ideas of sphere, line, point, triangle, et al. are strained until they break, pointing beyond themselves. It is all good mysticism. Nowhere in the expressions though will we find a conceptual sine qua non of the system. In other words, the details of his metaphors are put forth in the spirit that is exemplified in the prologue to *De Docta Ignorantia*: exhortative and hopefully useful.

Although Blumenberg focuses on Cusanus perhaps because he identified him alongside Giordano Bruno as standing on either side of the transition from the medieval to the modern world, the same thinking applies equally well to Eckhart. In fact, though Blumenberg does not mention this, Cusanus took influence from Eckhart (many of Eckhart's works survived in Cusanus' library at Kues) and the dynamics of Cusanus' own mathematical metaphors were presaged by a more basic form in Eckhart. As Blumenberg says, "The coincidence of immanence and transcendence is Cusanus's great theme, and he can demonstrate it on the infinite circle as well: circumference and

diameter fall together here, but their unity has absorbed the function of both" (PM 125). The circumference and diameter falling together is very much the same image that Eckhart uses in Sermon XXIV.1, where he says, "if we imagine the center of a circle rises in a sphere, it becomes the pole. Conversely, if the sphere is projected onto a plane, the pole becomes the center."[12] Here as well, the topic is the coincidence of immanence and transcendence through humility. The resulting depiction of the divine as a circle implicitly includes what Blumenberg rightly identifies as "activity without motion," an idea that was central for Eckhart (PM 118). As described above with Plotinus, "If 'activity without motion' is to be more than a mere play on words, a metaphorical representation must lie behind it," specifically, "the sphere spinning within itself and the circle returning to itself *imitate* the nature of the divine precisely because they were already implicitly *contained* in the notion of an actively restful, restfully active deity" (PM 118). This aspect of Eckhart's writing will be addressed in detail in chapter five.

There are other ways to blow up a metaphor. It is appropriate that Blumenberg connects explosive metaphorics to the *via negativa* generally, which uses explosive metaphors so that, "An intentionality of intuition is overstretched in order to express its futility in itself and, while reaching out, at the same time to retract its overreaching" (SS 90). In other words, consciousness is directed at an object and hyperextends its concepts and breaks them, while also providing commentary on the impossibility of reaching God with concepts, thus "retracting" its reach. Blumenberg focuses on where infinity naturally leads to explosive metaphor. Even where metaphors lack a "blasting

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[12] *Unde et centrum circuli, si imaginetur surgere in sphaeram, fit polus, et e converso si sphaera proiciatur in planum, de polo fit centrum.* (LW IV 219, 7-9)

agent" and are not explosive, he says, "Even where negative theology is not systematically elaborated, as in Augustine, we encounter those characteristic 'metaphors which baffle intuition'" (e.g., hand of the heart, head of the soul) (PM 123). In the space between mathematical explosive metaphors and metaphors that "baffle intuition," we find paradoxes which likewise guide thought and challenge existing modes of thinking. These rhetorical devices perform the same pragmatic function as explosive metaphors and deserve to be called such. With explosive metaphors that use infinity, one is mathematically led to the conceptual breaking point. With Eckhart's paradoxes, he similarly leads us toward the conceptual limits by his insisting upon maintaining the paradoxes and antagonizing our means of resolving them. Consequently, a single paradoxical expression may not be explosive, but the paradoxes are essential parts of a rhetorical path that, taken as a whole, is explosive.

Along with apophaticism and its emphasis on the inadequacy of discursive thought come the various rhetorical methods for working against our typical mode of thought and comfortable (harmonious because it is habitual) manner of using concepts. As Blumenberg says, Cusanus "snubs logic with a certain apotropaic deviousness, seeing original sin in man's seduction by the idea of knowledge" (PM 126). Since logic, emblematic of our usual mode of reasoning, is inadequate for getting at the divine, Eckhart and likeminded mystics naturally use subtle strategies to turn conceptual thought on itself so as to reveal its own inadequacy. This mechanism is fundamentally similar to explosive metaphor. For Eckhart, we will see this in the form of what he says (often, in paradoxes), what he does not say (nonlexical patterns of omission), novel biblical interpretation and so on. Blumenberg's description of the dynamics of explosive

metaphor will provide a useful way for unifying ostensibly disparate rhetorical techniques. This is especially useful in Eckhart since the overarching goal of his rhetoric is to provide directedness to the conscious activity of his audience so that they may, as he says in many different ways in the small prayers that close every sermon, move closer to seeing the divine[13].

Bernard McGinn tells us that "*Grunt* is a simple term of spatial and tactile immediacy. Yet it is also an extraordinarily complex word that creates what Josef Quint called 'a mystical word-field' (*mystiches Wortfeld*[14]), that is, a new way of using a variety of words and metaphors to express in concrete fashion what cannot be captured in concepts" (McGinn 2005, 85). Using Quint's idea of a "mystical word-field" to describe Eckhart's *grunt* is another way of saying that the passages in which Eckhart speaks of the *grunt* function as a non-lexical metaphor. That is, recalling Blumenberg's careful formulation, their intent "coalesces into a meaningful unity," which is, of course, nonconceptual (PM 10)[15]. In addition, McGinn argues that Eckhart's term *grunt* is an explosive metaphor, "*Grunt* can be termed a *Sprengmetapher* (explosive metaphor), particularly because of the way it breaks through previous categories of mystical speech to create new ways of presenting a direct encounter with God" (McGinn 2005, 85, cf. 121).

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[13] Forman claims that the prayers that close Eckhart's sermons reveal "the real point of his remarks," which is his hope that "some lived transformation or some mystical experience(s) - should happen in me: this is the key to Eckhart" (Forman 1991, 5).

[14] Alois Haas suggests something similar in saying "it is in the associations that accompany the given semantic field which are significant rather than the individual metaphors" (15).

[15] His formulation is careful because a "meaningful unity" is a subjective, phenomenological assessment, as opposed to 'knowledge,' 'understanding,' 'concept,' etc. So, instead of non-lexical metaphors having a "meaning" which might imply conceptual content, they evoke a "meaningful unity."

Notice that McGinn describes the breakthrough of old modes of thought into “new ways of presenting a direct encounter with God.” This language of an “encounter” between an individual and the divine will prove problematic for interpreting Eckhart and will be dealt with in detail in the next chapter. McGinn goes on to tell us that “While explosive metaphors like *grunt* can give rise to deep philosophical and theological speculation, their function is more practical, or better, pragmatic, than theoretical: they are meant to overturn and transform ordinary forms of consciousness through the process of making the inner meaning of the metaphor one's own in everyday living” (McGinn 2005, 85). Insofar as we are describing the experience of an individual living within the world of multiplicity, this description is useful. Ultimately, however, when speaking of mysticism, the individual as individual does not have primacy. It is here that we see problems with the Kantian assumption that metaphysical absolutes are untenable since we can have no unmediated access to them (cf. Forman 1999, 34). This, ultimately, is behind the necessary departure from Blumenberg after a certain point in mysticism.

2.3 Parting ways with Blumenberg: mysticism and the ontologically inflated self

In a nutshell, when thinking about how Eckhart’s metaphors work at the level of the psychological reception of those ideas by an individual, it is not necessary to make use of Blumenberg’s own metaphysical commitments with respect to what actually constitutes that individual. Blumenberg’s metaphorological practice, which involves chronicling particular metaphors’ use and reception over time, has the experience of the individual subject as its most metaphysically fundamental layer. As Franz Josef Wetz put it, for Blumenberg, we do not have “some anonymous power, or an event of

language and the sign, prior to and independent of the subject, which is always already at work behind the back of consciousness." Instead, "For Blumenberg, on the other hand, the hard rock where our spade is turned, because we are unable to dig down any deeper, is rather different: it is the finite character of the human being" (Wetz 389). Robert Savage captures Blumenberg's point of departure from thinkers like Eckhart when he says, "No nostalgia for the supposedly deeper truths of the inchoate, the irrational, the sublime and the primordial lay behind this research programme [of nonconceptuality]" (Savage 2008, 120). At base, Blumenberg's metaphysics disdains absolutes. As he directly states in one essay, "Phenomenology is the conclusive and now indeed infinite task of a history which must reject every way out to a pure Being as a mystical dead end and which can be experienced and endured nowhere else but in the cave itself and under its initial conditions" (LWCR 430). Blumenberg seems to see metaphysical absolutes as an excrescence, as something superadded to individual lived consciousness. By doing this, he is implicitly reasserting the fundamental position of individual experience in his philosophical outlook. Consequently, as Sandra Luft observed, "[Blumenberg] does not do sufficient justice to postmodern acosmic critiques that go beyond epistemology to deconstruct both subjectivity and the subject" (Luft 69). Although she has Heidegger in mind in particular, asserting that Blumenberg is still vulnerable to Heidegger's critiques, her criticism exposes the problematic assumption that Blumenberg carries that ultimately separates him from the mystics. To use his own rhetoric, Blumenberg's own theory does not admit an aporia here and does not question the fundamentality of individual experience (cf. PM 3).

In other words, we might echo Robert Forman's criticism of Steven Katz' seminal work on the 'constructivist' interpretation of mysticism. Katz holds that, "There are NO pure (i.e. unmediated) experiences" (Katz 26), and uses this claim to attack the 'perennialists' like Aldous Huxley who claim that mysticism is the same across religions and throughout time. Forman points out that this "epistemological assumption" is built upon the phenomenological account of *intentionality* (Forman 1999, 34). Katz's claim that there are no unmediated experiences implies the primacy of the individual and denies the possibility of insight into anything that is unsullied by individual experience. Since Blumenberg builds from this kind of phenomenological base, we might extend this same criticism to him, and with Forman insist that, "Insofar as any account of mysticism is grounded on these doctrines, it is profoundly flawed" (Forman 1999, 53).

In this section, we will see that this assumption springs from his advocating for the legitimacy of the modern worldview, including its qualities of self-assertion (which asserts the fundamentality of the individual subject) and its explanatory incompleteness as part of the interminable search for better explanations. A brief excursus into Lévi-Strauss' talk of 'complete' worldviews will bring out the contrast between Blumenberg's own values and that of Eckhart and the other medievals. Blumenberg's choice of the shipwreck with spectator metaphor and his treatment of its history will also demonstrate how Blumenberg's own metaphysical obligations color his metaphorological practice. His discussion of the physics of motion and the metaphorics of truth in *Paradigms* will provide similar evidence. Finally, Blumenberg's talk of Kierkegaard's description of a truth "in which" we live, alongside the later Husserl's notion of the life-world, will close the distance somewhat – but not entirely – between Blumenberg and Eckhart.

In his description of Cusanus in the *Legitimacy*, Blumenberg makes an odd yet revealing move. He says, unsympathetically and without any basis in Cusanus' own avowed intentions, that we should interpret Cusanus as if he were trying to hold off the epochal crisis, "Everything seems to be designed to prevent the crisis" (LMA 502)[16]. Blumenberg also consistently uses the trope 'thinking through to the end' to describe the unfolding logic that is, presumably useful in describing historical change, though his reasons for describing it like this are not made explicit[17]. Considering how often he uses this trope, it is reasonable to think that his rhetoric makes a claim that his argumentation never makes explicit by virtue of it embodying a *form of reflection* that we may *read off* through repeated use. Against a backdrop with this dynamic, we might be led to believe

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[16] In defense of Blumenberg on this point, we might look to Kant's assertions on the utility of teleology. Teleological explanations, he tells us in the *Critique of Judgment*, are useful for history and biology even if we know they are not true. This impulse seems to also govern Blumenberg's advocating the utility of speculative histories.

[17] It is worth noting that Blumenberg describes these changes with a consistent rhetoric of consequences being thought through to the end, perhaps implying that the seeds for the self-dissolution of the middle ages were sown early on with the additional implication of historical inevitability (though not in the Hegelian sense) (PM 23, 29, 124; LMA 171, 212, 563; GCW 465; WOM 246; SS 26). For example, "God's lack of reservation in the Creation, as a principle of the enhancement of the universe, has not yet been thought through to the end" (LMA 517). And also, "It is true that for Nicholas of Cusa the new cosmology was nothing but the consequence, thought through to the end, of the old idea of creation" (LMA 518). It's not clear how much explanatory power Blumenberg sees this characterization as having. If the consequences simply need to be thought through to the end, is it not reasonable to ask whether or not other veins of thought might have dried up (without persistent problem pressure) and never get thought through to the end? Judging by his condemnation of the idea of historical destiny and his emphasis on contingency (including the discussion of Jacob Burckhardt on *LMA* 468-9), it seems reasonable to think that Blumenberg did not intend on implying that the internal logic simply needed to be worked out by future generations, instead preferring to think of the dissolution of an age as a confluence of many contingent factors which conspire to alter the viability of existing answers and create the necessity for change. Nevertheless, he does say that the transition to the modern age was marked by "boredom" with cyclical history ("homogeneous unbrokenness") (LMA 462). This at least plays on (if not subtly affirming) the rhetoric that the early moderns used when speaking about 'waking' from the slumber of the previous age. As Robert Savage says, "Blumenberg soberly defended the achievements of modernity, never ceasing to affirm the indispensability and efficacy of concepts for dealing with the challenges faced by humankind" (Savage 120).

that thinkers on the threshold of epochal change might indeed be resistant to the change since the consequences of logically "thinking through" their positions might be clear to them even if the conclusions are undesirable. These must be merely speculations on Blumenberg's ideas since he offers them conjecturally as part of his speculative history and, in true literary fashion, does not explain all of his rhetorical choices.

The medieval system fended off objections and contradictions to retain its form not because of an unreasonable drive for self-preservation, but rather to preserve a *complete* worldview, one that can answer any question and one that leaves over no existential anxiety[18]. Taking a cue from Lévi-Strauss, perhaps a better criterion for passage to the modern age might be the *uncertainty* and specifically the *avowed ignorance* that modern science ennobles as part of its own endless progress. Lévi-Strauss said that traditional societies required "not only a general but a *total* understanding. That is, it is a way of thinking which must imply that if you don't understand everything, you don't explain anything. This is entirely in contradiction to what scientific thinking does" (Lévi-Strauss 17)[19]. The attempted valorization of

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[18] Given Blumenberg's conception of the function of myth in his *Work on Myth*, it is curious to me that he was not more aware of this issue. For example, "The stories that it is our purpose to discuss here simply weren't told in order to answer questions, but rather in order to dispel uneasiness and discontent, which have to be present in the beginning for questions about what awakens them and excites them to arise or to reach concrete form" (WOM 184). This is doubly curious since Lévi-Strauss was most actively writing about the same topic in the decade preceding *Work on Myth* (though, if he started it in the early 1960s, this is more understandable).

[19] Further, this comment occurs in the context of Lévi-Strauss contrasting the approach of traditional societies' push to understand things *generally* while scientific inquiry since Descartes seeks to split phenomena into pieces that can be isolated and understood. In this way, the tendency toward specialization and splitting the world into pieces truly runs in the opposite direction to the same drive to understand the world in traditional societies. There are some clear problems with the assumptions

uncertainty makes the modern age ineluctably *incomplete*, incapable of providing final answers and keeping out existential anxiety.

Blumenberg's lack of awareness of the significance of the incompleteness inherent in modern theoretical pluralism is evident in his description of the completeness of medieval knowledge. He says of the Middle Ages' assessment of their own knowledge that "The reproach that the Middle Ages had described the character of definitiveness and completeness to their state of knowledge and thereby crippled in themselves the will to theoretical progress and the acknowledgment of new experiences is part of the arsenal of the early modern age's critical distancing from its past" (LMA 494). He goes on to describe Rousseau's "*l'heureuse ignorance*" in the context of a critique of the modern age's illegitimate claims to knowledge. His discussion does not acknowledge the psychological advantages inherent in a complete worldview or, conversely, the disadvantages inherent in the modern age's ineluctably incomplete worldview. Omitting such an important point is evidence perhaps that he did not adequately appreciate this dynamic.

Blumenberg's approach becomes clearer when considering the effect of demonstrable experimental success on the burgeoning turn toward self-assertion. The medieval story of the image of God holds for Cusanus' description of man as a second god as long as the creation of the world is "incomparably sublime in comparison to the invention of logic and arithmetic" (LMA 528). In other words, so long as God's divinity is

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involved in a method of inquiry that seeks to break things into pieces. Most notably, the broad perspective that comes with trying to understand the whole as more than an extension of the phenomena observable in the parts is lost. It is no coincidence, therefore, that I am citing someone like Lévi-Strauss who ennobled such general theorization. The level at which the completeness/incompleteness idea that I wish to emphasize is the most *general*.

of another order from man's as a second god (*quasi alius deus*), we still retain the medieval picture. “But it no longer holds when the unsurpassability of an accomplishment can be grasped in its own evidence, and thus [human/divine] equivalence makes any relation of foundation a matter of indifference, and it no longer holds when the supposedly giving condition of being an image [of God] becomes something that one wants to be, as the full enjoyment of a newly discovered potentiality. … [This was the situation of] Galileo when he thought that he had disclosed, in mathematized natural science, a level of truth unsurpassable even for God” (LMA 528). So, the key for Galileo is his pretension to truth as a product of empirical investigation that could not be touched (i.e., was “unsurpassable”) even for God. Though it is questionable that experimental success precipitates metaphysical change (despite the positivistic ambitions of some contemporary philosophers), it is significant that Blumenberg evaluatively describes the Middle Ages as “crippled” in the same way that early modern writers like Bacon did. Likewise, the new “potentiality” for self-assertion that he describes as being opened by definitive experimental success carries with it the negative implication that one should become not only aware of one’s successes and achievements, but also that one should become aware of the inexhaustible reservoir of what still remains unknown. It is this second awareness that constitutes the *incompleteness* of the modern worldview. If self-assertion even partially reoccupies God’s place and valorizes its own contingent experimental achievements, then it necessarily cannot look at its successes as complete and final if the knowledge necessary for the technological achievements is ineluctably approximate due to the intensively infinite nature of the physical world. This combination of necessarily

incomplete knowledge and the way in which valorizing such knowledge displaces Christ as the regulative ideal result in a worldview that is characterized by incompleteness.

When Blumenberg emphatically claims that the Cusan is not open to changes to his cosmology as a result of experimental evidence, we see the tangible manifestation of "safeguards" against change in action[20]. It is most sensible to think that a complete system will have safeguards against objections. With this in mind, perhaps Blumenberg's suggestion that Cusanus sought to prevent epochal change can be understood as a more reasonable cause for the self-preserving building of safeguards to retain a complete system. In this light, we can also understand why Copernicus and Bruno's view of Copernicus' "constructive" (LMA 506) accomplishments as truth (LMA 480) could not have been admitted by the Cusan at least insofar as such truth would have the character of "unsurpassability" (LMA 528) even for God.

There is nothing inherent in mysticism that precludes multiplicity from having fundamentality. Indeed, even in Eckhart, the shiftiness of his rhetoric antagonizes a crystallization of dogma, not only for the purpose of forming concepts (which is necessary for dogma), but also for claiming the rightness of a particular notion of the absolute. Eckhart, and apophatic mystics generally at least since Dionysius, have gone to great lengths *not* to engage in rhetoric that conduces to concrete ideas falling out of the solution as precipitates. Blumenberg's admiration of the dynamics of Nicholas of Cusa's mathematical metaphors is revealing. He says, "Our notion of 'absolute metaphor' does not lead to an adequate understanding of what was intended by

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[20] It is interesting that Blumenberg even recognizes that the medieval system was advantaged by not depending on experimental success (LMA 472).

Cusanus, since from his position, all metaphorical projections are legitimated by a universal structural identity. They thus claim a far deeper legitimacy than we can grant 'absolute metaphor'" (PM 125, PZM 182). This "far deeper legitimacy" implies that there is an additional, substantial nonlexical meaning that can be read off from the confluence of multiple rhetorical devices, including absolute metaphors. With Eckhart as well, we will see that his loose use of terminology evades philosophical (and especially Scholastic) systematization for the purpose of pointing to just this sort of nonlexical meaning. This description can remain unproblematically true to Blumenberg. However, when we consider the additional point that Eckhart's thought was grounded in the divine and arose from a "complete" worldview of the kind that Lévi-Strauss identified, then conflict arises with Blumenberg's own base metaphysical assumptions.

The way that Blumenberg handles mysticism in his histories is also revealing. For example, he tells us,

> metaphysical speculation that thinks it can choose a standpoint outside the world, that operates with the infinite is not accessible by any process of transition. But is it also the normative standpoint, to which man has to transfer himself if he wishes to gain a concept of the world as a whole? … The mystic strives 'to adopt God's standpoint,' by seeking identification with the absolute; this point of view, before which everything real collapses into nothing, is for him the only valid one. (LMA 515)

However, the mystic does not have a standpoint which is commensurate with other standpoints. By contrast, what he says here is more accurate: "the mystic's 'absolute interest in the absolute.' That interest is directed at consuming what is finite and

destroying any possible standpoint in it. What is described as mystical experience destroys itself as experience insofar as its object forces the subject to abandon itself" (LMA 517). Yet, the subject abandoning itself does not seem compatible with Blumenberg's description of a "standpoint outside the world" unless the subject somehow persists. In other words, he does not seem to be fully willing to give up the primacy of the subject, even if it has no possible standpoint in the finite world.

Ultimately, Blumenberg underestimates the permeability of the individual in ancient and medieval thought. He does not seem to fully appreciate the way in which life experience can be described without wholly being confined to the bounds of the individual body and mind. As we read in Augustine's *Confessions*, to love God is to have God love himself through the individual. There is no need to speak of a *unio mystica* of substance between man and God if the act of loving itself is a kind of indistinct 'experience' where the subject who is loving is both man and God. At the boundary of human understanding that antiquity recognized, God's thought (in the sense of *logos* or Aristotelian *nous*) cannot manifest as an experience that occurs within an individual qua individual agent who is personally responsible for the experience. Instead, it happens by *grace*, by the infusion of the divine. At the point where divine 'knowledge' or 'experience' starts, distinct human identity dissolves.

Blumenberg refers to this issue in speaking of man inhabiting both the world of change and the changeless world of the Forms. Man, he says, is "not a pure special case but rather a point of intersection of heterogeneous realities, a compound - and, as such, problematic" (AAR 432). What is 'problematic' here is that human beings lead two lives, one concrete and one abstract, one intelligible through finite concepts and with an

identity as an individual among individuals in multiplicity, and another as an aspect of the infinite which is without number. This dichotomy bears upon the question of how the shipwreck with spectator metaphor has been used over time since the spectator is removed from the reality of the shipwreck and, perhaps because he does not have to fear it, he is able to engage in reflection on it (cf. SS ch.5). Blumenberg explores the rational/emotional, reflective/lived tensions, but does not address the finite/infinite even though he does recognize the human/non-human or civilized/uncivilized dichotomies inherent in comparing the chaos of the sea to ordered life on land. This omission provides a distinct clue to how Blumenberg's analysis is limited.

When Blumenberg tells the story of the developments leading to the move away from geocentrism in *Paradigms*, his emphasis is on physics and motion and individual creativity, but he does not mention the transformation of the concept of self. His story begins with psyche, but he speaks to its role as the motive force in organic things (self-moving, as opposed to mechanical, moved from without). In moving through Archimedes and Lactantius, his emphasis is on how the motion of things implies the increased transcendence of the creator. He tells us that for Cusanus, kinematic verifiability was "the sole criterion" for hypotheses in astronomy and that the human mind exemplified its creative capacity in devising hypothetical models (PM 67). Cusanus described man as a "second god" because of his creative potential, whom "he believes to be just as creative, in the realm of rational and artistic entities, as God in the realm of real and natural entities. With that, the mechanical construction succeeds in holding its own against the natural phenomenon" (PM 67; see also PM 65-6). He does not pause to speculate on *why* Cusanus describes man as a "second God" in his creative

capacities. Without appealing to changes in the scope of what belongs to an individual, this would indeed be difficult to describe.

In addition to changes in the notion of self during the medieval period, the notion of truth transformed as well. In antiquity, truth was therapeutic, conducive to human flourishing as well as technical knowledge. Though one could argue that the modern age's shedding of this therapeutic aspect does not necessarily render its account of truth incommensurate with the ancient one, we should also notice that the highest form of truth in the ancient and medieval worlds reached the divine. Since 'absolute truth' was another way of saying 'God' in the medieval world, it is not clear that one can shed this divine aspect of truth as though it were one predicate among many. When one crosses over from mundane truths to the truth of God, this problematizes the very notion of truth (especially for thinkers like Eckhart, though arguably for Plato as well). Speaking of truth with regard to seafaring is wholly different than speaking of truth with regard to God. Again, this issue impinges directly upon Blumenberg's problematic metaphysical commitments. If God as absolute truth is just one experience among many for the individual subject, then comparison is possible. In other words, it lacks fundamentality.

Paralleling the development of Husserl, who in the later part of his career moved closer to describing the historical embeddedness of human existence with his concept of the life-world, Blumenberg also provides hints of something more complex than simply saying that the finite human self is most fundamental. Blumenberg caps his discussion in chapter four of *Paradigms* by citing Kierkegaard, who describes truth as coming only through the "deep inner movement," something knowable only through "the indescribable motions of the heart" (PM 51). Blumenberg says these motions can be

said to manifest a truth *"in which*" one lives (PM 51, emphasis in original). This is why Kierkegaard says that he did not drink from the cup of wisdom - he fell in it. If we drink from it, then the implication is that the self that drinks is somehow separate from the drink, which is simply another thing. By having a notion of truth 'in which' we live, that truth determines at least a portion of what constitutes our self (recalling the idea that the self is the sum of its conjectures). We exist and think within truth rather than the other way around. This recalls the more ancient conception of truth. Rather than having truths that we collect like common objects of property, truth changes our world view (though perhaps not our essence). At the level of common objects, truths may be thought of as conceptually knowable. Truths 'in which' we live seem to at least function at the level of nonconceptuality for Blumenberg, which is more fundamental.

2.4 Conclusion

Blumenberg is at a comparative disadvantage when trying to understand and sympathetically characterize thinkers who did not share his phenomenological notion of the primacy of the individual. For Eckhart, we may sensibly speak of an absolute metaphor as pointing to the ground of being rather than merely pointing to the ground of individual thought as if all mental activity were contained within an impermeable individual skull. This makes the referent of absolute metaphor not only nonconceptual but *pre-conceptual*[21]. Blumenberg's notion of nonconceptuality is still understood phenomenologically, as occurring within the confines of the individual's experience, even if it is a lived experience inextricable from the life-world it inhabits. By releasing

[21] It is perhaps interesting to note that this strains the notion of metaphor itself, being liable to explode if it is examined carefully.

absolute metaphor from the requirement that it exist only within Blumenberg's phenomenological metaphysics, new possibilities are opened for more adequately and sympathetically treating pre-modern thought.

If we do not allow for something other than the individual to have primacy, then mysticism can appear as merely one theological option among many and its rhetoric must be conformed to a system of categories that facilitates comparison, a system that is foreign and inimical to it. By looking in detail at how such an approach misses the mark and steers our understanding of Eckhart in the wrong direction, we will be in a better position to understand how to avoid this. It is to problematic readings of Eckhart that are of this kind that we now turn.

CHAPTER 3

ECKHART'S COMMENTATORS

Fundamentally, posing the question, "What do we get out of reading Eckhart?" has more depth than asking "What does he say?" with the expectation that the answer will be given in a conceptual or doctrinal form. Eckhart poses an acute interpretative challenge because his aims are inextricably wrapped up with religious experience. The question of interpreting Eckhart implies the question of what experience can and should mean to philosophy. As Bernard McGinn said, "What Eckhart wants his hearers to grasp is not the abstract truth that God is present in all things, but the reality of what it means to live in this awareness" (McGinn 2005, 165). The tie to experience militates against facile distillation of traditional philosophical claims from his work. Consequently, to interpret Eckhart is like trying to characterize the experience of listening to a sermon. Though it may be convenient to talk of individual pieces abstracted from the whole, ultimately, the lived experience of understanding Eckhart is itself nonconceptual and dynamic. It is natural then to have recourse to metaphor in describing it, something that is true whenever we can 'get in the head' of a particular author.

Eckhart's interpreters have up to now inhabited different points on the spectrum which ranges from emphasizing concepts and doctrine on one end, and emphasizing experience and rhetoric on the other. In this chapter, I will look at some of Eckhart's interpreters who serve as exemplars for various points on this spectrum, beginning with

those who are more conceptually focused and moving toward those who are more experientially and rhetorically focused.

The interpreters selected to serve as paradigms for different points on the spectrum are among those who have done the best in rendering sympathetic accounts of Eckhart's thought. The sometimes garish misinterpretations of his work will be left aside. As we move further in the chapter therefore, we also move closer to Eckhart's own account of his thought as given in the defense. Specifically, we move away from *prout verba sonant*, the literal interpretation by the letter of what is said, and closer to Eckhart's own intention, something to which he appealed repeatedly in his defense. We will begin with the most literal interpretation of his work, that of his inquisitors.

3.1 Eckhart and the inquisition

Toward the end of his life, Meister Eckhart stood before the inquisition on charges of heresy. He could not be convicted of heresy since, as he explained it, "I can be in error, but I cannot be a heretic, because the first belongs to the intellect, the second to the will" (EE 72). In the papal bull *In agro dominico* of 1329, a total of fifteen passages from his works were condemned as heretical and another eleven as *male sonantes*, 'evil sounding,' with an additional two that he denied having said. Milem tells us that the appellation "evil sounding" indicates that "theologians were not always sure they understood what he was saying" (Milem 2002, 3). While this is certainly possible given Eckhart's shifty rhetoric, McGinn's explanation is more plausible. McGinn tells us that medieval judges in the inquisition "made their decisions based on what sounded like heresy (*prout sonant*), regardless of the intention of the defendant" (McGinn 2005, 57). Further, this was done even though Eckhart had died before the trial was concluded,

which normally resulted in a case being dropped. This has led many to suspect with good reason that there were political motives behind the bull's propagation[1]. Further, Eckhart's own protestations appear to have won him a small battle, as evident in the "insofar as" language that appears in the bull itself. There, we read that Eckhart

> professed the Catholic faith at the end of his life and revoked and also deplored the twenty-six articles, which he admitted that he had preached, and also any others, written and taught by him, whether in the schools or in sermons, insofar as they could generate in the minds of the faithful a heretical opinion, or one erroneous and hostile to the true faith (EE 81).

In speaking of the first thirty-three of the original list of forty-nine articles, he insists that "I hold that they are all true, although many are uncommon and subtle" (EE 72). Evidently, the commission found Eckhart's conditional revocation, 'insofar as' what he preached could arouse heretical thoughts in the simple, to be sufficient. In other words, Eckhart did not say he was wrong and the bull itself does not say that he was wrong. Toward the beginning of the bull, after some rhetoric that is typical of pronouncements on heresy, we read, "He presented many things as dogma that were designed to cloud the true faith in the hearts of many, things which he put forth especially before the uneducated crowd in his sermons and that he also admitted into his writings" (EE 77). Further, the words of condemnation themselves read, "Lest articles of this sort and their contents further infect the hearts of the simple among whom they were preached, and lest in any way whatsoever they should gain currency among them or others…" (EE 80).

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[1] See Senner (2013) for more on the details of the political situation involving the questionable character and motives of Eckhart's accusers, the Archbishop's own agenda and the Pope's reasons for wanting to give the Archbishop what he wanted.

Milem and McGinn both recognize that systematizing Eckhart is challenging, if not futile (Milem 2002, 111; with respect to the *grunt*, see McGinn 2005, 86). As Milem said, "We might want him to be more specific and precise. But I think his refusal to do so is deliberate" (Milem 2002, 171). McGinn seems to agree, saying in his discussion of Eckhart's Trinitarianism that it "leaves us with many questions, loose ends, and even inconsistencies - but this may be exactly what he had in mind" (McGinn 2001, 90). Giving some credit to the inquisitorial commission, the bull makes clear that they did not presume to know what Eckhart was trying to say. The text of the bull says that Eckhart "presented" the statements "as dogma" and that the statements "were designed to cloud the true faith," which emphasizes how they were likely to be *received* rather than what they actually *meant*. The works containing any of the twenty-six articles were condemned, even if they only contained articles from the second list of eleven that were not heretical, but merely "quite evil sounding and very rash and suspect of heresy, though with many explanations and additions they might take on or possess a Catholic meaning" (EE 80). Clearly, the concern of the bull was to avoid arousing heretical thoughts in simple, uneducated people.

Though the original list of forty-nine articles was trimmed substantially into the final form of the twenty-eight used in the bull, it is significant that two passages that Eckhart denied having said were still in the final document. This, along with the unusual fact that the bull was promulgated even though Eckhart had died, should provide us with an indication that Eckhart was not the only target of the bull. Indeed, as Robert Lerner claims, one copy of the bull was part of a collection of documents of a Mainz inquisitor, likely assembled for use in the 1390s (Lerner 352-254). Since the list of offenses in the

bull address many of the church's concerns with mysticism and fringe religious groups of that time, it is not difficult to imagine it being used for and perhaps even intended for that purpose. We should also recall that Archbishop Henry of Virneburg had a "reputation as a zealous hunter of heretics" (McGinn 1980, 393) and that the pope wished to preserve Henry's favor since he was a valuable ally in the papal struggle against Lewis of Bavaria. We have record that the pope ordered the dissemination of the bull in Cologne and Lerner has argued that it was published in Mainz as well and likely posted on the door of the cathedral in Avignon since this was customary for such constitutions (Lerner 1997, 348-9). Its circulation must have been limited however, since William of Ockham wrote two treatises in Munich between 1337-1341 and complained that Eckhart had never been condemned (Lerner 349).

We are approaching consensus that the bull's condemnation was not entirely sound. For example, as Colledge points out, although the bull ties proposition fourteen ("Since God in some way wills for me to have sinned, I should not will that I had not committed sins") to the *Book of Divine Consolation*, Eckhart rightly cites both St. Paul and St. Augustine in his *Councils on Discernment* when making this same point, providing a pedigree for the idea that the commission should have taken into account (EE 13-4). This is a significant error on the part of the commission since that proposition is among the fifteen *heretical* statements in the bull. As recently as a few years ago, in 1980, Ursula Fleming led a movement to get Eckhart officially rehabilitated. By 1992, Timothy Radcliffe, the Master of the Dominican Order, wrote the chairman of the Eckhart Society and said, "I wonder whether you know that we tried to have the censure lifted on Eckhart and were told that there was really no need since he had never been

condemned by name, just some propositions which he was supposed to have held, and so we are perfectly free to say that he is a good and orthodox theologian" (*Eckhart: The Man*).

The process of the inquisitorial inquiry itself was inherently incompatible with a proper understanding of Eckhart. Though there was long precedent for conducting the trial in the manner it was done, the commissioners did not have to read the author's works, relying instead upon the research of their subordinates and themselves considering only statements in isolation (EE 11). We have a document from Cardinal Jacques Fournier, who presided over Eckhart's trial and who succeeded John XXII to become Pope Benedict XII in 1334, which describes how inadequate he thought this process was (EE 11; see also Colledge 1978). When Durandus of Saint-Pourçain was on trial, Fournier "protested that he could not with justice [pass judgment on the case] until he had seen the contexts from which the propositions had been taken (EE 11-2).

In reading Eckhart's own comments in his response to the articles, it is clear that he did not entirely take the accusations seriously and had little patience for the way that he was being misunderstood. It is not reasonable to assume that Eckhart would have been unfamiliar with the usual thinking that guided inquisitorial hearings. And he would have likewise known that a hearing of that kind was unprecedented for someone of his stature. Further, the council he received from his fellow Dominicans would have been well informed indeed with respect to the inquisitorial process. Consequently, we should perhaps think Eckhart would have been *surprised* if he had known that some of his statements and the works containing those statements would ultimately be condemned after he died. As Colledge says, Eckhart "does not seem to have admitted the possibility

that the verdict could go against him" (EE 11). It is reasonable to think that Eckhart may not have fully appreciated the political situation that the pope was in part responding to with the bull. Thus, we may interpret this 'surprise' as an indication that the ultimate reasons for the result of the trial were not foreseeable to Eckhart insofar as he considered the matter of the case only as it applied to him.

Still, few are inclined to say that the condemnations are categorically wrong. Huston Smith calls this a "paradox" (EE xiii). Indeed, it is reasonable to assert that Eckhart's inquisitors were not wholly mistaken. Eckhart emphasizes what is archetypal in Christianity and explores its significance for the individual on a mystical path, downplaying the role of the Incarnation as an historical event. This is further underscored by Eckhart's comments that while Augustine said he found all of Christianity save the Incarnation in the books of the Platonists, Eckhart argued that even the Incarnation was there (*Confessions* 7.9.13; *In Ioh.* n.125 LW III:108.9-13; see McGinn 2005, 154). This is no mean point of conflict. The significance of linear history in Christianity is foundational for its worldview. Consequently, this diminution of the historical elements does indeed imply tension with the ecclesiastical hierarchy since that history informs dogma even though it essentially advocates a return to the spirit of patristic Neoplatonism, recast in a form that was suitable to the conception of the individual in the late medieval world[2].

[2] I am thinking in particular of Festugière's comment that "When the Fathers 'think' their mysticism, they Platonize" (as cited in McGinn 1992, 24).

3.2 Fitting Eckhart into an historical narrative: Bernard McGinn

If it were possible to distill doctrinal claims from Eckhart's work, this would facilitate comparison. Consequently, it may be unsurprising that Bernard McGinn's work is the first to be considered since his treatment of Eckhart is part of his larger project of crafting a constructive history of Western Christian mysticism. Historical narratives cohere by identifying continuities and discontinuities, elements that are only able to be identified if comparison is possible.

In discussing McGinn's commentary on Eckhart, two types of observation will be made. First, McGinn makes statements that enable comparison by explicitly excluding certain possibilities. Second, other expressions implicitly close off avenues of interpretation in ways that he may not have intended or at least point to assumptions that he did not make explicit. As will be demonstrated, the second extends and in some way amplifies the direction of interpretation established by the first. In both cases, the principle assumption of interest concerns the nature of the self.

Rather than criticizing his interpretation as straightforwardly wrong in a strong sense, the criticism given of McGinn's work here largely addresses the question of whether or his work guides thought in a useful fashion. In other words, it takes seriously McGinn's statement that he hopes that his history will constitute something like Plato's "likely story" (*eikôs muthos*) in the *Timaeus* (McGinn 1992, 6). Using the word *eikôs*, which is a form of *eikôn* (image), Timaeus declares, "The accounts we give of things [should] have the same character as the subjects they set forth" (29b3-5). Though McGinn, like Plato, provocatively leaves the question open of what this means, we may recognize at least two possibilities. First, since his work is a history of mysticism, his

'likely story' may have the same character as the mystical thought that he discusses. Second, we may recall Blumenberg's description of the goodness of his protohistory of theory as one that has 'fit' and 'quality' which enables it to guide thought productively and to remain obstinately relevant because of these virtues. Indeed, my own project here as well reflects similar ambitions. What is claimed therefore in the following critique of McGinn is that some of his descriptions and his manner of compartmentalizing serve to steer thought away from sympathetic interpretations of thinkers like Eckhart and thus do not guide thought in the most productive fashion.

One of the most significant scholarly efforts that McGinn has undertaken in the past few decades is to write a multivolume history of western Christian mysticism. The series chronologically steps through that history, covering a large number of Christian mystical writers. This encyclopedic effort is underwritten by an historical methodology that has its roots in his writings from the years before the publication of the first volume in 1992. McGinn begins his 1989 article on *unio mystica* by telling us:

> All ideals of Christian perfection, and mysticism is certainly one of these, are forms of response to the presence of God, a presence that is not open, evident, or easily accessible but one that is always in some way mysterious or hidden. When that hidden presence becomes the subject of some form of 'immediate' experience, we can begin to speak of mysticism in the proper sense of the term. The responses of the human subject to the divine presence have been discussed theologically in a variety of ways and according to many different models and paradigms … The mysticism of union is just one of the species of a wider and more diverse genus or group (McGinn 1989, 59-60).

Though we are perhaps so accustomed to talking and thinking about religion in this way, it may pass unnoticed that McGinn has made several decisive moves. The first two phrases ostensibly sound similar to the trite claim that mysticism simply is one part of Christian history. However, by saying that mysticism is "one of" the ideals of Christian perfection, it is implied that it is a member of a group of like things, able to be compared with other members of that group. The same thought closes the section above where he says more explicitly that "The mysticism of union is just one of the species of a wider and more diverse genus or group." Here, he expressly sets up a taxonomy with which we are to understand that union mysticism is a species that is linked with other species under a single genus. This one assumption puts McGinn at odds with a great many theologians in Christian history who thought that the highest Christian thought is mystical or that theology naturally inclines toward and becomes mystical, which implies that mysticism is not one thing among many. For the purposes of this study, of course, it is salient that Eckhart for one would have objected to this characterization of mysticism since it makes mysticism into an object which is amenable to conceptual thinking (what Eckhart called 'images').

If talk of mystical union did not appear before a certain point and exhibits certain characteristics in its evolution after that point, it seems reasonable to think of it as an historical object that is born at a certain time and evolves. While it may be true that certain rhetorical expressions have histories that can be studied, the deeper and subtler assumption that lies beneath the surface of McGinn's phrasing is that Christian mysticism is *heterogeneous* (the different forms are different species) and its particular

manifestations belong to the higher, unifying genus of what he calls responses to the "presence of God."

McGinn tells us that the "hidden presence" of God "becomes the subject of some form of 'immediate' experience." The necessary imprecision of speech ('some form') and equally necessary resorting to metaphor (placing 'immediate' in quotes) are telling. McGinn seems to recognize that he is on nonconceptual ground. Yet, he still maintains the tie to experience which is the experience *of a subject*. He makes this plain in the next sentence where he talks of "The responses of *the human subject* to the divine presence" and "the relation of union to the spiritual powers of the *conscious subject*" (McGinn 1989, 59, 60, my emphasis). Though the experience itself is nonconceptual and imprecisely described, McGinn is quite clear that it is an individual subject who experiences and that this subject is understood as distinct from God. This separation of the human subject from the divine constitutes a particular interpretative stance on mystical union: it is only rhetorical.

Mysticism in the late medieval world is often spoken of in terms of the varying emphases on love and knowledge, especially as traditionally exemplified by the Franciscan and Dominican traditions of thought. McGinn's *unio mystica* essay questions the utility of this usual manner of speaking and ultimately concludes that the categories are too simplistic, which is certainly the case. He concludes that the division between affective and intellectual mysticism is too general and that we risk overlooking the role of love or knowledge in a particular person's thought by emphasizing only one side (McGinn 1989, 84). What we should think about with this question, however, is what the effect on thinking is when compartmentalizing mystical history in this way. The idea that

we can distinguish types of mysticism like that implies that the distinction between them is substantial. In criticizing those categories, McGinn does not at the same time criticize the fashion of thought that makes such categorization possible. By maintaining that mysticism is “one of” the ideals of Christian perfection and that union mysticism is a species of a larger genus, he implicitly affirms the same kind of thinking that enabled the categorization of ‘love’ and ‘knowledge’ centric mysticism. McGinn tells us that he will look at love and knowledge and the history of these as "*means* and as *end*" in the history of Christian mysticism (McGinn 1989, 60). This alone tells us that these are substantive differences, thought of as elements in a process (a mystical itinerary, perhaps) that can be discussed conceptually. This is clear from his list of four questions which frame his discussion, including "what roles were assigned to love and knowledge in the process leading to union?", “in what sense may love and/or knowledge be said to be present within the experience or state of union attainable in this life?” and finally, “in what sense is love and/or knowledge present in the union to be enjoyed in heaven?” (McGinn 1989, 60).

In discussing Richard of St. Victor and his teaching that love and reason mutually support one another in the ascent to contemplation, he tells us, “Richard’s interest centers on *excessus*, the passing beyond and above reason” (McGinn 1989, 65). When we speak of transcending reason, we should also remember that transcending *ratio* includes disavowing the applicability of concepts - the transcending of conceptuality. The concepts that are used, therefore, may also be understood as pointing to practices rather than drawing conceptual distinctions. This recall’s Denys Turner’s comment that “Detachment and interiority are, for Eckhart, not so much the

names of experiences as practices for the transformation of experience. ... 'Detachment,' in short, is the ascetic practice of the apophatic" (Turner 1995, 179 as cited by McGinn 2005, 169). McGinn warns us, "We must beware, then, of any easy importation of modern psychological categories back into Eckhartian detachment" (McGinn 2005, 169). McGinn is appropriately careful with this, though he does not eschew categorization at certain times, evidently not always appreciating the avenues of thinking that this approach closes off.

Since McGinn's discussion does not problematize the manner of thought that seeks to understand mysticism by way of such categories, he thereby implicitly affirms the legitimacy of thinking in this way. Further, as modern people, since we are naturally inclined to think in these terms anyway, this serves to confirm our existing habits of thought and effectively discourages thinking differently. The dynamic here is equivalent to the exercising of a habit. By providing us with the right environment by way of certain rhetorical cues, he creates a space for thinking that we know how to use since it is so familiar. By entering into the familiar space of thought where we can exercise our usual habits of thought, we are not well situated to bring certain assumptions to light and transform our thinking and mode of being, which is the aim of so much mystical writing.

Despite the issues described above, McGinn remains a careful interpreter of Eckhart and his rhetoric does point toward a number of useful ways of thinking. For example, he says "*Grunt* is the protean term at the center of Eckhart's mysticism, one that vanishes from our grasp when we try to contain it in any definable scheme or doctrinal system" (McGinn 2005, 86). This is productive because it draws attention away from the philosophical concepts themselves and points to the need to think differently.

Even within the talk of love and knowledge centric mysticism, McGinn identifies Eckhart as an outlier since his notion of union lies beyond both love and knowledge (McGinn 1989, 77, 85). As such, McGinn tells us that "even if there is some kind of transcendental knowledge present in indistinct union, there is no way of describing these under the rubrics taken from the lower forms familiar to us" and, further, that Eckhart sees union in "a transcendental way that breaks the limits of language." (McGinn 1989, 77, 78). With additional detail, however, his rhetoric strays into issues with the conception of the individual. He tells us that "Indistinct union can be described as a continuous state of nonabsorptive and transformative awareness of the identity of the grunt" (McGinn 2005, 183). Once again, this is described in such a way that a subject is implied who has a 'state' of a particular flavor[3].

McGinn even says that the knowledge and memory gained through the (Augustinian) union of wills "are, of course, quite unlike those that are gained naturally" (McGinn 1989, 84). That it is a different kind of 'knowledge' than the knowledge we are used to suggests that the term 'knowledge' is being stretched. This is, borrowing McGinn's words, because "This new kind of knowledge of God is substantial, nondiscursive, passively received not actively gained, and, above all, incommensurable"

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[3] Though Suso sounds similar to McGinn, on closer inspection, he may have changed Eckhart's rhetoric without changing the substance of the ideas. Suso described three qualifications of union: 1) union is not a merging of essences, 2) union removes the consciousness of difference (like Tauler) but not the ontological difference, 3) the soul becomes God by grace and not by nature. Though this is a departure from Eckhart's phrasing, if the soul becomes God by nature or by grace, it still becomes God. Becoming God by grace removes distinction while the ontological difference of essences seems to maintain distinction. There is an apparent paradox in Suso's three qualifications. Interestingly, the paradox is removed by considering Eckhart's doctrine of existence. Although beings have their being from God, particular esse is transitory, which is why God must be beyond being (recall Eckhart's modification of Aquinas and his assertion that *Esse est deus*). So, the "ontological distinction" that remains with Suso may refer only to Eckhart's *ens hoc et hoc*, the existence of created things. If so, Suso found a way of restating Eckhart so as to avoid censure while leaving the ideas intact.

(McGinn 1989, 84). Yes, it is *incommensurable*, the hallmark of ineffable insight *and* of Blumenbergian absolute metaphors. When John of the Cross metaphorically calls this 'knowledge,' he is beyond conceptuality and naturally lacks a suitable term.

It is useful to hear that knowledge of God is not 'knowledge' as normally conceived. Mystical theology is "essentially experiential and therefore truly known only to someone who has received it" (McGinn 2005, 20). Since he does not problematize what it means to "know" mystical theology, his rhetoric instead carries the unfortunate implication that mystical theology is something *knowable* in a way that is similar enough to how other things are knowable to merit using the same term without qualification. With Eckhart, we must take the next step and admit that not only is the concept of knowledge problematized, but so is the concept of self.

McGinn's closest point of approach to the issue of the changing notion of the self may be where, in discussing an apocryphal sermon, he makes a statement that indicates that he understands the very point that is in tension with his interpretation of mysticism as the 'presence of God': "Here the soul goes beyond the identity she has with God in the eternal Image. There is no longer any kind of imaging; even the identity that implies two distinct things becoming one is lost. There is only nothingness" (McGinn 2005, 180). It is not clear how McGinn can coherently maintain the persistence of the individual identity here. Nevertheless, he still speaks consistently of "states" as if we were merely talking about different conscious states for an individual who has not lost his or her identity (see McGinn 2005, 180, 183).

In his discussion of the surge of interest in mystical union in the 12th-16th centuries, McGinn speculates that they were reading more Dionysius and Maximus the

Confessor (McGinn 1989, 61). This stands out as an odd supposition in comparison with his usually strong evidence to back his claims. Further, he cites an increased emphasis on systematic mystical theology and on personal mystical experience, but does not explore this further. McGinn notes that the transition is mysterious but does not mention the changing notion of self.

McGinn shares something close to Blumenberg's assumption regarding the fundamentality of the individual and individual experience. In referencing Blumenberg in describing Eckhart's *grunt* as an explosive metaphor, McGinn says,

> While explosive metaphors like *grunt* can give rise to deep philosophical and theological speculation, their function is more practical, or better, pragmatic, than theoretical: they are meant to overturn and transform ordinary forms of consciousness through the process of making the inner meaning of the metaphor one's own in everyday living (McGinn 2005, 85).

McGinn follows Blumenberg in his description of such metaphors as pragmatic. His description of mysticism is better for it since he avoids speaking in overly conceptual terms about mystical writing. However, he also follows Blumenberg in saying that the pragmatic function of such metaphors is ultimately restricted to the bounds of the individual's lived experience.

McGinn rightly recognizes the importance of Eckhart's use of chiasmus and other techniques that set his ideas in motion and antagonize conceptual settling by a kind of dialectical dynamic (McGinn 2005, 138). McGinn prefers this form of description to speaking of Eckhart's rhetoric as paradoxical. In anticipation of addressing Eckhart's

use of paradox in the next chapter, we will now turn to Bruce Milem's treatment of Eckhart's rhetoric and to paradox in particular.

3.3 Accounting for rhetoric: Bruce Milem

Michael Sells (1994) pointed out that Eckhart uses the word "in" when speaking of things that have no proper place. I would like to extend this and say that Eckhart uses the personal pronouns "I" and "you" to refer to more than the individual self as commonly conceived. He also uses 'part' to refer to things that have no parts. As Milem says regarding Sermon 52, Eckhart "deploys a series of dramatic assertions about the soul and God, using the first person pronoun 'I' in an ambiguous way entirely consonant with the soul's paradoxical status" (Milem 2002, 148). His use of the words problematizes and thereby strains the notion of the self until it breaks.

Milem recognizes that Eckhart uses more than one way of speaking about union (Milem 2013, 339). Further, it is not clear if these are separates 'senses' of union or simply different rhetorical angles for it. The presence of this complexity is an indication of why McGinn's classification of Eckhart's mysticism is too facile. This observation exemplifies the primary difference between Milem and McGinn on Eckhart: where McGinn gives weight to traditional philosophical and theological distinctions and mechanics, Milem emphasizes how Eckhart's rhetoric seeks to break out of that traditional mode of thinking.

Milem says hypothetically, "for the sake of argument, let us say that Eckhart's sermons address the relationship between God and the human individual" (Milem 2013, 338). He introduces this and similar conjectures to illustrate the difficulty in interpreting and understanding what Eckhart has to say. This signals his moving beyond McGinn

specifically by problematizing the claim that Eckhart's mysticism relates specifically to the relationship between God and the individual human subject. Instead, he says regarding Eckhart's inconsistent use of terms, "this raises the possibility that Eckhart uses traditional words in new ways and in effect develops a theological language of his own. (He may not be consistent with this language from one sermon to the next, either.) If this is the case, then one has to read Eckhart's sermons for a while and learn his language to grasp what he is talking about, and pocket summaries of his sermons will turn out to be misleading precisely because they depend on the standard meanings for Eckhart's words, and not Eckhart's own meanings" (Milem 2013, 338). Milem's consistent focus on the motion in Eckhart's rhetoric guides thought away from the use of traditional categories and assumptions. It signals to us that we should be unusually aware of how we are receiving what Eckhart says and how we should be open to the possibility that a new kind of thinking may be necessary to understand him.

Fundamentally, the need to go beyond our usual philosophical categories begins with the recognition that, for Eckhart, "God is not a finite thing like the things we encounter every day, and in this respect God is like nothing, which also is not a thing with a particular form or essence. … Eckhart speaks in Sermon 52 of the 'abyss of divine being.' But if nothing means nullity or nonexistence, then God differs from it, since Eckhart treats God as the source of being, not simply the absence of it" (Milem 2002, 128). In other words, if we say that Eckhart's God is beyond words and another theologian's God is not, we are implicitly assuming that the 'unsayability' (to borrow William Franke's term) of God is an accidental quality added onto a more fundamental conception of God that is still knowable in some way that is common to both.

For a God who is not similar to anything, it is most natural to focus on the rhetoric which serves as a signpost, steering thought in a particular direction, implying the necessity of a transformation of one's way of thinking. Instead of focusing on the content of *what* Eckhart is saying, those who approach Eckhart as Milem does prefer to emphasize the importance of *how* he is speaking. Milem tells us that Eckhart's sermons "can also be seen as events, actions, or performances. From this point of view, what Eckhart says is only part of the story. We also have to ask, what is he doing in saying these things? What kinds of effects does he create? From this point of view, the sermons are not transparent statements of Eckhart's opinions" (Milem 2013, 346). Milem extends this emphasis on Eckhart's rhetoric, even claiming that "Eckhart's speech emphasizes its own status as language" and that the sermons are "performances or linguistic representations of the matters that they discuss" (Milem 2002, 143). Milem wants us to consider the possibility that the act of listening to and thinking about Eckhart's sermons is essentially similar to the relationship between man and God. As he says, "If the sermon brilliantly overwhelms interpreters by challenging their ability to make rational sense of its pronouncements, then it is fair to say that God overwhelms the soul in their mutual encounter of identity and difference. Thus one's experience of the sermon faintly discloses something of the soul's incomprehensible meeting with God" (Milem 2002, 49). Thus, by engaging Eckhart and wrestling with what he says, we are involved in "an exercise" that is fundamentally similar to the relation between man and the divine and ultimately "discloses God more satisfactorily than anything he could actually say" (Milem 2002, 161).

As “pieces of dramatic art”, Milem sees the sermons themselves as Eckhartian *images* in the sense that they mediate between the eternal truths of God and the understanding of a soul that is still in time (Milem 2002, 174, 83). This transforms the entire sermon into a metaphor since it has the function of carrying the listener from one perspective to another by guiding thought[4]. Seeing the sermons in this way causes him to reject Egerding’s (and C.F. Kelley’s, which ultimately traces to Tauler’s) suggestion that Eckhart speaks from both eternal and temporal perspectives (on Tauler, see Milem 2013, 345). While I agree that seeing the sermons as dramatic performances which themselves mirror the relation between human and divine is useful, it is not necessary to then conclude that Eckhart does not speak from both human and divine perspectives (see Milem 2002, 83n43 and 68 where he says that “The sermon operates on the level of the lower form of understanding, even as it devotes itself to describing the higher form”). After all, in Sermon 2, Eckhart declares, “If you could look upon this with my heart, you would understand well what I say, for it is true and *the truth itself speaks it*”[5] (my emphasis).

Although we can agree that Eckhart “primarily involves his audience in a complex interpretive exercise by deliberately giving difficult sermons,” it is not as clear that these sermons thereby “emphasize their own status as products of language” (Milem 2002, 4). The potential problem here concerns Milem’s conceptions of the sermons as *only*

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[4] As I argued in chapter two, we should call things metaphors when there is a functional similarity. This not only recalls Blumenberg’s own debt to Cassirer’s functionalism, it also enables us to broaden the possible field of what counts as a metaphor, including non-lexical rhetorical elements like the one described here.

[5] *Möhtet ir gemerken mit mînem herzen, ir verstüendet wol, waz ich spriche, wan ez ist wâr und diu wârheit sprichet ez selbe* (DW I 40, 5-7)

temporal. Explicitly connecting the sermons with Eckhart's notion of *images* as expressed in Sermon 2, he says, "the sermons depend on God as the source of their being," even calling them "creatures" to emphasize their createdness (Milem 2002, 159). It is useful to conceive of them in this way, but it is not clear that the sermons are necessarily limited to this one way of understanding them. As *ideas*, the sermons have an eternal quality. Eckhart shows rhetorical craft, but he does not seem to share the modern concern with the works as entities or 'creatures' in their own right. Instead of couching his acts of preaching in modern terms of 'performance' and considering texts as entities unto themselves apart from the author, Eckhart may have preferred to think of his sermons as *activities*. Insofar as they are natural actions that flow from truth and the truth declares it, they are divine.

Limitations aside, the use in conceiving of the sermons as being similar to the human/divine relationship is illustrated most through the idea that Eckhart's words have *motion*. Specifically, "This movement is a kind of image, a distant reflection, of what does not abide within any form though abiding within all" (Milem 2002, 84). Milem tells us that "Eckhart slips between the different meanings so rapidly and without warning as to erase distinctions between them" (Milem 2002, 44). As he says, citing Duclow (1984, 41), "Eckhart's language and metaphors must be understood *in motion* … Nothing stays put in his language" (Milem 2002, 84n44). This notion of motion defraying attachment is part of Milem's extension of McGinn's talk of Eckhart's 'dialectic,' which is again too focused on conceptual thinking (McGinn 2005, 138). Duclow uses this idea to assert that the motion enables Eckhart to discourage our attachment to doctrine and conceptual definition in the same way that he preaches detachment from particular

religious practices. Milem usefully extends Duclow and connects this motion to the Eckhartian use of paradox: “In a process reminiscent of the constant becoming that Eckhart believes to be the lot of created being, his discourse continually moves and becomes by always trying again to think opposites together” (Milem 2002, 148). This implies the possibility that his sermons not only function as metaphors, but specifically, as *explosive metaphors* since they guide thought similarly[6].

In commenting on McGinn’s discussion of Eckhart’s *grunt* as an explosive metaphor, Milem says, “This ground is the ground of the soul but also God’s ground, and it effectively disrupts the distinction between the soul and God in favor of an identity that fuses the two without distinction. … [T]o understand the ground, we describe it as fusing God and the soul and thereby use the very distinction that the ground undermines. Eckhart’s emphasis on the ineffability of God makes it more difficult to pin down the subject matter of his sermons, because such attempts rely on the very terms and distinctions that Eckhart often seems at pains to erase” (Milem 2013, 344). The nexus of the divine and human is ineluctably paradoxical. At the point where we cross over from temporal to eternal, we cannot expect the conceptual thinking that belongs only to the temporal to be appropriately applied to the eternal, even by calling it ‘eternal.’ When Milem says that we are using the very terms that Eckhart seeks to erase and thus problematizing our usual way of thinking, he elucidates the key dynamic of the various

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[6] It is not clear that all paradoxes that result from opposites meeting (as with the *coincidentia oppositorum*, the coincidence of opposites) function as explosive metaphors. In addition to guiding thought toward its limits so as to burst through to a new way of seeing, it is equally possible to strain concepts with the eventual consequence of *deflating* them and robbing them of significance. For example, if the love and hate of worldly things can be shown to meet, the result may be an atrophying of attachment, just as when one learns how to attenuate a bad habit by first becoming aware of how it works. Of course, this is closely related to explosive metaphorics.

rhetorical techniques that Eckhart uses to speak of the divine. The different ways that Eckhart does this will be a running theme in the chapters that follow.

Milem does well to point out how Eckhart problematizes concepts and our usual way of thinking through the continuous motion of his concepts. Along these lines, Milem tells us, “Yet even as this difficult manner of speech apparently obscures the relation between the sermons and their subject, it also produces a situation in which, through the process of interpretation, interpreters can become active participants in the disclosure or construction of meaning that occurs in and through the sermons” (Milem 2002, 13). It is indeed useful to recognize that the activity of Eckhart’s listeners is a crucial element of his sermons. However, Milem may go too far in saying that, “Eckhart’s language constantly moves, correcting and contradicting itself” (Milem 2002, 84). Referring to Sermon 2, he tells us that “the little castle’s simple oneness overturns Eckhart’s statements about it” and “that same oneness requires revising Eckhart’s own description” (Milem 2002, 77). That makes it sound as though Eckhart was trying to say something conceptual, something that could be right or wrong. Speaking of Eckhart’s rhetoric as dialectical, where he puts forth an image and then “knocks it down” with a later one, as Milem says of the little castle[7], implies that the steps before the end are somehow less legitimate or true than the end itself. This subtly affirms our tendency to think that the end content, abstracted from lived experience and is true outside of time, is what is truly important. This leads us to underestimate the value in rhetoric that is

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[7] Milem sees tension between the virgin wife and the little castle (Milem 2002, 79). He says the little castle “takes back or negates” the oneness of the virgin wife. This may go too far: “On this reading [of Sermon 2], Eckhart uses the virgin wife image to setup a description of God’s relation to the soul and then knocks it down with the little castle” (Milem 2002, 81). He reiterates the point later with rhetoric that is consistent with his prior formulations, saying that the little castle “corrects” the virgin wife (Milem 2002, 160).

situationally important for listeners who are still on the path. Milem's rhetoric of correction and contradiction continues when he says, "This contradicts his earlier claim..." and similarly, "Thus it is better to say that only with the little castle, and not with the intellect, is the soul like God" (Milem 2002, 78). If this kind of pruning of Eckhart's rhetoric were useful, he would have never said both things to begin with. The same rhetoric of making 'claims' is present as well, "An image of God that pretended to be a literally true description of God's transcendence would truly be more misleading than an image that made no such claims" (Milem 2002, 83). This encourages us to think in terms of making claims and contradicting them, which occurs under the traditional model of dialectically approaching truth in the form of true claims. Eckhart's rhetoric is not dialectically seeking true claims about God[8].

Though much of what Milem does is helpful, some of his phrasing may steer his readers in a less productive direction. This most often occurs in the form of language that encourages our tendency to use comfortable philosophical distinctions. For example, "the movement from ignorance to self-knowledge in Eckhart involves a movement from identifying oneself primarily as finite and temporal to identifying oneself as also eternal and divine" (Milem 2002, 152). This may easily leave one with the impression that the important element in the transition is the identification of a particular human subject with either the temporal or the divine. We may notice some confusion on this point in Milem's writing. He says, "Thus, in one sense I am unborn and eternal, in

[8] This style of thinking leads us likewise to underestimate the importance of the little prayers that Eckhart uses to close his sermons. Milem tells us that they shouldn't be taken too literally (Milem 2002, 78). I agree with Forman, contra Milem, who claims that these little prayers are essential elements of the sermon and should be taken seriously (Forman 1991, 5).

another I am born and mortal. Eckhart does not identify the self with either half alone. It is both, though how this is possible he does not say" (Milem 2002, 43). While it is good that Milem recognizes that Eckhart does not affirm a specific claim in terms of identification, he leaves it as something enigmatic rather than probing the issue in more detail. Further, in discussing Sermon 2, "Eckhart in effect makes that oneness impossible to understand by restricting it to the transcendent, ineffable little castle in the soul. We may be one with God, but we have no idea what that means" (Milem 2002, 78). Yes indeed, we have no *idea*. Though Milem's rhetoric has a nice punch here and even feels Eckhartian, it also seems to imply that the matter is an unresolved question that could be answered.

Along similar lines, when discussing the notion of the virgin, who is detached, he says, "If virginity is an attitude that the soul can gain and lose, then there is no point in trying to attain it" (Milem 2002, 54). Virginity is not useless as an ideal just because it is possible to become attached to it. For one who is still at a midpoint on the path, currying motivation to keep going and to detach further is not at all incompatible with the correct but irrelevant observation that eventually, the ideal of detachment will itself be an obstacle if one is attached to it. The real problem here, though, is that his rhetoric seems to imply that the presence of a logical issue like becoming attached to detachment somehow vitiates the value of what Eckhart is doing. In other words, it encourages us to think in terms of truth and falsity rather than utility and motivation. Stated more plainly, being concerned with some notion of 'truth' leads one to esteem the internal logical structure of what is said. Note that this can remain the case even when talking about rhetoric as performative. If the performative aspect of rhetoric is

emphasized because of what is "said," then the implication is that the content communicated is what is most important (cf. Milem 2002, 14-5). Even if this content is nonconceptual, it can still be thought of as static, abstracted from lived experience and relating to a particular notion of truth. Despite Eckhart's elevation of intellect above being, his rhetoric ultimately still speaks to the fullness of lived activity, not merely to the intellectually abstracted truth that informs it (that is, as *esse formaliter*, a temporal manifestation, of *esse virtualiter*, an eternal Form). In other words, it is useful for Eckhart to speak of detachment in a non-detached way because of how those who are still attached to images receive what he says. As it was for Augustine in the *Confessions*, currying motivation and creating a strong will are necessary steps toward the annihilation of self-will.

Similarly, when Milem tells us that "Eckhart transforms Martha into the Virgin Mary" in Sermon 2, we might also hear the implication that he transforms her into something she is not. For Eckhart, she is the Virgin Mary only insofar as she is a virgin wife, which may mean that Martha is as much the Virgin Mary as I am. Milem's rhetoric subtly affirms our intuition that Eckhart is running against the grain of what is somehow 'true' of Martha, as though his departure from the traditional meaning was not on a par with it. Though it is clearly un-Eckhartian to speak of latent spiritual meaning as somehow not 'literal' and equal to other meanings, it is counter even to what Milem himself says in a later work, "interpretation of Scripture is not secondary to the text itself. Instead, interpretation, however extravagant, is itself part of the literal meaning and fabric of Scripture. In interpreting the Bible, the exegete is participating with God in the writing of Scripture and thus enjoys a kind of union with God" (Milem 2013, 347). I am

not claiming that Milem contradicts himself so much as I am that he may not have foreseen the kind of thinking that his rhetoric implied[9].

The issues with Milem's rhetoric are most clearly seen in his treatment of paradox. For example, in discussing virginity in Sermon 2, he says, "Recognizing the contradiction in treating spiritual virginity as a practical ideal to achieve in time allows one to interpret the sermon in a different way. Then it becomes clear that spiritual virginity actually names the soul's eternal oneness with God" (Milem 2002, 150). The problem here is that statements like this make it sound as though Eckhart's paradoxes are just roundabout ways, perhaps with rhetorical merit and practical utility, of pointing to what can be plainly said in other terms. In Blumenberg's terms, this would make them closer to *symbols* than to *metaphors*. Not only are Eckhart's paradoxes meant to point to the nonconceptual, they have an explosive quality in that they work by problematizing our usual mode of thought. This mechanism of encouraging transformative experience is not compatible with descriptions of Eckhart's paradoxes that seek to explain them away by thinking of spiritual virginity as *merely* another name for the soul's oneness with God. This is not, strictly speaking, 'wrong' since the soul's oneness with God is essentially paradoxical. However, it glosses over the problematizing of our usual mode of thinking, which is the primary mechanism by which Eckhart's paradoxes are effective. As this is a crucial element in interpreting Eckhart, this will be treated in more detail in the next chapter, especially in light of Cyprian Smith's work on Eckhart and paradox.

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[9] Note that Milem is milder than Schürmann when commenting on Eckhart's unusual interpretations of scripture. Schürmann tells us that "the question remains open as to whether and to what extent a thought can be called of biblical inspiration if the elaboration of the new meaning of the sacred text cannot but do violence to its letter" (10).

Milem's presentation of Eckhart makes significant strides to move away from more traditionally philosophical analyses. The absence of much of the troubling rhetoric in Milem's more recent work is also a positive movement. Though his sensitivity to the nonconceptual in Eckhart is laudable, we might wish to move more decisively away from abstracting claims and toward a more explicit inclusion of lived experience in Eckhart's thought. Robert K.C. Forman moves in that direction with his book-length study of what it may be like to undergo the experiences of which Eckhart speaks.

3.4 Eckhart and experience: Robert K.C. Forman

In his *Meister Eckhart: the Mystic as Theologian*, Forman explains that in the field of mysticism, he has "a rather unusual vantage point. Most of the debates on the philosophical nature of mysticism are an attempt to place mysticism in some sort of larger philosophical context; e.g., attempts to analyze mysticism in Wittgenstein's terms, in terms of the language of the tradition in which it stands, or in a Hegelian framework, etc. These attempts are laudable. However, such frameworks were constructed to explain our 'ordinary' experience, and only applied later to mysticism" (Forman 1991, x). This is in conflict with the fact that "Mystics tend to distinguish that which they speak of *from* their ordinary experience" (Forman 1991, x). Therefore, instead of describing Eckhart's writing in terms of "the philosophical system it gives rise to," he begins with "the experiences Eckhart describes" (Forman 1991, x). Thus, he sees his project as "attempting to portray as clearly and as precisely as I can Eckhart's phenomenological portraits of mystical or personal experience" (Forman 1991, x-xi). Finally, he tells us that he looks to answer the question: if I were Eckhart's disciple, "what kind of experience might I expect to undergo?" (Forman 1991, xi). I have included many of Forman's own

words here first to accurately represent the direction his study went, and second, because the precise formulations he uses will be shown to reveal certain rhetorical issues in discussing mysticism.

One emphasis of Forman's work that is particularly useful is his talk of motivation. Philosophical writers typically assume infinite motivation and patience on the part of their readers. Religious writers are typically more sensitive to the vicissitudes of motivation and the criticality of maintaining motivation in pursuing religious growth. The thrust behind many of Eckhart's rhetorical strategies is lost if we neglect to consider his motivational aim and instead treat it as merely peripheral. As with Milem's discussion of the virgin wife and intellect, which precede the little castle in Sermon 2, we might puzzle at Eckhart's inclusion of elements that do not point straight toward the goal if we ignore motivation. As Forman says, Eckhart's

> theoretical system is informed by — and leaves unmistakable room for – the possibility of particular experiences unlike those of the 'natural man.' It is structured in such a way that if one in the course of the religious transformation has these peculiar experiences, one can gauge the level of one's attainments and feel confident that one is on course. In addition, by hearing of the nature of the modeless expanse, one will hopefully be drawn towards it. As Eckhart describes, catalogs, and theorizes, he evokes. Philosophy accounts for and evokes the variety of cognitive structures described herein by means of a set of theologically laden ontological structures (Forman 1991, 212)

Being drawn toward a particular religious experience need not be described in terms of language and concepts necessarily mediating and creating that experience, as

someone like Steven Katz might do. Instead we might focus upon the way that being primed for an experience serves to facilitate and evoke further experience because it increases confidence and motivation, just as Augustine experienced by hearing of Victorinus and in Ponticianus' story of happening upon Athanasius of Alexandria's *Life of Antony* (*Conf.* VIII.v.10,15). Davies finds Eckhart's work is so full of "'poetical' and evocative" speech that he says of Eckhart's theology, "rather than being distinct ideas with a specific significance, they take on the evocative properties of an image and a metaphor" (Davies 1991, 155, 180). If I am learning piano and I listen to an expert describe what virtuosic playing is like, I may be inspired to further practice and try to bring out that experience in me. When I finally do break through and achieve something, that experience will be a product of my training and its concomitant experiences far more than it will be mediated by the words of the virtuoso who initially inspired me.

In discussing Sermon 86, Eckhart's other sermon that uses the same biblical passage as Sermon 2, Forman comments, "The first thing that strikes me about this passage is that its peculiarities concern the *subject*. ... In the Birth one has one 'awareness' with God's awareness … *I* know such and such, or hear such and such. The transformation is not in some content or sensation but in the 'I' itself." (Forman 1991, 143-4). This nicely points us in the right direction. Lest we think that the 'I' is somehow changed into a different thing that can be compared with the self as it was before, we should join this to Forman's other observation that "the key process in mysticism seems not like the horse of language pulling the cart of experience, but rather more like *unhitching* the experience-cart from the language-horse. Mystical experiences don't result from a process of building or constructing mystical experience, we've

suggested, but rather from an *un*-constructing of language and belief. It seems to result from something like a *releasing* of experience from language. Some forms of mysticism, in other words, should be seen as *decontextualized*." (Forman 1999, 99). Eckhart's own rhetoric sounds like this, which tells us that we are getting closer to his own thinking. Eckhart describes the process of "unknowing," an idea that Nicholas of Cusa would take and make great use of a century later, "And as this detachment rises up to the highest, so it becomes unknowing from knowing, loveless from loving, and dark from light."[10] Forman continues, "Notice, these decontrolling utterances often use the *via negativa*: '*cease* looking,' 'lay your expectations *down*,' '*stop* thinking you know what this will look like,' etc. In general, *via negativa* language serves this very particular cognitive function. It is designed to get you to *cease* applying your automatized expectations, and get you to open up to the world more immediately" (Forman 1999, 100). And similarly, "language here does not serve a descriptive function but rather an *evocative* one: it is designed to help bring about a process of *dropping* one's pre-formations. It is intended to help bring him to a new state by *de*constructing the old automatized perceptual patterns" (Forman 1999, 101). This leads him to the conclusion that Eckhart's "theory passages are all hortatory in intent," which directly impinges upon the inquisitorial questions that opened this chapter and show us the true distance that separated them from Eckhart's own thought (Forman 1991, 160). The direction that Forman provides his

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[10] *Und sô diu abegescheidenheit kumet ûf daȝ hœhste, sô wirt si von bekennenne kennelôs und von minne minnelôs und von liehte vinster.* ("On Detachment", DW V 428.7-9). See also Sermon 102, "we will become knowledgeable with divine knowledge and will be ennobled and adorn our unknowing with supernatural knowledge" (*Danne suln wir werden wiȝȝende mit dem götlîchen wiȝȝenne und danne wirt geadelt und geȝieret unser unwiȝȝen mit dem übernatiurlîchen wiȝȝenne.* Sermon 102, DW IV.1 420.132-133)

readers is parallel to the trajectory established by Eckhart's own explosive metaphors and self-effacing rhetoric, which once again signals that we are moving closer to a description that Eckhart might make of himself.

Though much of Forman's rhetoric guides us in a productive direction, he also devotes significant energy to discussing Eckhart in light of modern psychoanalysis. While I am sympathetic with comparative mythologists who use a modern psychoanalytic vocabulary to catalyze thinking about the history of religion, special care is required when attempting to directly confront mystical experience. Though his description of the birth of the Word in the soul is useful, we can see where his rhetoric seems to imply that the self is the locus of the change, as though the change were merely a change in perspective:

> The key fact to be understood about the Birth – and about each of the three modalities of mystical experience that Eckhart portrays - is that the change is not in any object, but rather in the subject. The perceiver undergoes a change in vantage point, as it were. In *gezucket* [rapture] the vantage point is inside of the divine 'expanseless expanse,' but cognizant of nothing else. In the Birth one comes to live amidst this expense. All activity is been conducted while maintaining the sense of a presence. That is, in the Birth *one perceives and acts from within this oceanic expanse*. One sees, hears, thinks, etc. in the old way, but the seer is now different. One's awareness is now as if broader or larger. To repeat: the novel element in the Birth is not a change in any object, but rather one in the subject, who now comes to experience from within a sense of the

> expanded presence. It is in this sense, and only this sense, that one becomes divine (Forman 1991, 165)

Though he is right to focus in a change with respect to the self insofar as the notion of the self is problematized, his descriptions consistently imply that the change is comprehensible in terms of individual experience. To say that the individual subject experiences “a sense of expanded presence” and that one’s awareness changes to become “broader and larger” is to make the mystical experience *too* familiar and knowable. In other words, based on his description, we might be led to presume that we can know too much about what mystical experience is by taking our existing concepts of what “broad” awareness and “presence” are and simply making them increasing their scope to make the awareness broad*er* and the presence *more* expanded. In other words, his description of “broader and larger” awareness is not apophatic.

We must be careful though, in this criticism. Just like Eckhart’s descriptions appeal to different stages of the process and have utility in doing so, Forman’s rhetoric as well can be useful insofar as it stimulates thinking in a productive direction, irrespective of the ultimate validity of any individual claim. For example, when Forman discusses the drop of wine in the ocean, a popular image of mystical union, he tells us, “imagine yourself to be that drop” to come to terms with the paradox of “knowing *God by God*” in the soul (Forman 1991, 147). He walks the reader through this little thought experiment, showing the utility in thinking through what it means to be a drop merging with the ocean. For a modern reader, especially, who may not be a mystic, the rhetoric

of awareness can be a useful inroad to try and get a grip on what it means for you, as the drop, to merge with the ocean[11].

His rhetoric of awareness and personal psychology is not incidental. When we read his comments on psychoanalysis and mysticism, the issues mentioned above are made more explicit. For example, “In sum, I define the Breakthrough of the Soul to the Godhead as a third new State of Consciousness. In it all mental content is encountered on the basis of a new cognitive structure in which any and all objects for perception are encountered as part of or permeated by the expanded reflexive awareness previously encountered within the soul” (Forman 1991, 181). Surely this goes too far in psychoanalyzing mysticism and translating it into modern psychoanalytic rhetoric. One of the chief issues with modern psychoanalytic language is that it still vies for objectivity. Understanding what a ‘state of consciousness’ is does not require any special appeal to experience and, what’s worse, implies that such a state is commensurate with other states and should be thought of in like fashion.

The problem described here is more than a rhetorical accident. Forman has spent a great deal of time forwarding the utility of the idea of the “Pure Consciousness Experience” in mysticism. He is effectively providing a term for the idea of contentless consciousness[12], meant to be a direct challenge to a prevailing tendency in philosophy of mind and psychology which tells us that consciousness is always a ‘consciousness

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[11] In using the term ‘grip,’ I am thinking of Merleau-Ponty and his talk of grip, which refers to the ‘right’ distance for viewing a work of art.

[12] He rightly likens this to William James’ talk of a “quasi-material something” which makes the contentless consciousness a positive experience of the One, as W.T. Stace said (Forman 1991, 119). This effectively insulates the claim of contentless consciousness from being reduced to nothingness, and thus, not justifiably called ‘consciousness’ at all.

of' something. Forman makes this explicit, telling us that "during the pure consciousness event one encounters nothing whatsoever" (Forman 1999, 109). The issue is with the talk of the "one" who does the encountering. Forman is essentially importing rhetoric from his background in Eastern philosophy, where this same rhetoric is frequently used to describe mystical experience. While it is doubtless useful to a certain degree, when he goes to great lengths to describe how the transformations that Eckhart speaks of can be explained in terms of modern psychological language, he does too much to encourage our thinking in a familiar way about the self and what mystical experience means.

As part of a thought experiment where he explicitly involves something like explosive metaphor, Forman says, "Now, let's perform a kind of calculus on our experience. Let's say the role of language decreases toward nil. … nothing 'external' is experienced; no 'objects of sense' are seen; and one is absolutely 'void of conceptions'" (Forman 1999, 104). Though this is quite useful, he never focuses on how this experience creates problems for our normal conception of the self and what it means for the self to have experiences. In other words, instead of describing the contentless experience as a kind of paradox, he seems to simply expand the notion of experience to include contentless experience as another kind of experience. The chief difficulty here is in the handling of paradox. More explicitly, when he discusses the paradox of how God in his unity can also have attributes, he tells us, "I would suggest that the critical factor standing at the heart of Eckhart's solution to this paradox can be summed up in the word *perspective.* From one perspective God is unitary, beyond attributes. From this perspective there is no naming, and thus no problem of how to name the *nomen*

innominabile. From another perspective, God has attributes; in fact, He is the name which every true attribute names, the *nomen omninominabile*" (Forman 1991, 203)[13]. To say that the paradox can be resolved by appealing to different modes of 'perspective' amounts to taming the paradox by rendering it intelligible in terms that we already understand and making it a merely *apparent* paradox. However, the heart of the use of paradoxes in mysticism hinges upon their *not* being amenable to our usual mode of thinking. It is only by first insisting upon maintaining the conceptual impossibility of the paradox that the possibility opens for rhetoric to provide the proper push to catalyze transformation[14]. It is to this crucial element in Eckhart's thought that we now turn.

[13] Eckhart uses this language as well in his Latin works.
[14] Without the metaphors guiding thight in the appropriate direction, simply seeing the conceptual impossibility could lead to the useless stasis of skeptical resignation instead of productive motion toward God, as Eckhart might say.

CHAPTER 4

PARADOX AND IMMEDIATE EXPERIENCE

What Eckhart does with paradox is special. He insists on preserving the contradictions, not allowing them to be explained away. In so doing, he preserves tension long enough to push concepts to the breaking point. As John Caputo put it, “The paradox of these assertions is exceeded only by their precision. Eckhart is speaking in a most exact way. Far from being muddled, Eckhart’s mysticism testifies to an extreme depth and sharpness of thought” (Caputo 1978, 215)[1]. Looking at conceptual metaphor theory as expressed by Lakoff and Johnson will serve to make clearer the significance of Blumenberg’s speculative narrative about the origin of metaphorical thinking and the anxiety it seeks to quell. It will also become clear that Eckhart’s use of paradox is functionally similar to Blumenberg’s explosive metaphors. By using discursive thought to unravel discursive thinking Eckhart pushes for an experiential, immediate experience. Extoling the value of an immediate, nonconceptual experience is a favorite topic of those speaking about the experience of nature. By looking at Erazim Kohàk’s description of the immediate experience of nature, we will see commonalities with what Eckhart aimed to accomplish with his rhetoric. In this chapter, we will trace the following

[1] Davies provides a list of ideas where Eckhart appears to contradict himself (Davies 1991, 155): Eckhart says that the ground of the soul is identified with the synderesis (Sermon 20a) and elsewhere not identified with the synderesis (Sermon 20b); we should understand the ground as intellect (Sermon 69) and not as intellect (Sermon 7); union with God is not love but knowledge (Sermon 7) and not knowledge but love (Sermon 63); the birth of the Word is identified with grace (Sermon 11) and not identified with grace (Sermon 70).

trajectory. Kohàk will help to describe how speaking of the immediate experience of nature requires an appeal to ineffable experience, just as we will describe how metaphor does for Lakoff & Johnson. The dynamics of such metaphors' functioning turns principally on their quelling anxiety, as with absolute metaphors, or fomenting anxiety, as with paradoxes and explosive metaphors, as Blumenberg described. At this point, the stage will be set for understanding Cyprian Smith's claim that paradoxes are at the heart of why Eckhart's teaching is effective. In all, probing Eckhart's insistence on paradoxes will prepare for the next chapter where we will more specifically target Eckhart's novelty through a discussion of how he leverages human curiosity for rare and novel things to guide his audience toward greater intimacy with the divine.

Etymologically, the word *paradox* comes from the Ancient Greek adjective *παράδοξος* meaning 'contrary to expectation, unexpected, incredible.' Briefly stated, a paradox is a riddle that provokes thought by making an incredible claim and thereby offending expectations. Consequently, we can sensibly speak of paradoxes as rhetorical techniques that create *tension* or Husserlian *disharmony* because they conflict with our current habitual, comfortable mode of thought. Eckhart's rhetoric generally aims toward catalyzing worldview change to bring the individual closer to God. This is different than saying that his meaning always points toward or speaks from union, in line with what C.F. Kelley claimed (Kelley 1977)[2].

Fundamentally, the ideas of the human soul as the image of God and the simultaneous divinity and humanity of Christ are paradoxes that are at the heart of

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[2] I agree with Cyprian Smith's comment on this aspect of C.F. Kelley's work. Smith says he is not so sure that Eckhart always speaks *in divinis*, but he says that he clearly does it often (C. Smith 1987, 65).

Christianity. When Eckhart spoke on these topics, if he allowed the paradoxes to be resolved, then he would implicitly advocate thinking about these paradoxes by using concepts that are already familiar to us. If instead Eckhart understood that the mystery of Christ and the mystery of the soul as the image of God could not be grasped without a transformational change in self and world understanding, then it is clearly in his best interest to insist upon the contradictory nature of the mysteries and maintain the paradoxes, even heightening the tension that they create to further motivate his audience to move away from their present mode of thinking and being.

Stated briefly, Eckhart often speaks of the mystery of the human soul. Since transformation is required for understanding, Eckhart must insist upon maintaining the paradox. As Bruce Milem observed, “Eckhart's view of the soul makes it a constant source of paradox” (Milem 2002, 148). This leads to some of his most ostensibly radical formulations.

Specifically, Eckhart’s advocating the ideal of the life of activity (*vita activa*) as opposed the life of contemplation (*vita* contemplativa) draws directly from the increased significance that he sees in the individual soul. Christianity provides the seed for valorizing the body and its temporality in the Incarnation, where eternal and temporal are combined, and in the resurrection of the body which further emphasizes the worth of otherwise contingent and ephemeral individual existence. Eckhart represents an extension of this line of thought, amplifying the spirit of his times in seeing significance and meaning in the individual qua locus of the divine ground. He does this by setting the stage for seeing individual particularity as intensively infinite (see Brient 2002). We observe this clearly where he sees the divine Being in all its richness as being present

in and even being the sine qua non of the temporal, ephemeral existence of the individual. One example of this is in Sermon 52, where he says that "the highest angel and the fly and the soul are the same in [the everlasting truth.]"[3] Thus, Eckhart pushes for enhanced valuation of the individual insofar as he or she is divine, not for the increased value of the differentiated individual. Though this aspect of Eckhart's thought is recognizably not modern, it nevertheless results in an increased valuation of the individual which is compatible with more modern conceptions of the individual.

Where we are speaking about the confluence of the eternal and the temporal, it is useful to think of what Zeno attempted to do with his paradoxes. If the nature of motion and change are contradictory, paradox provides an expedient medium for provoking thought for the purpose of seeing the contradictions inherent in the unreflective stance that we too often have on the physical world. As Blumenberg says, and Lakoff and Johnson echo, if the conceptual network we use feels as though it fits with our experience, it seems 'true' to us and gains the quality of truth in our thinking. Milem astutely observes that "Actions have the same paradoxical status as the soul" (Milem 2002, 168). That is, they are both temporal and eternal, with and without why. As products of being (which is itself paradoxical), we see a natural propagation of this paradox: God's creation of the temporal world in eternity → the Incarnation of Christ as both divine and human → the human soul as the image of God → the actions of the individual soul with a why and without a why, which exemplifies the return of the soul to God[4]. The soul participates in the eternal (we are not wrong to think that this is similar to

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[3] *die obersten engel und diu vliege und diu sêle glîch sint in dem* (Sermon 52, DW II 493.4)
[4] Also, as Milem says, "the soul is as full of paradox and mystery as the relationship between God and creatures" (Milem 2002, 152).

the Platonic sense) and yet lives out a temporal, ephemeral existence, which results in an ineluctable paradox in the activity of the soul, similar to Plato's description of time as the moving image of eternity in the *Timaeus* (cf. Milem 2002, 85).

Sermon 52 (*beati pauperes spiritu*) provides a particularly vivid example of Eckhart's use of paradox, specifically with respect to the nature of the individual soul and his use of the pronoun 'I':

> So we say that man should be so poor that he neither is nor has any place in him that God may work. Where a man clings to place, he clings to distinction. Therefore I pray to God that He make me free of God, for my essential being is above God if we take God to be the beginning of created things. For in God's being itself where God is above being and beyond distinction, there I myself was, there I willed myself and came to know myself in creating this man. Therefore, I am the cause of myself on account of my being, which is eternal, and not after my being born, which is temporal. And therefore I am unborn, and after the way of my being unborn so I may never be destroyed. According to the way of my being unborn, I am eternally existing, I am now and eternally will be. What I am in being born shall die and not come to be, for it is mortal. Therefore it must be corrupted with time. In my birth, all things came to be born and I was the cause of myself and of all things; and had I wished, I would not be, nor would all things be; and furthermore, if I did not exist, 'God' would not exist. I am a cause of God

> being ‘God’; if I did not exist, God would not be ‘God’. There is no need to understand this.[5]

We can attempt to understand him here by considering ‘I’ as being used in different senses, breaking up the contradiction by separating out the contradictory meanings into different concepts. To do this is to miss the point, however. As Milem says in commenting on this passage, “We might want him to be more specific and precise. But I think his refusal to do so is deliberate. … Eckhart’s initially confusing usage of the word ‘I’ to include both aspects of the soul encourages us to think about their continuity and their difference at the same time” (Milem 2002, 171). What Milem advises is better than trying to resolve the paradox, but there is more to it than this. Eckhart is trying to explode our usual conception of self. If we try to resolve the paradox by merely identifying different ways that Eckhart is using the word ‘I’, then we are effectively saying that the passage is capable of being understood in terms of our familiar discursive thinking and its concomitantly familiar concepts.

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[5] *Alsô sagen wir, daȥ der mensche alsô arm sül sîn, daȥ er niht ensî noch enhabe deheine stat, dâ got inne müge würken. Dâ der mensche stat beheltet, dâ beheltet er underscheit. Her umbe sô bite ich got, daȥ er mich ledic mache gotes, wan mîn wesenlich wesen ist obe gote, alsô als wir got nemen begin der crêatûren; wan in dem selben wesene gotes, dâ got ist obe wesene und ob underscheide, dâ was ich selbe, dâ wolte ich mich selben und bekante mich selben ze machenne disen menschen. Her umbe sô bin ich mîn selbes sache nâch mînem wesene, daȥ êwic ist, und niht nâch mînem gewerdenne, daȥ zîtlich ist. Und her umbe sô bin ich ungeborn, und nâch mîner ungebornen wîse sô enmac ich neimer ersterben. Nâch mîner ungebornen wîse sô bin ich êwiclîche gewesen und bin nû und sol êwiclîche blîben. Daȥ ich bin nâch gebornheit, daȥ sol sterben und ze nihte werden, wan eȥ ist tœtlich; her umbe sô muoȥ eȥ mit der zît verderben. In mîner geburt, dâ wurden alliu dinc geborn, und ich was sache mîn selbes und aller dinge; und hæte ich gewolt, ich enwære niht, noch alliu dinc enwæren niht; und enwære ich niht, sô enwære ouch ‚got‘ niht. Daȥ got ‚got’ ist, des bin ich ein sache; enwære ich niht, sô enwære got niht ‚got‘. Diȥ ze wiȥȥenne des enist niht nôt.* (Sermon 52, DW II 502.4-504.3). As Colledge suggests, the content here is similar to *In agro dominico* article 13, which condemns the idea that the divine man created the world and that God’s actions are the just man’s actions (EE 203n10). That article evidently targets Sermon 6 rather than Sermon 52.

To see this most clearly, we will need to put together all of the pieces. Lakoff & Johnson provide us with an interesting way of thinking about how our thought is grounded in metaphor and how metaphors relate to habits of thought, yet they also do not mention metaphor's role in guiding thought, nor do they mention the possibility of explosive metaphors. Blumenberg tells us a lot about the way that metaphors affect our thinking and how they can guide thought, but he does not emphasize the way in which our thinking is grounded in metaphor the way Lakoff & Johnson do. By describing the immediate experience of nature and differentiating it from more traditional philosophizing, Erazim Kohàk helps us to avoid the pitfall of being overly conceptual in thinking about the experience that hortatory rhetoric like Eckhart's seeks to elicit. Cyprian Smith tells us that Eckhart maintains his paradoxes and describes the overall effect on one's disposition that paradoxes have in line with Eckhart's own account of detachment, but he does not dwell on why Eckhart insists upon the paradoxes and why this dynamic is effective. The claim made in this chapter, therefore, draws from these sources but is not contained fully in any one of them. Taken together, they make it possible to see that Eckhart's use of metaphor is a positive indicator of a metaphysical shift that was taking place in the late medieval world with respect to the conception of the individual. Finally, implications of the discussion of the psychodynamics of paradox will be discussed with respect to how mystics identify one another, a phenomenon that I call connoisseurship. This has consequences for how we can identify mysticism that derives directly from the richness of lived experience, the way in which mystical speech communicates that richness via metaphors, and the way that we intuitively grasp another person's expertise in an area where we have expertise after observing behavior

and/or language. The unspoken communication that enables one expert to recognize another is fundamentally similar to the mechanism by which Eckhart's paradoxes work.

As Bernard McGinn recognized, modifying his earlier stance, "Eckhart's speculation resists systematization. To think of presenting a systematic Eckhartian doctrine of the Trinity would be to contradict everything he stood for (McGinn 1997, 53, see Milem 2002, 16n18). Even better, Eckhart offends our expectations. His rhetoric, Milem tells us, is designed to "unsettle the relationship between a preacher and his audience, deny his listeners the comfort of knowing beforehand what is going to happen" (Milem 2002, 160). For example, referring to when Eckhart spoke of knowing God in Sermon 52, Milem identifies the entry point of the paradox, "knowing nothing, that is, knowing God in the way in which one is God, means knowing oneself as all things" (Milem 2002, 36-7). Herein lies the key: Eckhart's statements ask us to consider 'knowing' and then to consider God's 'knowing.' As we expand our idea of knowing to try and suit it to how God knows, the concept of knowing strains and finally bursts.

4.1 Lakoff & Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory

Looking in detail at Lakoff & Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory will serve our purposes in three distinct ways. First, their account of how deeply and irresistibly metaphor permeates our thought is a testament to the foundational role that metaphors play in our thinking. The foundational changes in self and world orientation that Eckhart is attempting to provoke inhabit this nonconceptual, principally metaphorical realm. Though Lakoff & Johnson are not mystics any more than Blumenberg is, their push to get beneath the layer of conceptual thinking and peer into the metaphorical, nonconceptual substrate is likewise useful. The second service their ideas provide is in

their account of how a metaphor 'fits' and thereby becomes 'true' to us. Finally, they describe 'conventional' metaphors as those metaphors which we often think to be literally true and frequently do not recognize as metaphors at all. Instead of looking only at ideas that Eckhart evidently crafted intentionally, Lakoff & Johnson show us where to look to find metaphors of more casual speech that were *not* chosen intentionally. In keeping with the focus on paradox and immediate experience, conceptual metaphor theory is fundamentally *experiential*[6]. Lakoff & Johnson even describe their theory as the "experientialist myth,"[7] which signals a move just like Blumenberg makes to view their own analysis as attempting to get beneath conceptuality and guide productive thought just as metaphor does (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 186).

Lakoff & Johnson claim that we live and think through metaphors. They use the term 'metaphor' in a way that is related to, but distinct from how Blumenberg uses it. For Lakoff & Johnson, we think through metaphors, which makes them fundamentally nonconceptual and constitutive of the substrate of thought from which our irreducibly nonconceptual understanding of the world arises (cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 144). For Blumenberg, metaphors can point to and guide us toward the nonconceptual. In both cases, the substrate of thought is irreducibly nonconceptual and metaphors allow

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[6] Specifically, they recognize, as Aristotle did in speaking of a thing's function (*ergon*) and end (*telos*), that we identify a thing as a thing because of how we interact with it rather than just the physical properties of the thing (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 121). This move in particular is in line with their general objection to the "objectivist myth" that characterizes the modern approach to thinking of the world in purely physical terms and understanding physics in terms of efficient causes.

[7] As with Blumenberg, Lakoff & Johnson also recognize that myth, metaphor and art are closely related. "Myths provide ways of comprehending experience; they give order to our lives. Like metaphors, myths are necessary for making sense of what goes on around us. All cultures have myths, and people cannot function without myth any more than they can function without metaphor" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 185-6). Unfortunately, they do not differentiate myth from metaphor, which leaves open the question of whether or not their own theory, which they call an "experientialist myth," is in fact a *metaphor*.

us to have insight into that fundamental level of thought in a way that conceptual language cannot. Further, our actions and experiences grow out of the metaphors we have internalized (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 5). In a pragmatic vein, again like Blumenberg, they understand metaphors principally in terms of the actions that they imply (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 153). If we see God as a father, then the relationship we establish and experience thereby is more than merely conceptual and requires no conscious thought to activate. For our purposes, what is useful is to see that the actions that are implied by metaphors are actually *entailed* by their characteristics (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 91)[8]. In other words, our thought is guided in the direction dictated by the structure of the metaphor. This further allows us to 'scaffold' (i.e., build layers of abstraction upon abstraction) metaphors upon metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 25). This also helps us to think about Eckhart's ethics since metaphors sanction action and facilitate setting moral goals insofar as we feel them to be 'true' (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 142). We can understand metaphor's ability to guide thought by their ability to imply action when we see them as *fitting* well (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 180). Paradox is thus part of Eckhart's *destructive* program for metaphor: he seeks to undermine his audience's existing metaphors that constitute self and world orientation by using explosive metaphors to enable his audience to experience the inadequacy of their own metaphors firsthand. The net result is that when a metaphor that we currently

[8] They go too far in saying that "The heart of metaphor is inference" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 244). They overemphasize the explaining of one thing in terms of the domain of another. The mental movement that is provoked when encountering a metaphor is at least as important as the way in which a metaphor enables understanding by a mechanism like domain mapping.

feel to be ‘true’ (it has good ‘fit’) is *seen* (i.e., we have the experience of understanding) to have contradictions internally or with other metaphors and fundamental values, the strength with which we hold on to the metaphor is weakened[9]. Therefore, since Eckhartian ‘images’ themselves are ‘metaphors’ since they constitute our relationship with things and ideas, stated in Eckhartian terms, *paradoxes weaken our attachment to images*.

Though their work is useful, as Blumenberg’s is, for pointing us in the right direction, there are some salient limitations. Lakoff & Johnson claim that our thought is experiential insofar as metaphors derive from physical experiences, which makes our thought deeply *embodied*, a thesis they make much of in their later book *Philosophy in the Flesh* (cf. Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 19). While that additional step is provocative, it is not necessary for our purposes here. Though Eckhart would agree with Augustine that we must speak in bodily terms since our experience is ultimately carnal, he would not likewise agree with Lakoff & Johnson that our thinking is hopelessly carnal and cannot reach back to God. While they are right that we tend to “conceptualize the less clearly delineated in terms of the more clearly delineated” this does not imply that “we typically conceptualize the nonphysical *in terms of* the physical” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 59). By understanding abstractions as containers merely because we intuit similarities between abstractions having properties and physical containers holding objects, they

[9] This is an extension of their principle, “Don't map an element if it would give rise to a contradiction in the target domain” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 254). They apply this to the creation of new metaphors, but it is equally relevant to atrophying the power of existing metaphors.

overstate the fundamentality of our thinking of things in physical terms[10]. One might say, in the vein of Kohàk, that our immediate experience of emotion and our subsequent metaphorical ascription of emotion to nonhuman things is not metaphorical in a *physical* sense. More subtly, and edging closer to Eckhart, we might say that the act of abstraction (Eckhart would say by the *active intellect*) can be experienced directly and leads us back to God without recourse to physical metaphors[11]. Again, Lakoff & Johnson are clearly not mystics and instead inhabit a position in modern phenomenological thinking.

4.2 Immediate Experience: Erazim Kohàk and William James

Discursive reason and its concomitant *images*, as Eckhart calls them, constitute an obstacle to spontaneous *action* that does not have a *why*. Though ultimately Eckhart is looking for more than merely a pure experience since the notion of an 'experience' signals that we are within the domain of the temporal individual, the direction of movement necessary for Eckhart is the same as it is at least initially for those who seek

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[10] At a more basic level, we might say that they regard metaphor as being overly fundamental since they see experience (action and thought) as built on top of them. This amounts to saying that the level of personal experience is most fundamental for them. This perhaps reveals their own ties to the phenomenological tradition and a particular scientific view of what the mind is. As we read in Lakoff & Turner's *More than Cool Reason*, writers create new metaphors in literature and rhetoric just as Lévi-Strauss' bricoleur does: by finding new combinations of existing ideas. This precludes the possibility for any thoroughly new metaphors, though it does leave open the possibility of the effect that they have being new, of course. One gets an impression of a similar kind in reading Blumenberg. For Blumenberg, metaphors and myths serve the same function. So, one might say that, for Blumenberg, 'metaphor' names only the current instantiation of the thing that performs that foundational role.

[11] For example, "one can see beyond [metaphors] only by using other metaphors" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 239). In other words, they *assume* that we can never do without metaphors. Saying that metaphors are fundamental is defensible and useful. However, saying that they are the bedrock of experience is nothing more than a metaphysical *assumption*. It is kindred to the assumption that the self is always present and always culturally conditioned. This is also akin to their evidently unilinear conception of some metaphors being more basic than others and how those physically based metaphors cross domains to structure more abstract thought. It is ostensibly sensible, but it assumes that the target domain does not reciprocally influence the source, which would instead imply that the two 'experiential gestalts' are coeval and jointly metaphorical rather than being straightforwardly traceable to purely physical experiences.

an immediate, pure experience of nature. Eckhart takes it a step further: instead of stopping with the experience of detachment, once God gives Himself entirely to the detached soul (which He must do), we have union with the divine, at which point talk of temporal 'experience' is strained. As Cyprian Smith says, "Eckhart is leading us to an 'experience', but not, perhaps, an 'experience' as we would normally be inclined to understand that term" (Smith 1987, 89). And further, "we are being called to an experience which is not an experience" (Smith 1987, 93).

Eckhart's paradoxes allow us to see firsthand what is problematic about discursive reasoning, which is precisely what distances us from immediate sensory experience. As William James said,

> Other philosophies try, some by ignoring, some by resisting, and some by turning the dialectic procedure against itself, negating its first negations, to restore the fluent sense of life again, and let redemption take the place of innocence. The perfection with which any philosophy may do this is the measure of its human success and of its importance in philosophic history (James 1912, 92-3).

By looking more closely at Erazim Kohàk's work, we can more clearly depict the kind of experience that Eckhart's paradoxes target since Kohàk also wrestled with the difficulty inherent in attempting to communicate a nonconceptual experience.

Kohàk tells us that to see reality through the lens of a conceptual framework is to privilege a particular viewpoint, inevitably omitting certain details and emphasizing others, just like Lakoff & Johnson's metaphors (Kohàk 1984, 49; Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 163). Instead he advocates an *evocative* manner of communication, "It would be neither meet nor right to speak of conclusions in a book which seeks not to argue but to

see and to evoke a vision, pleading with the reader to pause and ponder rather than to argue and agree. An argument can lead to a conclusion; an evening does not" (Kohàk 1984, 179). Interestingly, he claims that Thomas Aquinas similarly appealed to experience even in his otherwise ostensibly systematic theology, "Though [Aquinas] couched his testimony to the modes of God's presence in the world in the form of arguments, he concluded each with an appeal to evident insight - and this all men know to be God" (Kohàk 1984, 190). Kohàk suggests that Aquinas may have had this in mind with his 'five ways,' offering them as part of a larger invitation to *experience* God directly. As Kohàk says, when such arguments "are presented as hypotheses, seeking to win consent through argument, they become empty. I doubt that anyone was ever convinced into believing by the traditional arguments. But then, that is not really their point. … The point is different: to see, to recognize God's presence in His creation" (Kohàk 1984, 190). Kohàk's own work is a more philosophically self-conscious version of Thoreau's *Walden*. As he explains, "I have not sought to 'prove a point' but to evoke and to share a vision. Thus my primary tool has been the metaphor, not the argument, and the product of my labors is not a doctrine but an invitation to look and see" (Kohàk 1984, xiii)[12]. If we consider Eckhart's speech in light of this, we see that his discourse is not a direct response to William of Ockham and the other nominalists of his day. Nominalism is concerned with reference while Eckhart was concerned with evocation.

[12] Here, we might think of Cassirer's labels of *primitive* and *mythical* to describe words that embody experience and point metonymically as a part does to the whole. As Kohàk suggests and Lakoff & Johnson would doubtless agree, such metaphorical use of words to refer to experiential situations may be more basic and common than we often think (Kohàk 1984, 53).

4.3 The centrality of paradox: Cyprian Smith

Of all of the authors discussed here, Cyprian Smith comes closest to what I am attempting to express about Eckhart's use of paradox. As he puts it, "I have called Eckhart's way 'the Way of Paradox', because he sees the Reality of God as something that can be grasped only within the tension in clash of opposites" (Smith 1987, 24). "This tension," he tells us, "has to be experienced in our thinking and talking about God; and this involves *paradox*" (C. Smith 1987, 24). He goes on to explain Eckhart's approach:

> I cannot attain [union with God] by remaining what I am now; I have to die somehow to the life I am living, so as to find the new life in God. This death and rebirth must involve my *whole* self, not only my daily life, but also my thought and speech. No part of me, not even my mind and tongue, can get through to God without passing through the clash of contraries. That is why Eckhart talks constantly in antithesis and paradoxes.... Eckhart keeps us perpetually swinging from one pole to the other; he will not let us rest in either. To rest in one and forget the other is to lose hold of the truth, which is essentially paradoxical (Smith 1987, 27).

For Smith, what he calls the "Way of Paradox" in Eckhart is not only the use of rhetorical techniques. Instead, it extends to one's overall disposition. In his words, speaking in a tone very much as Eckhart does with the self, to approach the 'Permanent Self' which resides in the Ground of the Soul (this 'self' is the only one that is capable of Eckhartian *activity*) is to live in a fundamentally paradoxical way. The approach to this 'part' of the soul (Eckhart might say, in referring to a part that is not a part and a place that is not a

place – see Sells 1994), is likewise to progress to something without moving, to move toward a goal that is not a goal and – most importantly – without setting a goal. Every motion that one makes in stripping away the self as normally conceived is fraught with paradox. Just as disposition impacts every element of our lives, Smith observes that we find paradox at every turn with Eckhart:

> So now we really are on the perplexing knife-edge of a paradox; withdrawal from creatures while being busy over them, stillness of mind while full of distractions, freedom from images while having our head full of them! Who can make sense of this? And for good measure, let us add another paradox: we are being called to an experience which is not an experience, a union with God which is perceptible yet utterly ineffable … Obviously we must make some sort of attempt to sort out this incredible tangle - recognizing, of course, that in the last analysis it cannot be sorted out. It is intrinsically paradoxical and cannot be 'resolved' without falsifying it; yet we must try to find some way of getting into it rather than remain perpetually baffled and perplexed on the outside (Smith 1987, 93-4).

To this we might also add the paradoxes of the relationship between God and creature as Being and as nothing, bridgeable and yet unbridgeable gulf between creator and creature, ground which is a part and not a part of the soul, and so on. Smith's answer is appropriately pragmatic: "What do we have to *do* in order to live out this paradox, and to experience the Birth of God in the Soul's Ground? The answer is that the key to this mystery is not a *practice* but an *attitude*. ... It is a matter of *how* and *why* we do these things" (Smith 1987, 94; cf. 52). The 'resolution' of the paradox is experiential instead of logical; it is the resolution of the *tension* of the paradox through a transformation in

seeing, the Birth of the Word in the soul, which enables a new kind of *activity* that is *without why* and thus without tension. In addition to Smith 'answering' the paradoxes in an Eckhartian way by pointing to experience, we might also observe that paradoxes are everywhere in Eckhart's thought because his sermons always go straight to the goal, tracing a tight and yet eccentric orbit around the divine mystery.

Smith tells us that the most primitive fact of human life and of the Incarnation is the paradoxical nature as both temporal and eternal, "In [Christ], the element of *paradox*, which is intrinsic to [Eckhart's] path, reaches its maximum concentration and tension. … But it is in the *human* condition that the paradox becomes most acute" (Smith 1987, 73). He is careful to say that, through spiritual progression, we engage in "harmonising" the experience of the tension but not the opposites themselves (Smith 1995, 89). Consequently, "Questions about Jesus are always, at the same time, questions about ourselves, because he is the *archetypal* human being" (Smith 1987, 74). Smith rightly says that conceptions of Jesus change through time as either his divinity or humanity is emphasized.

> An age which stresses the divinity of Jesus at the expense of his humanity – finding it hard to believe that he ate, drank, or suffered pain – is an age which has a faulty concept of what human beings are, and is unable to come to terms with the animal and physical elements in our make-up. An age which stresses the humanity of Jesus at the expense of his divinity – not an uncommon phenomenon in the twentieth century – is one which has lost sight of the transcendent, spiritual element in our human nature … A faulty or one-sided picture of Jesus is always, by implication, a faulty or one-sided picture of

> ourselves. … Once we stop seeing Jesus as a mystery, we stop seeing ourselves as a mystery; and that means we have lost hold of the truth. … When we form a faulty concept of Jesus, and therefore, of ourselves, we shall always find, if we look into the matter closely, that the fault lies in our failure to come to terms with the essentially *paradoxical* nature of the truth. It is very hard to face the fact of a being who is both divine and human, spiritual and material, mortal and immortal. The temptation is always to simplify the picture, to get rid of the painful paradox by suppressing one of its components (Smith 1987, 74-5).

Stated more completely, we lose hold of something valuable because we are moving away from the immediate experience of the richness of ourselves and instead conceiving of our humanity (and Christ, by extension) in the *limited* terms, with lines drawn by our concepts rather than by our experience and wonder. As with Augustine, if the will is purged of worldly desires, the natural desire for God comes out (Smith 1987, 22; see Eckhart's "On the Nobleman"). Conceptual thinking clouds and impedes our ability to receive divine knowledge because it implicitly excludes the possibility of anything outside of itself as knowledge.

Smith likens the direct and visceral communication of the Word to the way that music can be experienced. Natural sounds inhabit a world that is outside of civilization and bear no marks of human design. When we design an object or space for a particular use, that stamp of intentionality is felt in the way that it is *limited*. Since it grows out of a conceptual scheme, the intention of accomplishing particular ends is experienced by us as we enter the space or interact with the thing. Indeed, our worldview is reaffirmed by interacting with objects and concepts which exude that same

mode of thinking (cf. Kohàk 1984, 22-3). Further, the notion of man as a creator that begins to arise in the late medieval world also tends to separate us from immediate experience of things as they are by inviting us to view things instrumentally, as means to our own intentional ends rather than as infinitely rich particulars. This imprimatur of intentionality is absent from waves crashing on the beach. When we hear that natural sound, the richness of its personality and its mode of being that is outside of civilization and intentional design thrusts itself upon our ears. Further, it may be significant that it is a *sound* rather than a *sight* that Kohàk and Smith appeal to in order to make this point. We can always look away. We cannot look away with our ears. Further, sound is more easily ambient. What we see always occurs in a particular place and has a particular size. Sound, by contrast is less spatially specific and can thereby more easily appear to be everywhere. What appears to be everywhere can similarly be consuming and be felt predominantly as inside rather than occurring in a space outside. In other words, sound is more easily felt as something universal, while vision more naturally gives us particulars[13]. As Eckhart himself tells us, "I am passive in hearing. I am active in seeing. Still, our bliss does not lie in our activity, but rather in that we undergo God."[14] Likewise, Eckhart's paradoxes and the rhetoric surrounding them are stubbornly nonconceptual in

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[13] Interestingly, an exception to this is Nicholas of Cusa's painting that accompanied *De Visione Dei*. The eyes of the painting appears to be looking at the viewer regardless of where one stands in viewing it, a most unusual feel for a visual thing since it is an experience of the universal.

[14] *daȥ hœren bin ich lîdende, aber daȥ sehen bin ich würkende. Aber unser sælicheit enliget niht an unsern werken, mêr: an dem daȥ wir got lîden* (Sermon 102, DW IV.1 421.143-422.145). One could also say, as Fox does, that "I undergo hearing." Quint points us to a number of sources where Eckhart speaks of undergoing God: Sermon 47 (DW II 408.3-409.2), Sermon 52 (DW II 501.1-4), Sermon 83 (DW III 437.13-438.3), Sermon 31 (118.3-7), Latin sermon XI (LW IV 105.7-107.1), In Ioh n.100 (LW III 86.16-87.1), In Ioh. n.181 (149.9-13), In Ioh. n.396 (LW III 337.1f), In Ioh. n.397 (LW III 338.5f), In Eccli. N.38 (LW II 265.12f), In Ioh. n.106 (LW III 91.3), Latin Sermon IX n.100 (LW IV 95.3-5), Sermon XI,2 (LW IV 109.14-111.3), Sermon XXII n.206 (LW IV 191.2), Sermon XXV,1 n.256 (LW IV 234.3-5), Sermon 47 (DW II 400.6), Sermon 42 (DW II 309.1-5), Sermon 45 (DW II 373.3-6).

the same way that natural sounds are. Paradox fills the environment of his sermons in the same way.

In terms of impact on the individual, Eckhart's use of paradox forces there to be a mystery. He resists resolution and conceptual settling that removes mystery. As Smith and Kohàk both mentioned, mystery is one of the things that is ostensibly missing in the modern world. As Smith said, “If we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit that the mysterious, the unfathomable, the intangible, has a certain magnetic fascination – accompanied by some fear and dread … Great though Shakespeare, Newton an St Thomas Aquinas may be, it would be stifling and deadening if their sublime utterances contained the *whole* truth” (Smith 1987, 30-1). We are too confident that our manner of acquiring objective knowledge will work for everything. We need to hear someone like Eckhart tell us not to rest content with our understanding. Mystery may re-enable meaning in just the way that Eckhart described - by showing us that there is something unfathomably beautiful waiting once we let go of what is individual about us.

4.4 Shared experience: connoisseurship

I will close the chapter by extending the interpretive space somewhat by discussing what I call *connoisseurship*, which is the ability of people who have some understanding or experience to intuitively recognize an equal or lesser level of that same understanding or experience in others. Smith says that in real communication between people,

> words are few, but telling and to the point. They arise out of the depths, and they express silence rather than obliterate it. … it is also characteristic of natural sounds that they seem to heighten rather than destroy silence. Anyone who

> listens to wind stirring the leaves of the trees, to waves breaking on the sand, even to thunder splitting the sky, will have no difficulty in grasping this. It is not simply that silence precedes and follows these sounds; it remains as a background to them, and even expresses itself in them. They, in their turn, point back to it. We cannot claim, therefore, not to know what a true 'word' is. It is something we come across frequently in our own experience (Smith 1987, 60)[15]

The communication that occurs is not because of the precise referents of the words, or some notion of shared definitions. Instead, real communication is a matter of entering sympathetically into another's imaginative horizon and gaining an intuitive feel for how the other thinks. Words "express silence" because the words are signposts to the underlying shared understanding that is mutually recognized and enables fluid communication.

If Lakoff and Johnson are correct in pointing to the central place of metaphor in our lived experience and thought, then we may sensibly point to a different way of 'knowing' that is similar in kind to their conception of understanding that is based on metaphor. Recall that, for them, understanding is a matter of intuitively feeling that a particular metaphor 'fits' with the experiential gestalts of the source and target domains.

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[15] Smith expresses a similar thought in his other book: "Very different is the silence of wild, remote places, far from any human habitation. This has a quality all its own. It is by no means simply the absence of noise. On the contrary, wild places are full of sound: wind stirring the leaves; the cries of birds; waves breaking upon the sand. Yet behind all this there is a background of silence, which the sounds punctuate but do not efface; indeed they seem to intensify it. It is a silence which is deep and calm, yet pulsating with energy and life. It makes prayer easy and natural; and that is not surprising, since it is a kind of icon of creation. As sounds emerge from the silence and fall back into it, we can see there an image of the universe spoken forth by God, and then breathed back into him again (Smith 1995, 66). And also, "Real communication happens when words are like the sounds of wild nature, emerging from silence, returning to it, but never obliterating it. They do not negate it but rather articulate and express it. That is what real communication is: it is articulated silence" (Smith 1995, 68).

This fit cannot itself be something that is objectively knowable or reducible to conceptual understanding. Though they do not explicitly treat the topic, can we recognize when another shares some measure of our own nonconceptual understanding? I suggest that we can and that we do this whenever questions of expertise arise. We also do this when making friends. Of course, we do not and cannot fully know what another person's understanding is like. William James dedicated an entire essay to expounding on how significant this lacuna is in our lives (James 1929). Nevertheless, it is equally clear that experts can quickly recognize one another simply through observation and conversation. We learn much more about another person's personality and level of understanding through experience than we can frame with concepts for objective consumption (Smith 1987, 74-5). The idea of connoisseurship that I forward here is an extension of the recognition of the richness of the individuality of another person. It also answers the question of how mystics recognize other mystics and, consequently, whether mysticism has a core of unity.

To say that the experience of God cannot be subsequently captured in words is a soft version of the apophatic claim that God is ineffable. We might therefore, as many people have done, ask how one can tell the difference between mystics and non-mystics, believers and non-believers? In other words, if we emphasize the ineffability of the divine and shed pretenses of framing dogma in conceptual terms, does religion not lose its boundaries and become unintelligible?

The answer, of course, is no. If we look to the East, we find a similar situation in Zen. Zen famously abstains from knowledge claims and generally recognizes the inability of conceptual thinking to carry us to enlightenment, subverting conceptual

thought with statements that cannot be made to be logically coherent or domesticated at all with our habitual mode of conceptual thinking. How, therefore, can one tell a novice from an expert? Zen is full of stories of just this kind. Stories of dharma transmission (identifying a new master) such as that of Hui-neng are instructive. A new master is identified on the basis of what I call *connoisseurship*, the ability of one expert to recognize another. This process happens by *feel*, beneath the level of language. When we speak to another person who purports to also be an expert in an area in which we have expertise, we can very quickly assess the other person's abilities and experiences by identifying with the overall feel of how they think. In other words, we can see through the individual words and claims and peer into the imaginative horizon of that person's worldview.

This is why we should take Daisetz Suzuki seriously when he recognizes Meister Eckhart as having much in common with Zen. The commonality that Suzuki identifies is certainly plausible by looking only at Eckhart's theology and his modes of expression. But it becomes truly convincing only from the inside: when one is experienced in one tradition and recognizes the same spirit of thought and being in someone from a different tradition. In other words, Suzuki's linking Eckhart and Zen would not have been as meaningful if he was attempting to link Eckhart and Zoroastrianism. Suzuki's own experience in Zen enables him to recognize in Eckhart a deep similarity, one that is more fundamental than conceptual thinking and cannot be distilled into claims that would be fully intelligible to someone who did not share that core of experience.

Suzuki describes Eckhart as being "richly equipped with experiences," (Suzuki 1957, 7) and that his views were "based on his own experiences" (Suzuki 1957, 27). He

goes as far as saying, “I am sure that Eckhart had a satori”[16] (Suzuki 1957, 79). There is no general consensus that Eckhart spoke from a position of experience, perhaps especially among those who prefer to think of Eckhart as a philosopher rather than as a mystic (Davies 1991, 3). Eckhart says:

> Therefore one writing, a gloss[17], says very well that no one can understand or teach Saint Paul’s writing unless he possesses the spirit in which Saint Paul spoke and wrote. And this is what I always lament, that crude people, empty of God’s spirit and not possessing it, want to judge on account of their crude human understanding what they hear and read in Scripture, which is spoken and written from and in the Holy Spirit.[18]

Eckhart’s message “demands to be understood as an appeal from experience to experience,” placing him within the Dominican tradition of *contemplata aliis tradere*, or “handing on to others what has been learned through meditation” (Davies 1991, 3, cf. McGinn 2001, 10). Statements like the following from Sermon 68 are difficult to comprehend without thinking of Eckhart as referring to a distinct product of experience, “If a man were in a house that was beautifully decorated, another man who had never

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[16] In Zen, satori is generally described as a flash of insight or sudden enlightenment experience. We might best understand Suzuki to mean that Eckhart had an *experience* of enlightenment. This is to distinguish it from a merely intellectual understanding of enlightenment.

[17] McGinn refers us to the *Glossa Ordinaria*.

[18] *Dar umbe sprichet gar wol ein geschrift, ein glôse, daȥ nieman enmac vernemen noch lêren kan sant Pauli schrift, er enhabe danne den geist, in dem sant Paulus sprach und schreip. Und daȥ ist alles und alliu mîn klage, daȥ grobe liute, die gotes geistes ledic sint und niht enhânt, nâch irm groben menschlîchen sinne wellent urteilen, daȥ sie hœrent oder lesent in der schrift, diu gesprochen und geschrieben ist von dem und in dem heiligen geiste* (*The Book of Divine Consolation*, DW V 43.5-11).

been inside it may well speak of it: but he who was inside would know."[19] Similarly, we read that "those who have never been familiar with inward things do not know what God is. Like a man who has wine in his cellar but has never tasted it, he does not know that it is good."[20] "Whoever does not understand what I say, let him not burden his heart with it. For as long as a man is not like this truth, he will not understand what I say. For this is a truth beyond thought that comes immediately from the heart of God."[21]

Eckhart is not missing something essential by not advocating for somatic mystical experience. Note also that Eckhart spent much time in service of the *cura monialem* of the Dominicans, the care of the Beguine and other pious women who ennobled somatic mystical experiences (Davies 1991, 176). That he did little more than attempt to redirect their energies is a testament to his implicit acceptance of the experience, even if he did not think it to be the best path. In Sermon 104, Eckhart mildly approves of mystical rapture with the caveat that while the "spirit sees and undergoes God,"[22] it cannot be long-lasting because of the toll it takes on the body.

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[19] *Wære ein mensche in einem hûse, daȥ schône gemâlet wære, und ein ander, der dâ nie în enkam, der mac wol dâ von sagen; mêr: jener, der dar inne gewesen ist, der wéiȥ eȥ* (Sermon 68, DW III 150.6-9).
[20] *dem menschen, der von inwendigen dingen nie gewon enist, der enweiȥniht, waȥ got ist. Als ein man, hât er wîn in sînem keller und enhæte er sîn niht getrunken noch versuochet, sô enweiȥ er niht, daȥ er guot ist.* (Sermon 10, DW I 164.5-8).
[21] *Wer dise rede niht enverstât, der enbekümber sîn herze niht dâ mit. Wan als lange der mensche niht glîch enist dirre wârheit, als lange ensol er dise rede niht verstân; wan diȥ ist ein unbedahtiu wârheit, diu dâ komen ist ûȥ dem herzen gotes âne mittel* (Sermon 52, DW II 506.1-3). Note that 'immediately' in English should be understood to literally mean 'without an intermediary.' It is also salient that the Aristotelian notion of likeness to truth being a prerequisite for understanding is indeed one to which Eckhart subscribes. According to this thinking, being like the truth implies understanding and also has a salutary moral implication as well.
[22] *schouwet unde lîdet der geist got* (Sermon 104A, DW IV.1 572.78-79). McGinn puts *lîdet* in brackets in his translation since he translates the word as 'experience' though it also means 'to suffer or undergo' (McGinn 2001, 66).

It is hard to create a metaphor for an experience you have not had. Since I would not propose to train someone in an art in which I was not skilled or to try and get someone to understand a perspective that I did not already have[23], I take as a given that Eckhart was not trying to lead his listeners to a perspective that is significantly different from what he had himself. Mystical rhetoric builds directly from such experiences and frequently goes to great lengths to ensure that the reader does not mistake the medium for the message[24]. Referring to the discernment of spirits that Augustine attributed to Monica, Henry Suso, one of Eckhart's disciples, says, "The person to whom God has given this same gift can better find his own way in this matter. No one can explain it to another just with words. One knows it by experiencing it" (Tobin 1989, 196). As Albert the Great said, "We do not receive the things of God by means of rational principles, but experientially, in a way, by a kind of 'sympathy toward them,' as Dionysius says of Heirotheus, who learned the things of God 'by undergoing them'" (McGinn 2005, 20).

If we think, as Steven Katz famously does, that all experience is hopelessly mediated by culture and language, then we might be inclined to agree with his

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[23] There is a difficulty hidden here. In the gulf between the novice's and the expert's perspective lie many possible intermediate perspectives. One of the difficulties of teaching may be that of trying to coax the novice into an intermediate perspective, while the expert has neither the novice nor the intermediate perspective. This merely qualifies rather than invalidating my point, though, which is that the expert intends on drawing the novice *closer* to the expert perspective. Even in mysticism where the million-sided polygon inscribed in a circle is still infinitely far from being a circle, we hear from Eckhart (e.g., the progression of states he describes in "On the Nobleman") for instance that although one cannot speak directly of the final union, it is sensible to speak of intermediaries.

[24] As Davies says, "Eckhart himself gives short shrift to those who write of things they do not themselves know" (Davies 1991, 3). As with gaining expertise in most other pursuits, there is no reason to think that a similarity in end products implies a like homogeneity in means. As Eckhart said, "everyone cannot follow one single way" (EE 267; *Counsels on Discernment* §17). McGinn encapsulated this sentiment nicely, "We are told by those who see clearly that truth is of dazzling simplicity, but the ways in which it may be perceived are vastly complex" (EE xv).

conclusion that there is no common core to mystical experience. As he says, “No scholar can get behind the autobiographical fragment to the putative ‘pure experience’ - whatever one holds that to be” (as cited in Forman 1999, 17). As Robert Forman argues, however, mysticism is not merely one set of experiences and claims among others, easily juxtaposed and understood in terms of our concepts, because mysticism is about the continuous *stripping away* of conceptual thinking. Katz’ word choice here is revealing. By referring to a ‘scholar’ and ‘whatever one *holds* that to be,’ he is speaking in terms of concept-driven discourse about claims that one can hold without recourse to experience. Katz would probably balk at the suggestion that the experience of divine unity is more fundamental than conceptual thinking. It would be consistent with his work for him to claim that all experiences are mediated and this is simply one of them, however emotionally poignant it is. Forman responds to this by saying, “I see no reason that different people could not refer to one experience differently. Were a Hindu Guru and a Buddhist Roshi to hear someone report some experience, it would make sense that one might say, ‘that’s an instance of *samādhi*,’ while the other might say, ‘oh, you’ve experienced *śūnyata*’” (Forman 1999, 47). Again, however, recalling Kohàk, the quiet joy that comes with being rapt in watching one’s own child play with a favorite toy requires no concepts (Kohàk 1984, 217). It is only upon reflection after the fact that we struggle in vain to capture the experience with words. That experience is as pure and unmediated as we could hope for.

This happens in part, because children themselves are closer to unmediated experience at all times. As Schopenhauer rightly recognized, the source of much of our pain as humans is from our uniquely human ability for abstract thought, including

especially memory and hope. In other words, it traces to the source of our mediate experience as adults. In children we recognize, since we were all children once, the purer experiences of joy and sorrow, unadulterated by adult concerns that are only intelligible in terms of concepts. Though the experience of joy as a child is necessarily transient and occurs in time, there is nothing about the experience that is self-consciously temporal or sullied by concepts that are only coherent in temporal terms.

The experience of God is the extreme form of this. I am reminded of a story that I once heard of a priest who was approached by an older woman who was upset that she had lost her faith and did not know God. The priest responded, “is there nothing that you love?” She said, “yes, I love my son.” “Ah,” he replied, “then there is God.” Once again, the priest quite rightly judged that the best path back to faith was by way of an appeal to incontrovertible, immediate experience. It would be awkward and inappropriate to question the logical coherence of what claim he was making. He simply called to her mind a consuming, immediate experience of love and linked that with God.

In this chapter, we examined the details of how Eckhart’s use of paradox guides thought by undermining the strength of our inclination to apply discursive thinking to theology. In the next chapter, we will continue to see how some of his other rhetorical techniques antagonize conceptual settling and likewise encourage movement toward a different way of seeing and being. The effectiveness of those techniques hinges upon Eckhart’s use of new and rare, shocking rhetorical formulations that leverage our attraction to and curiosity for what is novel and unusual.

CHAPTER 5

NOVELTY AND THE SPIRIT OF PLAY

We are naturally excited by novelty. That we are 'excited' means that we naturally tend to be motivated to dedicate conscious resources to understanding what appears new. An unthreatening environment can be relaxing, but it can also be boring. If it is beautiful, it is relaxing. If it is sterile, it is boring. Though it requires effort and we tend to economize our expenditure of the energy that is needed to become consciously aware of something, deliberate upon it, and make it familiar, we nevertheless do not enjoy our conscious resources laying fallow. In animals and humans alike, there is a drive to *play* with new things, to see what can be done with them[1]. Blumenberg talks about this in the context of the poetry/play pair. We create myths in part to quell anxiety. Once the anxiety is at bay, an "imaginative excess" appears as play (Nicholls 2014, 145, Blumenberg 1971, 13). The spirit of play is the action implied by relatively unthreatening novelty. Something new becomes increasingly threatening in proportion to the perceived risk it poses to what we *value*. A physical threat threatens the body or other things that we value physically. Ideas and metaphors are threatening insofar as they threaten the values that underwrite the constitutive elements of our self and world understanding.

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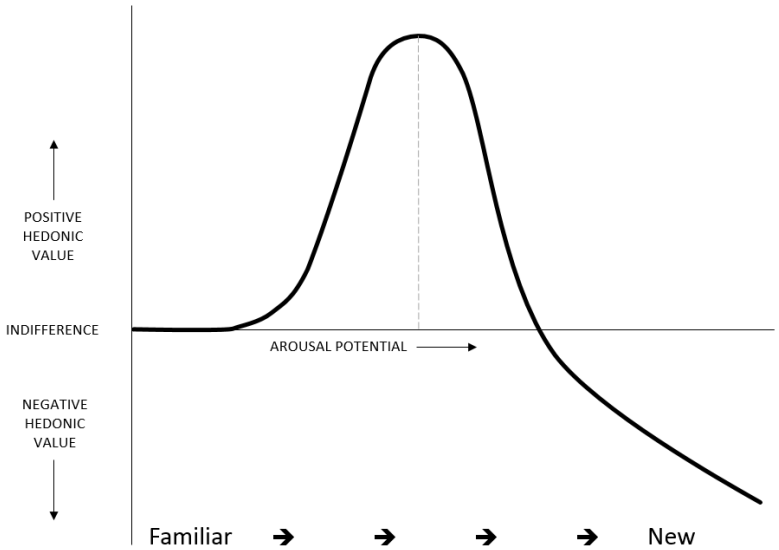
[1] Here we might profitably recall Edmund Burke's treatment of how we take pleasure in grief and are otherwise allured by stimuli for unpleasant emotions. We have a penchant for perseveration, perhaps commonly called 'worry', on whatever threatens our values and what we value.

As an entry point into understanding this dynamic, we can use Wilhelm Wundt's well known curve that depicts our reaction to novelty:



The Wundt Curve

The horizontal axis describes two dimensions, both increased arousal and increased novelty. In sum, we are indifferent to the mildly new, positively aroused by the moderately new, and negatively aroused by the radically new. Rhetors, of course, often seek to inhabit the apex, the point where the right mix of familiar and unfamiliar maximally excites with positive affect.

Eckhart pushed this further to the right with rhetoric that is more threatening, but also even more arousing. Here, one is reminded of Tantra. It sometimes advertises itself as 'risky' or 'dangerous' but also, consequently, purports to be the fastest path to enlightenment. We can understand it as teetering on the furthest point that we can

tolerate on the right side of the Wundt curve. Eckhart seems to have had a similar strategy in mind.

By looking at a number of different perspectives on our psychological response to novelty, we will benefit from having many tools to think with to help us better understand how Eckhart leverages our natural tendencies to react to novelty. New material must overcome several obstacles before being fully understood. Since the first obstacle we encounter is habit, we will first look at how we use habits of thought and emotion in reacting to novelty. Next, we return to Blumenberg's characterization of how metaphor works by considering Husserl's notion of *disharmony*. William James' psychological works will help to fill out more of the details of how we react to novelty and what strategies one can use to facilitate understanding. The discussion will then reconnect with Lakoff and Johnson's notion of *fit* and prepare us for understanding how the change Eckhart recommends can be understood as a reorientation of the metaphors we live by. Finally, before turning to Eckhart, looking at haiku and its relation to immediate experience will provide the final clues for how we might understand how rhetoric can directly appeal to and catalyze the rich form of immediate experience that pushes us beyond our familiar concepts.

5.1 Husserl, harmony and habit

The principle force we struggle against in understanding something new is *habit*. Whether we encounter a new idea or physical situation, the new material does not even win a chance to achieve conscious awareness if it is sufficiently proximal to an existing habit. Instead of *responding*, we *react*. One way of understanding our natural curiosity and spirit of play with novel things is in terms of the expenditure of mental energy on

some harmless novelty that enables us to avoid boredom. Thinking in terms of Wundt's curve, we can recognize two forces at play. First, we are compelled to avoid boredom by playing with new things (new ideas or physical objects), provided that they are mostly harmless. Beyond a certain point, however, a threatening thing generates anxiety. If it is familiar and sufficiently dangerous, we avoid it. However, if it is *unfamiliar* and dangerous, we feel compelled to assimilate the new thing into our existing way of seeing the world, which makes it less threatening. Stated differently, it threatens our existing *values* insofar as it resists assimilation into our existing worldview[2]. Ultimately, if a threat persists over time and proves to be too problematic for the existing paradigm, it can undermine the values of our existing way of thinking. This is why Eckhart must *insist* on his paradoxes, preserving mysteries so that the threat persists and enables worldview change.

Blumenberg leans on Husserl in his characterization of the psychology of why metaphors work. For Husserl, the existence of the external world is predicated on our ability to synthesize new experiences *harmoniously* with what we already understand and consequently expect to see. As Theodore de Boer summarizes Husserl's position:

> When consciousness manifests a certain arrangement, a world comes about. If consciousness does not do so, no world arises. (This nonexistence means a "modification" of consciousness, i.e. the lack of a harmony of experiences.) … *This ordered experience is both the necessary and sufficient ground for the appearance*

[2] In a recent article, I proposed this as a definition for stress (Johnson and Johnson 2010). Since the mind's response to stress is physiologically the same for eustress and distress (positively and negatively appraised phenomena), it is sensible to think of stress generally in terms of the propensity of a thing to affect what we *value*, that is, anything we think of as good, whether physical things or ideas.

> *of a world.* [Husserl] writes: 'let us… assume that the proper arrangements for consciousness [he means mutually confirming experiences, as is evident from the context] are in fact satisfied and that as regards the course of consciousness itself, there is nothing lacking which might in any way be required for the appearance of a unitary world and the rational theoretical knowledge of the same (Boer 1978, 356).

We are therefore highly motivated to maintain harmony since the maintenance of this harmony ensures the persistence of our ability to see the external world[3]. More than this, however, the persistence of the external world implies that the world is *familiar* and *known* to us. A known world is one which facilitates the assimilation of new experiences without undue *anxiety*.

Our concepts and habits provide a kind of horizon of thinking, beyond which we cannot see that certain avenues of thought and experience are closed off for us. These habits of thought occur both on an individual level and on a social level. As Husserl says, "In keeping with their respective habits of interpretation (*herrschenden Auffassungsgewohnheiten*), the natural scientist is inclined to regard everything as nature, whereas the investigator in the human sciences is inclined to regard everything as spirit, as a historical construct, and thus both thereby misinterpret whatever cannot

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[3] It also implies utility and efficacy of action and thought. In line with Kohàk and Stephens, the implication seems to be that when humans first enter a space, their impulse is to dominate it and change it to suit their instrumental needs (Kohàk 1984, 90, Stephens 2000). The result of this is a pruning away of features that do not facilitate the process of instrumentalization, similar to what Nietzsche argued that we do with concepts in his *Truth and Lie* essay. One might say, therefore, when we enter a new space, we are moved to instrumentalize it and thereby to reduce it based on our existing stock of concepts. Though this need not subsequently imply the aesthetic deadening of the space since the aesthetic is one kind of interest we have that is activated upon moving into a new space, more often than not in the modern world, this aesthetic component is sacrificed at the altar of efficiency.

be so regarded" (Moran 2011, 69)[4]. The rhetoric that typifies a particular milieu also closes off thinking and limits it in ways that are not apparent to a reader who inhabits a similar worldview.

When an experience is disharmonious with our expectations, this can threaten our existing way of seeing the world and understanding ourselves in it. To summarize Husserl on this situation:

> The givenness of everything, after all, is provisional and inadequate. Now, it is also *conceivable* that future experience will 'cross out' previous experience. It is possible for an experience to resolve contradictions. Contradictory experience usually requires a correction through which the harmony of experience is restored. But this need not take place. It is possible for experience to 'abound in conflicts that are irreconcilable, not for us but in themselves'; in short, it is possible 'that there no longer be a world.' It would then be the case that the plurality of experiences that constitute the thing do not fit together harmoniously. Experience 'explodes' (Boer 1978, 340).

His use of the term 'explodes' is, of course, felicitous. This explosion is fundamentally similar to what Blumenberg has in mind with explosive metaphors. Since our concepts work principally in terms of family resemblances and our thinking is relatively loose, we only refine the boundaries of our concepts once we are forced to look at them. This is what happens in theology when doctrine crystallizes as a response to the presence of heresy. A similar thing happens when we are forced to look in detail at elements of our

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[4] William James makes a similar comment, describing how each science limits itself by cutting out a small part of the world for its study: "Chaque science découpe arbitrairement dans la trame des faits un champ où elle se parque, et dont elle décrit et étudie le contenu" (James 1912, 209; original is in French)

own thinking that we use habitually. This is one of the primary mechanisms by which Eckhart's thought infects his hearers with just the right elements so as to catalyze change in their self and world understanding.

As an additional point of similarity, Eckhart's life lived with images and attachment ('with a why') is analogous to Husserl's 'natural attitude' of normal, habitual living. As such, Husserl's *epoché* also points in the right direction since it works against our habits of thought and habitus (disposition or stance) at all levels of his genetic account of experience by attempting to 'bracket' our usual concepts and habits of thought[5]. This is analogous to Eckhart's own talk of shedding images (especially in Sermon 2).

As a caveat, while this all points in the useful direction, Husserl is unfortunately limited to thinking that the ego is a persistent, absolute given: "the world of things has only a *presumptive* reality, whereas I myself enjoy an *absolute* reality. '*Over against the positing of the world, which is 'contingent,' stands the positing of my pure ego and ego-life, which is 'necessary'* and simply beyond doubt'" (Boer 1978, 337). Thus, we have the same utility and the same point of departure for Husserl as described in chapter two for Blumenberg. Consequently, once Eckhart speaks of the "annihilation of self" (*vernihten sîn selbes*, *Councils on Discernment* §23, DW V 292.7), much of the modern debate on the details of the involvement of ego consciousness, such as the debate

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[5] I will leave aside here Bourdieu's (and perhaps Merleau-Ponty's) criticism of Husserl and the ability of anyone to sufficiently bracket habits which leave no artifacts that can be subject to conscious awareness. As we read in Buddhist psychology, and we might charitably say that Husserl had this in mind as well, sufficient experience with the phenomenological practice of bracketing may lead to habits becoming available for conscious intervention even if they previously left no trace in conscious awareness (i.e., they were un-bracketable). Dermot Moran argues that Bourdieu is closer to Husserl than he may think and that Husserl sufficiently addressed this concern in his writings on habit (Moran 2011).

between Hubert Dreyfus and John McDowell, is not entirely helpful since it assumes, as Husserl did, the persistence of the individual ego (Moran 2011, 55).

His assumptions about the self left aside, Husserl was more concerned to describe how habits functioned in particular ways in the context of his philosophical system. This resulted in his leaving aside more practical considerations of how to understand the functioning of habit for the purpose of particular rhetorical aims. For that we must turn next to William James.

5.2 Pragmatic psychology and hortatory rhetoric

Since action is ultimately the primary object of hortatory rhetoric, James' pragmatic psychology usefully targets the psychological dynamics that are most salient when thinking about Eckhart's rhetoric. Further, James' psychology doesn't assume a separation between subject and object, making it that much easier to speak of Eckhart in his terms. Piers Stephens tells us that "James thus tried to use immediate 'pure' experience as a non-dualistic precursor to the subject-object dichotomy, with pure experience temporally preceding the division of subject and object" (Stephens 2000, 280). James tells us that when we assume a rift between subject and object, the result is "a paradoxical character which all sorts of theories had to be invented to overcome" (James 1912, 52). Further, like Eckhart, James tells us that "if an intellect stays aloft among its abstract terms and generalized relations, and does not reinsert itself with its conclusions into some particular point of the immediate stream of life, it fails to finish out its function and leaves its normal race unrun" (James 1912, 97). James also cites Kierkegaard as saying that we live forwards and understand backwards (James 1912, 238). Thus, we might better understand Eckhart's emphasis on the life of action as a

kind of reversal of the life of contemplation insofar as the action refers to living activity in the present moment while contemplation dwells in abstract concepts created in the past[6]. As Kierkegaard says, “Immediacy is precisely indeterminateness. In immediacy there is no relation, for as soon as there is a relation, immediacy is canceled. Immediately, everything is true, but this truth is untruth the very next moment, for in immediacy everything is untrue. If consciousness can remain in immediacy, then the question of truth is canceled” (Kierkegaard, as cited by Wolfson 2010, 47). Eliot Wolfson tells us that “Kierkegaard correlates immediacy with reality, mediacy with the word, and consciousness with the contradiction that necessarily arises from the relationship between them. … [T]he common point is that human language is a form of mediation that cancels the immediacy of our sense experience” (Wolfson 2010, 47). The importance of immediate experiences and the way that they are spoiled by conceptual thinking tells us much about why Eckhart used shifty rhetoric and sought to avoid conceptual settling.

Conscious awareness only has a chance to occur when there is disharmony between experience and our concepts. As James says, we seek to disturb our present stock of ideas as little as possible, taking a new experience and “squeezing it under the handiest or least disturbing conception” (James 1899, 163). In fact, for James, we

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[6] James sees this as a unique feature of his radical empiricism, providing us with some disparaging remarks about other philosophical approaches that have engaged in “Universal-worship,” privileging abstractions over concrete particulars since the time of Plato (James 1892, 243). Though he describes the scholastics’ maligned take on universals in the same work, he does not mention Eckhart and the tradition which emphasizes the *vita activa* in contradistinction to the scholastics’ and nominalists’ dispute over universals. Despite this, James’ “broad” sense of the will corresponds rather closely with the Thomistic conception of will. In his notion of the will, his lack of contention that the self is unitary and persistent, and in his emphasis on immediate experience, there is much about James’ thought that is medieval.

manifest the tendency “to subliminally eliminate the jarring or irrelevant, to construct the impression of our environment which is most harmonious and efficacious to our psychological and physiological needs. The larger and more abstract the quantity of learnt abstractions and analogues from previous experience, acquired in order to help us flourish in the world, the more our selective processes tend to separate us from the sensory immediacy of pure experience and draw us towards conceptual rigidity” (Stephens 2000, 280). In other words, our habits and abstractions serve to separate us from immediate experience which is prior to the subject/object distinction. We also fill in much of what we experience with old experiences, seeing through the lens of our existing concepts and providing a distinct *direction* of thought, as with phenomenological *intentionality* (James 1892, 240). In other words, this gives thinking momentum in a particular direction. James suggests that what troubles us when viewing a foreign movie is not that we cannot understand what is said but that we become aware that we do not even hear the words (James 1899). We perceive just as little normally, but we do not notice it since we have no relevant experiences of the words with which to fill in the incoming situation’s sounds. This is an example of how novelty can be disturbing.

In addition to the difficulty in avoiding the use of existing habits, we are similarly moved to quickly create new habits and abstractions when encountering new material. James tells us that we crave abstraction after being presented with only a few concrete examples (James 1899, 151). Essentially, we desire to economize the expenditure of mental energy by fixing abstractions that fit well enough to avoid needing further energy expended on understanding a thing. Eckhart and apophatic theologians generally

sought to avoid this conceptual crystallization since it forestalls any further possibility for learning.

Eckhart does not insist upon forced attention, preferring instead to curry interest. In line with what James suggests, one way that Eckhart foments interest is by perpetually presenting a variegated, ever-changing subject. Indeed, the variety must be continuous since habits wither from inattention, but they are easily reinvigorated when fed a little. As much as this helps his apophatic ends, it also excites interest by antagonizing conceptual crystallization and sustaining interest. As James observes, “variety in unity [is] the secret of all interesting talk and thought” (James 1899, 112).

James discusses a number of principles that describe the factors involved in sustaining attention and what the environment must be like for new understanding to arise in the face of habit. He suggests giving people an idea to hold in mind when introducing a topic, much as Eckhart and most ministers do by leading their sermons with a familiar passage from Scripture. The effect of this is threefold: 1) it primes our minds with an object or idea to look for, making it easier to form associations and recognize the thing when we see it; 2) by beginning with something familiar, we begin by being favorably disposed toward the topic; 3) beginning with a familiar scriptural passage causes the associations with that passage and its ideas to be brought to the fore. A similar phenomenon happens when Eckhart takes familiar words, turns them into adjectives and gives them new meaning: *gelâzen* (letting go, leaving, resigning) becomes *gelâzenheit* (letting go-ness), *abgescheiden* (cutting off, detaching) becomes *abgescheidenheit* (detachment), *bild* (image) becomes *entbilden* (dis-imaging/un-imaging) (McGinn 2005, 165-6). Here we seem to have conflicting forces at work. On

the one hand, Eckhart antagonizes conceptual settling by shifty rhetoric. On the other, he does indeed develop a vocabulary of ostensibly new concepts in his neologisms. It is merely an apparent contradiction, however. The new words serve as necessary anchors for thought. With ethical ideas in particular that work against existing habits and natural tendencies, holding fast to a single word as part of the interruption of a habit's stream of action is invaluable.

James also suggests that stories and sensory experience easily grab the attention (James 1892)[7]. Although he does not make the connection here (even though he forwards a similar thesis in an 1899 essay), it seems reasonable to think that stories and sensory experiences call to mind rich, lived experiences and thus can occupy the whole mind without overly taxing it. The richness of such experiences also provides a fertile ground for association. Discriminating and making associations are likewise pleasant for us according to the same dynamic that novelty has. That is, while we enjoy lightly engaging in discrimination and association, it becomes increasingly onerous as the level of detail outstrips our motivation to pursue the activity further.

An important principle for Eckhart is that association spreads interest without diminishing interest in its source. When a connection is made from an already interesting topic to a new topic, interest is contagiously transferred to the new topic. Further, the more closely linked they are, the more the two tend to grow in interest together. The clearest example of this in Eckhart's rhetoric is in his linking of detachment to virtue. He builds on the existing moral sense and interest in his audience,

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[7] It is salient that James tells us that after adolescence, words and verbal concepts drive most learning. Though this is partially due to to the power of abstract thinking, I believe this is also because we are sufficiently familiar with sensory experiences and find little that is new in sensory experience.

borrowing that interest to fuel motivation to understand what he calls detachment. Further, since effort is a byproduct of interest, personal action always looms in the background of the possibility of new ethical understanding.

Eckhart challenges inhibitions that undermine action in the direction that he aims for his audience to adopt while simultaneously inserting new inhibitions to inject hesitation into our otherwise habitual moral thinking. Our inhibitive machinery, like our attention, is delicate. We are easily distracted when confronted with certain situations. As Blumenberg describes what Abbé Galiani rightly pointed out in response to Voltaire, indulging curiosity requires a standpoint of personal safety (SS 39-40). Fear forces curiosity aside. Perhaps this is why Eckhart downplays hell and warns against being God-fearing. Such fear tends to trump a great many of what James calls the more 'subtle' emotions, of which religious sentiment is one.

Further, as James recognizes, our moral sense being activated can abruptly put a stop to a vigorous chain of actions. The important dynamic to note here is that the activation of the moral sense can inject hesitation into an otherwise unthinking execution of a habitual chain of actions, in terms of both physical and mental acts. When Eckhart recommends detachment, he does so in the context of morality, tying his discussion closely to his audience's existing moral sentiments. If the new idea of detachment is understood and felt by them to be true, then it has the potential to interrupt existing habitual chains that run counter to Eckhart's aims. As James says, "If a novel experience, conceptual or sensible, contradict too emphatically our pre-existent system of beliefs, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it is treated as false. Only when

the older and the newer experiences are congruous enough to mutually apperceive and modify each other, does what we treat as an advance in truth result" (James 1912, 203).

As a final thought on James, we naturally consider things that we put labor into (either to earn the right to buy them or by modifying them through effort) to be a part of our selves because we *value* them and are thus *attached* to them (cf. James 1892, 178). Eckhart's strategy, as we see commonly in both Christianity and Buddhism, is to diminish personal claim to *particular* parts of the world, thus increasing the valuation of *all* parts of the world. It is as if we are naturally inclined to value and that if we do not privilege anything in the world in particular, our valuing of the totality increases. The Buddhist practice of *metta* (meditation on compassion) is an example of this.

This dynamic is intimately linked with immediate sensory experience. Our concepts mollify our otherwise rich response to reality. This is even more so the case because the concepts were inherited from others, so they do not even uniquely belong to our personal experience, as Stephens says. Conceptually dividing reality is analogous to our devaluation of particular things by privileging only parts of reality[8]. This implies that since immediate experience is enabled in the absence of our being driven by habitual conceptions, our openness to novelty and spontaneity likewise strengthens in proportion to our proximity to immediate experience (cf. Stephens 2000, 282).

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[8] Here, I am adopting a similar strategy to what Stephens did. He also argues "by analogy" that the more or less pure and immediate experiences we have are analogous to natural environments that are more or less pure due to their relative absence of objects which bear the mark of human instrumentalizing intentions (Stephens 2000, 282).

5.3 Living metaphors, fit and action

How deeply are concepts and metaphors embedded in our thought? James recognized, as Lakoff and Johnson were to do later, that we think we are speaking objectively when we describe things metaphorically (James 1912, 218)[9]. James spoke of the way that two ideas or feelings must be similar and compatible in a certain way at various times in his psychological writings, but he did not always spell out what this means. Lakoff & Johnson tell us that our feeling that certain metaphors are 'true' testifies to how well they 'fit' with our experience, regardless of what we think the truth is. In other words, we holistically and intuitively feel that a metaphor fits with our experience. If we feel that a metaphor fits, then that metaphor acquires some *force* which is not entirely subject to our control. Here we might think of Blumenberg's discussion of "mighty" truth which compels assent (PM ch.1). This is a more pragmatic version of the mechanism of assent: when we feel that a particular metaphor works, it becomes part of our thought and, consequently, begins to imply action. As Lakoff & Johnson say, in softer terms than what James uses, "Though questions of truth do arise for new metaphors, the more important questions are those of appropriate action. In most cases, what is at issue is not the truth or falsity of a metaphor but the perceptions and inferences that follow from it and the actions that are sanctioned by it" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 158).

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[9] "Nous parlons d'un orage affreux, d'un homme haïssable, d'une action indigne, et nous croyons parler objectivement, bien que ces termes n'expriment que des rapports à notre sensibilité émotive propre" (James 1912, 218).

Changing a metaphor is difficult in proportion to the amount of action that it implies. That simple principle is not directly stated by Lakoff and Johnson or James[10]. We can think of the idea of 'fit' with our existing network of ideas and associations in terms of different layers of abstraction. If I encounter a relatively novel set of mundane experiences for the first time, my new concepts do not have to compete with existing abstractions. Nor do those new concepts need to imply very much action. For example, if I am from an area of the world that does not get snow at all, my first experience of it may involve a good deal of childlike fascination, an easy and even pleasurable process of getting to know the new thing. In this case, I feel little disharmony. For increasingly fundamental components of the way that I see the world and understand myself in relation to it, however, the network of associations and implied action is considerably stronger and more elaborate. Lakoff and Johnson have an especially nice metaphor for this process, saying that "When the network does fit, the experiences form a coherent whole as instances of the metaphor. What we experience with such a metaphor is a kind of reverberation down through the network of entailments that awakens and connects our memories ... and serves as a possible guide for future ones" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 140). Testing out a new metaphor here implies more initial resistance, skepticism and a more rigorous examination for fit. If the experience of snow is new, the

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[10] As Lakoff and Johnson describe the situation, "it is by no means an easy matter to change the metaphors we live by. It is one thing to be aware of the possibilities inherent in the CHEMICAL metaphor, but it is a very different and far more difficult thing to live by it. ... So much of our unconscious everyday activity is structured in terms of the PUZZLE metaphor that we could not possibly make a quick or easy change to the CHEMICAL metaphor on the basis of a conscious decision" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 145). We have to see deeply that it works for it to become a truth to us (as they come close to saying on 142). "New metaphors have the power to create a new reality. This can begin to happen when we start to comprehend our experience in terms of a metaphor, and it becomes a deeper reality when we begin to act in terms of it" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 145).

details of that experience and its associated concepts are not as important and do not impinge upon the process of concept formation as strongly. However, when a new metaphor is suggested as competition for an existing mode of understanding that has significant value attached to it, the criteria for fit are stricter. Of special interest here is the fact that we weigh the existing conceptions and mode of understanding *out of proportion* with their actual goodness of fit. This translates into a dynamic of *inertia* with respect to existing ways of seeing. Here, the metaphor of *overcoming friction* seems especially apropos. Some energy is required to even begin movement. However, once the movement has started, further movement is considerably easier.

Lakoff and Johnson do not address mysticism. Consequently, they do not consider metaphors that target comprehensive changes in thinking and being of the kind that Eckhart and other mystics are most concerned with. They do provide at least two useful clues for thinking about this, however. As a prescription for encouraging the adoption of a new metaphor, they recommend “Having experiences that can form the basis of alternative metaphors” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 233). In addition, Lakoff and Johnson do not limit their treatment of metaphor to particular concepts that are rationally identifiable. They also speak of artwork just as they do metaphor: “Each art medium picks out certain dimensions and excludes others. Artworks provide new ways of structuring our experience in terms of these natural dimensions. Works of art provide new experiential gestalts and, therefore, new coherences” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 235).

New metaphors create new possibilities for association and action since they facilitate the recognition of new similarities between experiences and ideas that were

previously not sufficiently comparable (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 151). New metaphors also tend to emphasize certain aspects of experience and downplay or suppress others (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 149). It does so through its structure (by suggesting new relations) and also by increasing the *presence* that certain aspects of an experience have. In this way, increased emphasis translates into increased presence, which implies an increase in *value*. Conversely, if an otherwise significant element is omitted from a new metaphor, that metaphor's subsequent adoption implies a *devaluation* of that idea or aspect of experience. This dynamic is important for Eckhart's rhetoric. His metaphors depict the what-it's-like to be imageless and to live without a why.

5.4 Haiku and being drawn back to God

As Kohàk says, "A metaphor does not describe a fact – it seeks to evoke a sense" (Kohàk 1984, 55).The attempt to evoke a *sense* also explains the need for Eckhart's rare and novel formulations. Word order and word choice in metaphor have the effect of referring to what Lakoff & Johnson call a 'situation,' a full-bodied experiential gestalt rather than a collection of specific traits and details. As Kohàk explains, "To speak of the rosy-fingered dawn, as Homer does, is not an indirect way of conveying information about the hue of early morning clouds, but a way of evoking the sense of the coming dawn" (Kohàk 1984, 55). Seeing the sense of a metaphor goes deeper than mere rational understanding and assent. It involves us in a *participatory* fashion in the idea. As Kohàk says, "Heating with one's own wood may be no more 'authentic' than central heating, but it offers a far clearer metaphor. Heating with wood is very much a participatory activity" (Kohàk 1984, 25). Both central heat and burning wood accomplish the same end and are thus like rational understanding of a metaphor. The participatory

nature of actually burning wood has a richness of experience that is not captured in rational assent, just as metaphors invite us to *participate* in them by summoning memories and feelings that enable us to be led through to an experience of the experiential 'meaning' of the metaphor.

Aesthetic descriptions and metaphors require conscious, *active* engagement with the material rather than merely recognizing familiar and already understood concepts or arguments[11]. By using an aesthetic metaphor in a philosophical text, the reader is signaled that something new is being put on display with content that is dynamic, richer *and not reducible* to a simple, static conceptual point. The richness and potential for unfamiliar experience via the description of a unique aesthetic moment antagonizes our tendency to quickly pigeonhole experience into classes and file them under existing conceptual categories. This gives the seemingly irrelevant details of aesthetic stories a positive function that is otherwise not as easily accessible to philosophical writing. The net result is the conclusion that these stories function effectively as exhortations first to active conscious engagement and then potentially to action as well[12].

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[11] Though a new conceptual argument also opens up space for something experientially new, it must work with existing concepts and may propose conceptual reformulation (e.g., a new definition of what justice is). If it pushes beyond existing concepts toward the nonconceptual, its behavior becomes increasingly metaphorical, by necessity, as it leaves the domain of conceptual thought. An example of this is Robert Forman's argument about mysticism progressively shedding concepts and assumptions. Though it reads like a philosophical argument and it indeed works with our existing concepts, it invites us to think through what it is like to shed those concepts. Notice that the dynamic then becomes something that looks more metaphorical than conceptual since the concepts strain as they are being turned on themselves.

[12] In this context, we might think of Aristotle's Aristotle spoke of metaphor as bringing-before-the-eyes (*pro ommaton poiein*). For Aristotle, bringing-before-the-eyes is most desirable for metaphors because it capitalizes on the power of sense perception (vision, in particular). That bringing-before-the-eyes and *energeia* are used synonymously is significant (Newman 2002, 3). It implies that the work (*ergon*/*energeia*) of a metaphor is to bring-before-the-eyes of the audience for the purpose of exciting cognitive mechanisms with a telos which is appropriate to the type of work (*mimesis*, *katharsis*, clarity;

The aesthetic experience of haiku discourages thinking in terms of classes of experience, antagonizes reductive conceptuality, and works against thinking of experiences as utilitarian means to an end. Instead, it encourages a valorization of the particular and otherwise ostensibly unimportant details of everyday experiences. At least part of the way in which haikus effectively direct our attention to the particularity of individual experiences is by allowing specific details of experience to be exhibited prominently.

Most fundamentally and in a somewhat Socratic mode, we look for chinks in the armor of our current way of seeing. We can see instances of substantial experiences that seem as though they should constitute a kind of 'knowledge' even though they are not scientific. For example:

First white snow of fall
just enough to bend
the leaves
Of faded daffodils
- Matsuo Bashō

Bashō's haiku is not making an argument. It is not making a conceptual knowledge claim. The substantive experience that makes this little poem powerful is one that arises

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Poetics 6.1449b20ff). This capacity of metaphors allows orators to "actualize actions immediately before audiences and ... lead [them] to insight" (Newman 2002, 3). Aristotle also pointed out that a proper admixture of the unusual (i.e., the unfamiliar) is desirable (22.1458a17-1458b1 as cited in Newman 2002, 6).

directly from the rich complexity of our lived experience and the what-it's-like of that moment of life, not from the conceptual content of any one word or phrase. The poem functions as a metaphor, in other words, pointing to a nonconceptual, substantive experiential gestalt. Our craving abstraction after being presented with only a few concrete examples along with our penchant for using habits even where they are not fully appropriate is part of a mental economy that seeks to maintain the expenditure of mental energy in the optimally useful places. Haiku embodies an antithetical aesthetic to such utilitarian, reductive conceptualizations.

Not all conceptual thought instrumentalizes. Eckhart provides "names" for things which provide useful anchors around which we may more easily rouse the motivation in the necessary direction to effect the desired change. What makes this noninstrumental is that union with God is an 'end' that is not an *instrumental* end. The full richness of personality is retained and even expanded in union with the divine. Consequently, while most goals that we have transform things and people into mere instruments by limiting them to the aspects of their existence that are useful for a particular end, when the end is union with God, no reductive limiting takes place[13].

Smith says the *Cloud of Unknowing* points out that we cannot understand God, but we can pine away for him and reach out to him (Smith 1987, 107-8). He says this may be the best way to get started on the Eckhartian way. In addition to the negative and contemplative, Eckhart also advocates a stance that is "more positive, fiery and

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[13] See Stephens (2000) and Stephens (2004) for further detail on the relation of immediate experiences to concepts. As he says of pre-existing concepts: "in Jamesian terms they constitute ready-made ideas, estimates of reality, techniques and conceptual short-cuts to be used as instruments for purposeful action but which might also drape the fullness of reality and thus deaden our sensitivity to its flux" (Stephens 2000, 283).

active. It is the ‘dart of longing love’ which *The Cloud* speaks of: in Eckhart's own terminology it is the ‘spark’ which leaps heavenwards and will be satisfied with nothing less than the ultimate truth and reality” (Smith 1987, 110).

We are drawn to things (ideas, artwork, and experiences) which move us away from concept-driven experience (living through ‘metaphors’ or ‘images’) and bring us closer to immediate experience. Though Eckhart does not directly state this thesis, his work seems to embody it. As Eckhart might say, we are naturally drawn to God. We can think of curiosity as the allure we experience toward novelty that is harmonious with our interests. This places objects of curiosity toward the immediate experience portion of the continuum which stretches between immediate experience and unreflective habit. Therefore, we may reasonably conclude we are curious about experiences and drawn toward novelty that pushes us closer to immediate experience at the same time that curiosity just as often results in new abstractions which pull us in the opposite direction[14]. It is salient that the continuum that stretches between conceptless immediate experience and unreflective habit is actually a circle, where we have a *coincidentia oppositorum* at the endpoints. One way of understanding monotheism is where the notion of God is a maximal abstraction. To maximize abstraction is to reach this coincidence of opposites, the limit of concepts and the limit of conceptless immediate experience.

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[14] Merleau-Ponty recognizes a similar dynamic. He says that “what enables us to centre our existence is also what prevents us from centering it completely” (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 85). This push-pull dynamic of competing motivations antagonizes equilibrium. If a stable equilibrium were attainable, then we could come to a comfortable place of rest in unreflective habit, living much like an animal. Instead, we are persistently destabilized by our own inner tension that is created by curiosity. This is an integral part of our being drawn back to immediate experience, back to the divine.

CHAPTER 6

A METAPHOROLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF ECKHART'S RHETORIC

Philosophy and theology are ineluctably metaphorical. This is especially true when lived experience and a transformation[1] in being and worldview are goals. If what is sought is ultimately ineffable and defies all possible conceptions of agency, then all possible statements of subjects, objects, actions, properties and things are inevitably metaphorical. As Augustine said and Eckhart runs with, Scripture and any statements about the divine are clothed in a worldly mode of thinking, which includes but is not limited to worldly concepts (*Super Oratione Dominica*). In other words, we necessarily think in terms of worldly things and events because our thought arises at least in concert with our experience. As it is for Eckhart, the details as to *why* that is and *how* it happens are often not as important as the fact *that* it happens and what *practical* steps we can take to overcome it. Thus, in a way that is perhaps shocking to lovers of contemporary philosophical thinking, such thorny issues from philosophy of mind may be blithely set aside in favor of addressing the pragmatic concern of how we deal with the matter at hand. As with much of Eckhart's approach to theology and living, this theme is familiar to Buddhists and may bring to mind the parable of the poison arrow: when shot with a poison arrow, should I ask who made the arrow, who shot it and what

[1] Knowing what metaphor is best to describe this 'change' that defies our normal logic of change is not a trivial task. Throughout, I have adopted Eckhart's practice of speaking of 'transformation,' while nevertheless recognizing and advocating for the utility of its metaphorical character in being a good tool to think with.

path it took? No – I should pull it out and address the practical concern that presses upon me with immediacy. In Eckhart, we read, “If one has a foot in the fire, one does not reflect but immediately pulls it out. And so, a prisoner does not consult a guard about his escape but flees without delay when he has the chance.”[2]

This is all to say that Eckhart’s ultimate concern is always with the divine. All terms, concepts and reasoning thus clothe themselves ineluctably in metaphors that are judged and understood in terms of their *practical utility* in transporting us first in intellect (since intellect rushes ahead, motivates us and enables experience) and then in being. Also ironically implied here just as it is throughout Eckhart’s work is that the starting point is knowable and intelligible in the traditional sense, using our current modes of thinking and being in the world. The end point allows none of these. It is ironically an ‘end point’ because it is no ‘point’ at all. As Eckhart says, “Therefore, as man nakedly yields to God with love, so will he un-form, inform, and transform in the divine uniformity where he is one with God.”[3] We cannot possibly use our existing mode of thinking and concepts to logically sort out what it means to unform, inform and transform, especially in divine oneness that admits of no change. As we wrestle with it and feel the confusion that flows from the interplay of juxtaposed concepts, memories and feelings, we may not notice that our thought has taken on motion, something that happens so consistently that such rhetoric may be designed to capitalize on this motion, guiding thought and

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[2] *habens pedem in igne non consulit quin statim extrahat. Sic incarcerates non consulit carcerarium de exitu suo, sed cum potest, continuo fugit.* (*Comm. Ioh.* n.234; LW III 196.6-8)

[3] *Und dar umbe, als sich der mensche mit minne ze gote blôȥ vüegende ist, sô wirt er entbildet und îngebildet un überbildet in der götlîchen einförmicheit, in der er mit gote ein ist.* (Sermon 40; DW II 278.4-6)

directing it toward new understanding that transforms our current understanding by way of unforming, informing, and transforming it into the divine.

6.1 Rhetorical details and metaphorological dynamics

When I began scrutinizing the details of Eckhart's writing, I expected to find many aspects of his work that were metaphorical and indicative of his thought, but were at the same time likely used without his awareness of their implications. What I discovered instead was that Eckhart demonstrates an intense awareness of rhetorical minutiae, the kind that one would expect from a professor of rhetoric like Augustine. This became apparent in several different ways.

First and most transparently, Eckhart talks openly about the detailed choices that he made in his exegesis, often interpreting Scripture in ways that depend upon grammatical subtlety, for example. What became clear was that Eckhart was willing to employ any detail or interpretation he could find, no matter how small and how counterintuitive, to accomplish his rhetorical aims. Eckhart's project, I contend, revolves in a tight orbit[4] around a core experience: achieving oneness with God. Speaking of an individual soul attaining this straightforwardly implies a paradox since the soul is created and in part temporal. This will be treated at length since it is central to understanding Eckhart's rhetoric. The experience of achieving oneness with God is fundamentally ineffable, though the *practical* steps that one can take to get there and prepare the mind for getting there are amenable to endless description. For Eckhart, speech about lower

[4] cf. Sermon 9, DW I; Venus' close and stable orbit makes it analogous to the *bîwort*, 'adverb'. Just as Venus orbits as closely as it can to the sun, so should man endeavor to stay as close to God at all times. Venus is Eckhart's analogy to the famous 'adverb' passage of Sermon 9, as is evident from his scriptural choice for the sermon in mentioning the morning star: *quasi stella matutina*.

things takes place using abstractions which are higher things (as Platonic forms are higher than their manifestations, but the forms would be used to describe the manifestations), but "one cannot properly speak of God, for nothing is higher than God."[5] As Augustine says regarding God's ineffability and Eckhart quotes approvingly, "When you hear that he is truth, do not ask, what is truth? Remain if you can then in that very first flash when you touched upon its dazzling light, when you first heard someone say 'truth.'"[6] The point of this passage is not limited to the suggestion that we actually remain in that moment. It is great because it functions like a haiku that paints a picture of what that moment was like and thereby enables us to partially revive and reexperience that moment. Here, we have the first of many hints that truth is posterior to the divine and is in fact less than God. Eckhart speaks of the "veil of truth" for God, just as he does of the "veil of goodness" and the "veil of being itself"[7]. If truth is not the highest, then the highest that is above truth must be ineffable and reached only by practical action and experience. Interestingly, Eckhart elsewhere uses the word 'truth' in a contrary way: "He has spread truth on creatures, but they are not truth itself as God is. However, in some ways truth does pertain to creatures."[8] His rhetoric here is qualified. Creatures are not the truth as God is. This tells us that he is here using 'truth' to mean

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[5] *enmac von gote niht eigenlîche gesprochen werden, wan boben gote niht enist, noch gote sache niht enhât.* (Sermon 20b, DW I 346.7-8)

[6] *»cum audis: veritas est, noli quaerere quid sit«. »In ipso igitur primo ictu, quo velut coruscatione perstringeris, cum dicitur veritas, mane, si potes«.* (Augustine, *De Trin*. VIII.2, as cited in *Prologue to the Book of Propositions*, LW I,1 170 n.7 lines 1-3; cf. *Comm. Ex.* n.18) Eckhart adds to this, "And Augustine meant that this is God." (*Et vult Augustinus dicere quod hoc est deus.*)

[7] "veil of goodness" (*velamen veri*), "veil of truth" (*velamen boni*) and the "veil of being itself" (*velamen ipsius esse*) (Sermon XI,2, LW IV 114.4-6)

[8] *Aleine hât er wârheit an die crêatûre geworfen, doch sô enist si diu wârheit selber niht, als got diu wârheit selber ist..Aber in etlîcher wîse ist wârheit an den crêatûren* (Sermon 93, DW IV.1 127.33-34).

the truth just as God is truth itself and not the truths of things in the world. Eckhart does not always include such qualifications, which make plain his intention to use a word in a particular fashion as a kind of aside. Similarly, “For I tell you in eternal truth, if you are not equal to this truth of which we want to speak now, then you cannot understand me.”[9] Again, by ‘eternal truth’ we must be ‘equal to’ (as in *adaequatio*) the truth. With characteristic irony, we must have had the proper *experience* of being raised up to be equal to this *truth* in order to understand it. To be equal to the truth is for a person to be ‘true,’ as he says, “each thing is said to be true on two grounds: first, if it attains the substantial form of its nature; and second, if it has nothing foreign mixed in with it” (EE 155; *Comm. Ioh.* n.87). For man, this means having attained pure *humanity* with nothing foreign to the form (i.e., none of the imperfections and falling away of a particular manifestation). Combine this with Eckhart’s statement that “when Christ became man, he did not take on a particular man. He took on human nature. Go out of all things in this way so there remains only what Christ took on. Then you will have put on Christ.”[10] Thus, to be equal to the truth is to put the soul in Christ’s position and deify her. In other words, this strains the normal concept of truth to a breaking point (but not the thought that “God is truth”), as will be discussed in the section on explosive metaphors[11].

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[9] *wan ich sage iu in der êwigen wârheit: ir ensît denne glîch dirre wârheit, von der wir nû sprechen wellen, sô enmuget ir mich niht verstân.* (Sermon 52, DW II 506.1-2)

[10] *dô Kristus mensche wart, dô ennâm er niht an sich einen menschen, er nam an sich menschlîche natûre. Dâ von sô ganc ûz aller dinge, sî blîbet aleine, daz Kristus an sich nam, und alsô hâst dû Kristum an dich geleget.* (“On Detachment”, DW V 430.8-11).

[11] Even in making a simple point about God being above truth, we see the dialectical spiral in action, leading us into a variety of topics and implications to attempt to plumb the depth of what Eckhart is saying. This complexity is usual rather than being unusual for Eckhart’s speech.

Second, Eckhart uses his metaphors so consistently that they obtain a character of their own through repetition. Eckhart's metaphorical repertoire is actually quite limited, which enables certain rhetorical effects that require repetition. Since he always uses fire, for example, in the same way, all previous experience that the reader has with Eckhart's use of fire informs the way that he uses it in a new context. Thus, as with common interpretations of Scripture, we come to expect Eckhart to do something in a certain way. When he deviates from this, or more commonly when he omits certain important details that actually extend his point in productive and perhaps provocative ways, the reader is led to see even greater depth in a sermon that otherwise does not contain it on its own. Just as Eckhart recommends his listeners work toward an orbit of ever smaller radius around God (like a figure skater who brings in her arms, decreases the overall radius and gains speed), my analysis of Eckhart's rhetoric will necessarily follow a similar trajectory. That is, Eckhart's rhetoric never goes far from God and it never leaves Him for long. This does not mean, as C.F. Kelley argued, that Eckhart speaks *in divinis*. He speaks from the standpoint of the divine, *in divinis*, only as he speaks of man insofar as he is divine. Further, he repeats himself so often, both theologically and metaphorically, that his rhetoric often features many different metaphors at the same time, mutually encouraging one another's rhetorical effects and creating a tight orbit around God. So while we will move from one to the next in the course of this analysis, the trajectory described is more like a collection of eccentric orbits rather than a straight line.

Lakoff and Johnson make much of metaphors that people use, unaware of their significance. They describe metaphors of space (where nonspatial things have fronts

and backs), position (where ideas are far away or close to us in terms of understanding), and so on. Eckhart however, scrutinized his metaphors to such a degree, that it is difficult to tenably claim that he was unaware of the rhetorical details of how some things are "higher" than others, for example. As will be addressed in the sections below that treat his cosmology and theory of knowledge, Eckhart was quite aware when he used "high" and "low." As he explains, "whenever I say, 'the innermost,' I mean the highest. And whenever I say 'the highest,' I mean the innermost of the soul. In the innermost and in the highest of the soul – they are both the same."[12] Regarding spatial metaphors, Eckhart quotes Augustine who says, "Nothing in the universe's body is really 'below.' Those who conceive of before and behind, right and left, above and below in the universe are deceived, because it is hard to oppose custom and the senses" (TP 85; *Comm. Ex.* n.127). Yet it can be done, and "After we abolish these words, we have to make a real mental effort in order to see the point" (TP 85; *Comm. Ex.* n.127). Eckhart explains,

> if we consider heaven as far as its parts in the whole are concerned, since heaven is a simple body, there will be no place in it for above and below and the other four. But if heaven and its parts are compared with the whole universe (of which heaven is a part) as far as its place there is concerned, then we can talk about right, left, before, behind, up, and down in it. For example, in man the head is above, the feet below, the face before, the back behind, one hand is right, the other left. These do not vary among themselves insofar as they are related to man. Whatever direction a person

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[12] *Und swenne ich spriche ‚daȝ innigeste', sô meine ich daȝ hœhste, und swenne ich spriche ‚daȝ hœhste', sô meine ich daȝ innigeste der sêle. In dem innigesten und in dem hœhsten der sêle, dâ meine ich sie beide in einem.* (Sermon 30, DW II 95.3-5)

> turns, his face will always be above and his feet below if we refer these parts to the whole person, but if the parts are referred to some exterior location, then the upside-down man is said to have his feet above and his head below. … This is why Avicenna well says that heaven exists and is moved in a 'where,' because 'where' takes its meaning from place without any consideration of the order of parts in the place. (TP 85; *Comm. Ex.* n.128)

Clearly, Eckhart is aware to a remarkable degree of the metaphorical considerations that Lakoff and Johnson study.

An analysis of his metaphors cannot merely be a lexicon of Eckhartian terminology. His images and words often do not have single objects and single functions. Instead of providing an illusion of conceptual cohesion and logical consistency as a lexicon may do, we will be sensitive to the undercurrent of his thought that pervades his speech and informs word choice. This is the reverse of a terminological lexicon, which begins with words and backs into thought. Instead, we will see that Eckhart's rhetoric is Robert Forman's approach in action: many different ways of describing the process and experience of stripping away this-worldly 'images.'

6.1.1 Rhetoric about rhetoric

At all times, I would like to claim, Eckhart's emphasis is remarkably *practical* for someone so deeply embedded in scholastic theology. This is a consequence of his mysticism and perhaps also of his order's emphasis on preaching. For Eckhart, the soul needs words just as it needs all worldly things, "If she could know God without the world, the world would not have been created for her ... to train and strengthen the soul's eye to endure the divine light," something that is not possible "it were not made

constant and carried over by matter and parables and then led and habituated to the divine light."[13] In short, parables and matter enable the soul to rise above her 'self', which is the portion of the soul that is worldly-focused. It is salient that the Middle High German (and modern German likewise) for 'parable' is *glîchnisse*, which also means 'likeness.' A parable is thus a story that is similar to or reflects its intended object. In other words, the mind rashly rushes ahead of its current level in order to facilitate motion, which is necessary for progress, "knowledge runs ahead, surpassing and breaking through."[14] As Eckhart says, "if a painter considered every stroke of his brush when he made his first stroke, he would paint nothing. If someone was to go to a city and thought beforehand how he was to take the first step, nothing would come out of it. This is why we should follow the first suggestion and go forward"[15]. Similarly,

> Plato himself and all the ancient theologians and poets generally used to teach about God, nature and ethics by means of parables. The poets did not speak in an empty and fabulous way, but they intentionally and very attractively and properly taught about the natures of things divine, natural and ethical by metaphors and allegories. … As the poet Horace himself says in his *Art of Poetry*: 'Poets want either to be useful or to entertain.' And later: 'He who mingles

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[13] *Möhte si got bekennen âne die werlt, die werlt enwære nie durch sie geschaffen. Dar umbe ist diu werlt durch sie geschaffen, daȝ der sêle ouge geüebet und gesterket werde, daȝ si daȝ götlîche lieht lîden mac. ... eȝ enwerde gestætiget und ûfgetragen bî materie und bî glîchnisse und enwerde alsô geleitet und gewenet in daȝ götlîche lieht.* (Sermon 32, DW II 134.5-135.1, 135.4-5). Note that *lîden* here means to 'undergo' or 'suffer' which is an important metaphor for Eckhart that describes the soul's passivity in receiving God, as will be discussed. Also, *gewenet* can mean both 'habituated' and also 'familiarized,' which goes beyond simply becoming strong enough to endure the divine light.

[14] *bekantnisse diu loufet vor, si vürloufet und durchbrichet* (DW I, Sermon 3 49.1-2; cf. DW I, Sermon 19 where Eckhart likewise says the intellect "runs ahead")

[15] *wölte ein mâler aller striche gedenken an dem êrsten striche, dâ enwürde niht ûȝ. Sölte einer in eine stat gân und gedæhte, wie er den êrsten vuoȝ saste, dâ enwürde aber niht uȝ. Dar umbe sol man dem êrsten volgen und gange alsô vür sich hine.* (Sermon 62; DW III 515, 68.5-69.2)

> the useful and the entertaining wins all the applause.' (EE 93; *Prol. Par. Gen.* n.2)

The 'attractive' way of teaching is the 'proper' one, which results in motion. Our desires follow what we recognize to be good in Socratic fashion by inevitably pursuing what one thinks to be good, recognizing that the soul that is far from God mistakes worldly things as being good. Therefore, divine teaching must be clothed in worldly images so that the preacher may guide such a person, connecting the dots that describe a path between worldly images that are thought to be good and the veritable good that is the nakedness of the divine essence. It is a sophisticated pedagogical approach, one that recognizes the necessity of maximally exciting motivation by capitalizing on the good that people can understand at various stages of the process. It appeals to all, as Eckhart says recalling Augustine, "In the beginning, Scripture laughs at young children and attracts a child to it" and thus "there is no one so simple-minded that he cannot find what suits him"[16] Similarly, "Moses only wrote like that: he knew better, but he did it for people who could not grasp it otherwise."[17]

Using the analogy of baking, Eckhart tells us, "If someone heats a baker's oven, … the single temperature of the oven does not work the same way in different doughs, but it does not have the same effect upon the different doughs … In the same way then,

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[16] *Die geschrifft an dem anfang so lachet sy an iunge kinder vnd locket das kind an sich ... es ist nyemant so einfeltig von synnen, er fynde darin, das im eben kompt.* (Sermon 51, DW II 467.)
[17] *Aleine schrîbet Moyses alsô: er weste doch daȝ wol, aber er tete eȝ durch der liute willen, die eȝ niht anders enkunden genemen.* (Sermon 101, DW IV.1 358.141-142)

God does not work alike in all hearts; he works as he finds readiness and receptivity."[18] This accords with the more general claim that "He gives to each according to what is best and most fitting for him."[19] Putting the pieces together: while each person finds what suits him, God gives to each what is most suitable and *useful* to that person. Eckhart's keenness of 'baking the right bread' for the tastes of his listeners may explain statements like the following: "Those who do not understand this should not worry about it"[20] and "Whoever does not understand these words, let them not trouble their hearts over it. For as long as someone is not like this truth, they will not understand these words."[21]

At various times, we see evidence that Eckhart wants his audience to maintain confidence that they can achieve what he is describing. For example, "No one should think that they cannot get here."[22] Moreover, he pushes this further by perhaps ironically insisting that what he describes is *easy* and quickly attainable. "Nothing is so easy and so worthwhile as renouncing what is foreign and rejecting what is from without, whose nature is external, foreign, adverse" (TP 80; *Comm. Ex.* n.108). Again, "There are many

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[18] *sô man einen bakoven heiȥet ... nû enist niht dan éin hitze in dem ovene und enwürket doch niht glîch in den teigen, ... Ze glîcher wîse sô enwürket got niht glîch in allen herzen; er würket dar nâch, als er bereitschaft und enpfencliche*i*t vindet.* ("On Detachment", DW V 424.4-11). Cusanus used a similar image, telling us that "hunger" is met by the preacher who, like a baker who cooks different bread to suit different tastes, tailors the content of his sermons to best reach his audience, "Les pains qui sont cuits pour les différents auditeurs, sont différentes dans leurs contenu même" (Lentzen-Deis 2008, 115). With regard to how he best reaches his audience, Lentzen-Deis says that the preacher offers "aux hommes les plus divers un pain spirituel adapté, afin que chacun puisse prendre ce qui est important pour lui" (Lentzen-Deis 2008, 115).

[19] *Er gibet einem ieglîchen nâch dem, daȥ sîn besteȥ ist und im vüeget.* (*Counsels on Discernment* §23, DW V 302.1)

[20] *Diet niet en verstaet, hi enbecummere hē niet.* (Sermon 16a, DW I 259.30-32)

[21] *Wer dise rede niht enverstât, der enbekümber sîn herze niht dâ mite. Wan als lange der mensche niht glîch enist dirre wârheit, als lange ensol er dise rede niht verstân* (Sermon 52, DW II 506.1-3)

[22] *Eȥ endarf nieman unmügelich dünken, hie zuo ze kommene*. (Sermon 38, DW II 245.1-2)

people, and we can readily do what they do if we wish, who are not hindered by things they deal with."[23] The more complete statement on this provides us with a clue, "no one here is so coarse, so ignorant, or so inept that he that he could not, with the grace of God, wholly unite his will with God's will. He then he only needs to say with desire, 'Lord show me your dearest will and strengthen me to do it!'"[24] He continues, saying that the Virgin Mary's "joy is not far from you, if you will only seek it wisely."[25] Doing this "wisely" and "by the grace of God" are significant qualifications. If we recall Augustine's herculean struggle to give his will over to God in the *Confessions*, we know that actually accomplishing such a *conversio* of will is harldly 'easy.' Contrast this with his Origenist statement elsewhere that "this does not happen all at once, but slowly as a result of the growth of the soul. For if a man were to burn up all at once, that would not be a good thing."[26] Yet with irony in play, Eckhart saw utility in insisting upon ease perhaps because ease also implies closeness. Since God is closer to the soul than it is to itself (Counsels on Discernment §20), rhetoric that inspires progress toward understanding this intimacy is valuable, even if it takes the ironic form of saying that conversion of the will is easy[27]. This may be related to Eckhart's tendency to describe God as hurrying to

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[23] *Der liuhte vindet man vil, und kumet der mensche lîhticlîche dar zuo, ob er wil, daȥ in diu dinc, dâ bî er wandelt, niht enhindert* (*Counsels on Discernment* §7, DW V 209.7-8).
[24] *daȥ kein mensche hie enist sô grop noch sô unverstendic noch sô ungeschicket dar zuo, mac er sînen willen mit der gnâde gotes lûterlîche und al vereinen mit dem willen gotes, und er enbedarf niht mê wan sprechen in sîner begerunge: ‚herre, wer mich dînen liebesten willen und sterke mich den ze tuonne!* (Sermon 66, DW III 118.13-119.)
[25] *vröude enist iu niht verre, wellet ir sie wîslîche suochen* (Sermon 66, DW III 119.5-6)
[26] *doch niht zemâle, sunder algemechlîche durch daȥ zuonemen der sêle; wan verbrente der mensche alzemâle, daȥ enwære niht guot.* (Sermon 82, DW III 247.6-8)
[27] Eric Mangin recently made much of this rhetoric of intimacy in his book *Maître Eckhart ou le pronfondeur de l'intime*. The rhetoric of closeness will appear throughout the remainder of the discussion here.

give himself to the humble person, “When God sees that we are his only begotten Son, God hurries so quickly and rushes to us and acts at once, as if his divine being was about to break apart and become nothing in itself ... God has this lust and joy in his abundance.”[28] Similarly, “He needs our blessedness so much that he lures us to him by any means, whether pleasant or unpleasant. God forbid that he ever permit anything that does not lure us to him.”[29] Although desire is the province of created things and God is above desire (DW II, Sermon 44), Eckhart may have sensibly decided to hyperbolically describe God’s desire since we approach God with love that increases infinitely (Sermon 82, DW III; cf. God’s working “joyfully” [*lustlîche*] in the soul in Sermon 92, DW IV.1 102.8). Already we see the emphasis that Eckhart places on factors that motivate and compel the soul to move toward God. Even God’s hiddenness in the depth of the soul, in the manner of making such stirring enticingly unfamiliar,

> is most useful for her [the soul]. This unknowing guides her in wonder and makes her pursue it. She indeed judges that it is, but does not know how or what it is. When a man knows the cause of things, he immediately tires of them and seeks to know something else, always in a sorrowful longing to know more without any constancy. Therefore, this unknowing knowing keeps her still and makes her pursue it.[30]

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[28] *Swenne got sihet, daȥ wir sîn der eingeborne sun, sô ist gote sô gâch nâch uns und îlet sô sêre und tuot rehte, als ob im sîn götlich wesen welle zerbrechen und ze nihte werden an im selben ... Hie hât got lust und wunne in der vüllede.* (Sermon 12, DW I 194.2-7)

[29] *im ist also nôt nâch unser sælicheit daȥ er uns in sich locket mit allem dem und er uns in sich mac bringen* (Sermon 73, DW III 269.2-3)

[30] *daȥ ist ir allernützest. Daȥ unwiȥȥen ȥiuhet sie in ein wunder und tuot sie disem nâchjagen, wan si bevindet wol, daȥ eȥ ist, und enweiȥ aber niht, wie noch waȥ eȥ ist. Wenne der mensche weiȥ der dinge*

On this crucial point, Eckhart takes influence from Augustine. As mentioned earlier, Eckhart understands the value of the surprising and unfamiliar (or what is "strange, doubtful or false"[31]) in exciting attention and motivation "because new and unusual things more pleasantly provoke the mind than everyday ones."[32]

Eckhart makes use of a specific technique in an effort catalyze transformative change in his listeners by using a particular kind of novelty: he turns familiar material into something unfamiliar. Familiar images and ideas which are read as meaningful by his audience are used by Eckhart to provide viable pathways on which his listeners may be carried from their habitual torpor into a new way of thinking. The resonance with existing values produces a shock and perception of worldview proximity that is necessary for movement, while the unfamiliar material must produce enough dissonance not to be serviceable by existing habits, but not so much that it is read as incomprehensibly foreign or as antagonistic[33].

Another method by which Eckhart made the familiar unfamiliar was through the subversion of common exegetical themes. This was accomplished both by directly

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sache, alzehant sô ist er der dinge müede und suochet aber ein anderz ze ervarne und ze wiȥȥenne und quilet und jâmert iemer mê alsô nâch wiȥȥenne und enhât doch kein bîblîben. Dar umbe, diȥ unbekante bekantnisse daȥ entheltet sie bî disem blîbende und tuot sie disem nâchjagen. (Sermon 101, DW IV.1 361.155-160)

[31] *monstruosa, dubia aut falsa* (LW I,1 152.4)

[32] *quia dulcis irritant animum nova et rara quam usitata* (*General Prologue*; LW I,1 148.14-149.1)

[33] Davies argued that Eckhart sought to "awaken his listeners" and to "shake [them] free from their assumptions, in order to deliver a 'metaphysical shock'" (Davies 1991, 126). Davies argues that Eckhart's rhetorical devices are there to turn his listeners' minds away from the created and point them to transcendence (Davies 1991, 200). I generally agree with Davies, though he claims that Eckhart was being hyperbolic in his idealization of the union of God in *Beati pauperes spiritu* (Sermon 52) to shake them from spiritual complacency with the tantalizing possibility of what can be, which is unwarranted (Davies 1991, 201). Similarly, Cyprian Smith says, "Constantly in his sermons he talks about God in such a way as to shock us into an awareness of how shallow and inadequate our habitual notions of God are" (Smith 1987, 38).

addressing themes by name (i.e., "'Wife' is the noblest word that one can say of a soul, much nobler than 'virgin'"[34]) and also by omitting ostensibly obvious interpretations. As McGinn noted, "one cannot escape the conviction that he was implicitly criticizing much of the preaching and religious practice he saw around him in the early fourteenth century by paying so little attention to such standard themes of medieval homiletics as faithful reception of the sacraments, practical moral advice, and fear of damnation" (McGinn 2001, 131). Similarly, regarding Eckhart's commentary on John 1:43, McGinn says "At times, Eckhart seems to go out of his way to avoid an obvious Christological reading of a text" (McGinn 2001, 116). That this is significant is readily apparent. Why it works is not as obvious. When someone has heard a lifetime of sermons given in a particular fashion with a particular style of interpretation, *not* referencing Christ in discussing John 1:43 (KJV: "The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me.") is at odds with what the mind expects.

Eckhart begins Sermon 30 (*Praedica verbum*, "Speak the Word") by telling his listeners that the Latin passage from 2 Timothy 4:2 means the following in the vernacular, "Speak the word, speak it aloud, speak it forth, bring it forth, give birth to the Word!"[35] As Tobin observes, Eckhart paraphrases *praedica verbum* (speak the Word) repeatedly until he arrived at the formulation he wanted: "give birth to the Word" (TP 295n2). Each successive formulation drifts further from the wording of the text, further from what is familiar and closer to the desired idea of the birth of the Word in the soul, a

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[34] *Wîp ist daȥ edelste wort, daȥ man der sêle zuo gesprechen mac, und ist vil edeler dan juncvrouwe* (DW I 27.3-4).

[35] *sprich daȥ wort, sprich eȥ her ûȥ, sprich eȥ her vür, brinc eȥ her vür und gebir daȥ wort!* (Sermon 30, DW II 93.2-3). The only portion of what Eckhart says that is in the original verse is *praedica verbum*, 'speak the Word.'

perennial Eckhartian theme that is decidedly unfamiliar. At the same time, those in his audience who were acquainted with his favorite themes would have waited with anticipation to see what strange and novel way he would enter into that territory. He continues, saying that "It is a wonderful thing that something flows out and yet stays within."[36] He emphasizes the incomprehensibility of the statement, validating his audience's feeling that they do not clearly understand it. With the space created for the unfamiliar, he uses the opportunity to introduce more of his unusual-sounding ideas in the following order: God is in all things, God made the world once and continues to make it in eternity, the birth of the Word in the soul, identity with the Son, total detachment. Duclow observes a similar progression in the *Book of Divine Consolation*, "as Eckhart moves into divine knowledge, the perspectival shifts become increasingly radical and their healing power progressively stronger; chicken soup then gives way to veritable psychosurgery" (Duclow 1983, 574).

His talk of the diminution of the personal will in favor of becoming divine is another example of the same tactic. He begins by saying most comfortably and concretely, "I was sitting somewhere yesterday when I spoke a little word from the *pater noster*: 'Your will be done!' But what's more, it would be better as: 'May will become yours!'"[37] The wordplay's reversal is more evident in the original: *dîn wille der werde* becomes *werde wille dîn*. Here, we clearly see Eckhart taking a common and familiar idea and making it his own through wordplay, allowing the new formulation to ostensibly inherit some of the familiarity of the original.

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[36] *Eȥ ist ein wunderlich dinc, daȥ ein dinc ûȥvliuȥet und doch inneblîbet* (Sermon 30, DW II 94.1).
[37] *Ich saȥ gester an einer stat, dô sprach ich ein wörtelîn, daȥ stât in dem pater noster und sprichet: 'dîn wille der werde!' Mêr: eȥ wære beȥȥer: ,werde wille dîn!'* (Sermon 30, DW II 99.1-2).

In his exegesis of "work in all things" (*omnibus labora*), he repeats the same strategy in proceeding from most familiar to least familiar, most easily understood to least easily understood. He says there are three ways we should understand "work in all things": 1) see God in all things, 2) love all equally, and 3) to love God equally in all things. Just as his earlier discussion of God as eternal leans on Augustine, Eckhart goes as far as citing Augustine (*Conf*. 4.12.18) to quickly argue for seeing God in all things. His discussion of the second point is particularly interesting. He begins with the well-known injunction in Lk. 10:27 to love your neighbor as yourself. In the process of discussing this, however, he makes the unsettling statement, "If you have love for one person more than another, this is wrong. If you have love for your father, your mother, and yourself more than another, this is wrong."[38] Though this is implied by Lk 10:27, as his listeners may have been aware, it is almost a direct reference to the even more unsettling phrasing of Lk 14:26, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (KJV).

Eckhart, I believe, depended on a form of the *pratfall effect*[39] in soliciting a positive response from his audience. Since Eckhart's audience came to respect him,

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[38] *Hâst dû einen menschen lieber dan den andern, dem ist unreht; und hâst dû dînen vater und dîne muoter und dich selben lieber dan einen andern menschen, im ist unreht* (Sermon 30, DW II 102.4-6)

[39] In psychology, the pratfall effect works as follows. If I already have a positive opinion of someone, seeing them make a mistake only causes me to like them more. Of course, the reverse is true as well. If I am already negatively disposed toward an individual, then seeing them make a mistake causes me to like them even less. Eckhart was able to sermonize with an established *ethos* which probably allowed his audience to give him more than the usual benefit of the doubt when he made outrageous sounding claims. In those situations, because there was a certain amount of trust (or at least curiosity), they would be likely to sustain attention in listening to him. Since some of Eckhart's rash-sounding claims read like mistakes and abuses of the texts (twisting the wax nose of authority too much perhaps), those who were

when they heard a shocking statement that had the ring of blasphemy, they may have been *even more* inclined to seek out the subtle thinking which would instead show the statement to be surprisingly orthodox. Franke encapsulates the psychology of this situation, “Verbal obscenity, moral indecency, religious blasphemy, the ritually abject are all either socially unavowable or, in various ways, subjectively or psychologically inadmissible. All can become avenues leading to rupture with any and all systems of communication establishing normative sense and so lead to experience that is beyond the net of language” (Franke 2005, 493)[40].

In talking about whether the depth of Scripture is suprising, Eckhart answers ‘yes’ for man insofar as he is created and ‘no’ for man insofar as he is divine (DW I, Sermon 22). Wonder is the province of a creature[41]. As a created intellect begins to leave the familiar confines of thinking that is focused on the material world, its eyes open to God in wonder. It is continually *surprised* because surprise is what happens when our expectations are not met as we experience something unfamiliar. When God is

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positively disposed toward him may have been all the more likely to keep listening with increased attention. A modern analog of this situation is found in Heidegger’s *Kantbuch*. Those who enjoy Heidegger are probably more likely to accept his claim that doing violence to the history of philosophy served a greater philosophical purpose. On the other hand, those who were negatively disposed toward Heidegger and took Cassirer’s criticisms to heart may like Heidegger even less.

[40] Compare Franke’s statement to William James likeminded assertion: “Where mendacity, treachery, obscenity, and malignity find hampered expression, talk can be brilliant indeed. But its flame waxes dim where the mind is stitched all over with conscientious fear of violating the moral and social proprieties” (James 1899, 181).

[41] In Plato, we read, “wonder is the feeling of the philosopher, and philosophy begins in wonder” (*Theaetetus* 155d, trans. Jowett). In Aristotle, “It was their wonder (*thaumazein*), astonishment, that first led men to philosophize and still leads them” (*Metaphysics* 982b12, trans. Ross). Since Plato says that the *arche* of philosophy is *thaumazein* and that Iris (the messenger of Heaven) is the child of Thauma (Wonder), it may not be too much of a stretch to think of this in concert with the *arche* (Lt. *principium*) of John 1:1. At the very least, for Eckhart, wonder leads us back to God just as Christ does. It is not clear that Eckhart would have known this portion of Plato, though he would have read the idea in Aristotle.

unfamiliar and 'foreign' (*vremde*) to us, we are surprised. Once the created individual is effaced and the soul returns to union with God and he is thus familiar, we are no longer surprised.

Rhetoric contains great power, as Eckhart says, "Words also have great power: we can perform miracles with words. All words have power from the first Word."[42] As he says, human speech flows forth and remains within, just as divine speech does (DW II, Sermon 30)[43]. Further, Eckhart is willing to identify the speaker with the truth, making for a stronger statement, "If you could look upon this with my heart, you would understand well what I say, for it is true and the truth itself speaks it."[44] This sounds radical, but it flows from his general principle that "What proceeds is in its source; it is in it as a seed is in its principle, as a word is in one who speaks" (EE 124; *Comm. Ioh.* n.4) and "in every case the principle lies hid in itself, but shines out and is manifested in what proceeds from it, namely in its word" (EE 149; *Comm. Ioh.* n.75). Thus, the speech of one who speaks the truth is a production or manifestation of the truth itself. Instead of conceiving of speech as necessarily sullying and having truth mediated by the individual's imperfect understanding, Eckhart asserts that truth shines through as truth

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[42] *Wort hân ouch grôȥe kraft; man möhte wunder tuon mit worten. Alliu wort hânt kraft von dem êrsten worte.* (Sermon 18, DW I 306.5-7)

[43] Some readers may object that I am ignoring some of Eckhart's most famous and discussed metaphors, such as 'flow,' of which McGinn in particular makes much. These have not been ignored, of course. Instead, we should notice that it is not the imaginative portions of those metaphors that contribute the content that is relevant to my project of drawing out the metaphysics of the individual. Flow is an extension of Neoplatonic emanation. Eckhart's metaphysics of flow is not peculiar to him insofar as it is flow. In the other details of what flows and how it flows, we see metaphors that are more clearly useful for this project.

[44] *Möhtet ir gemerken mit mînem herzen, ir verstüendet wol, waȥ ich spriche, wan eȥ ist wâr und diu wârheit sprichet eȥ selbe.* (Sermon 2; DW I 40.5-7)

in such situations, not merely as an imperfect resemblance. This is because the light of grace and not just the light of the intellect may shine in the enlightened soul (DW III, Sermon 73). This is possible because of the "divine light, which shines through the the soul like the sun through glass."[45] So we see that Eckhart understands the individual soul as having the capacity to speak the truth as truth itself because the divine light shines in the highest part of the soul. Thus, Eckhart does not need to speak from the standpoint of divinity, as C.F. Kelley contends, as if divinity were something external. For the soul that has been purified of images and made receptive to God, the soul as the only-begotten Son speaks the truth as the truth itself, with no distinction between them, as Eckhart might say. This energizes his rhetoric with possibility. Words are not merely aspiring, nominalist approximations that hope to be verisimilar to the truth. The soul can do away with its limitations by cleansing itself of images and speak the Word as the truth itself.

All of this is possible because Eckhart's philosophy of language is not based upon a simple understanding of a true statement as being a likeness to what it describes. He touches upon truth in the natural world and indeed has a well developed cosmology, as we will see. Yet, his discussions of these truths always feel like a side issue, something that is always secondary to his ultimate purpose of getting at the divine itself. Consequently, if we get sidetracked by his particular statements and begin

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[45] *götlich lieht, daȥ dâ durchschînet die sêle als diu sunne durch das glas* (Sermon 95b, DW IV.1 199.296-298; cf. DW III, Sermon 73). Note that the lower powers cannot house the divine light, though they may be made receptive to it (Sermon 10). As he explains, "if God is to divinely shine in you, your natural light will not help you at all. It must become a pure nothing and entirely go out of itself" (*sol got götlîche in dir liuhten, dar envürdert dich dîn natiurlich lieht zemâle niht zuo, mêr: eȥ muoȥ ze einem lûtern nihte werden und sîn selbes ûȥgân zemâle*; Sermon 103, DW IV.1 476.27-477.28). Note that the 'natural light' is the lower intellect.

to construct a philosophically coherent system, we get out of synch and lose the rhythm his rhetoric establishes. We will see this most clearly by looking at the dialetical motion that his rhetoric establishes in an effort to guide thought toward God. Many of these are explosive metaphors, of course. In preparation for discussion this, let us now turn to Eckhart's attention to the little words and use of grammar that give those metaphors a consistent and characteristically Eckhartian tone.

6.1.2 Dialectic of particles: in, by, with, though

One of the most consistent rhetorical tropes for Eckhart is his parroting of the Scriptural tendency to string together words that express relation: in, by, for, through, with. For example, we read of "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4:6) and "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things" (Rom. 11:36). Fundamentally, applying multiple relations like this creates a kind of paradox since they can be mutually exclusive. A God who is "above all, and through all, and in you all" is at once paradoxically above and within. A similar paradox begins the gospel according to John: "the Word was with God, and the Word was God." I contend that such structure emphasizes the maximal intimacy and complete oneness of God[46]. A word like "with" establishes a certain relation between two parts when we say "*x* with *y*." This relation has meaning because it *excludes* other possibilities. We would not say that two things are *with* one another if they are in fact the same thing[47]. So, for things to be

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[46] The effect and language are reminiscent of the infinite sphere metaphor.

[47] This is precisely the issue with Eckhart's comment, "An indwelling, an adhering and a oneness with God - that is grace, and there 'God is with'" (*Ein innesîn und ein anehaften und ein einen mit gote, daȝ ist gnâde, und dâ ist 'got mite', wan daȝ volget zehant dar nâch*; Sermon 38, DW II 244 7-8). The word *mit* in German indicates a closeness of relation, much like *apud* does in Latin (this is the word used in the

from God and also *in* God can only be sensible if the relations antagonize one another and revert to oneness. Stringing together such particles, in other words, guides our thought to try and work out the meaning in the combination of relations. In that process, we experience firsthand the futility of applying the exclusions implied by each particle. We are left only with oneness. Eckhart, of course, uses this same structure to refer to God, "whatever exists is from God himself, through him and in him" (TP 55; *Comm. Ex.* n.40). Where this is perhaps more surprising is where he uses this same structure with the individual soul[48]. Eckhart tells us, "we live with the Son and in the Son and through the Son"[49].

This is part of a more general trend where Eckhart takes rhetorical figures and words which normally apply to Christ or God and then applies them to the individual soul, spark or intellect[50]. In image language, the Son is the true image (*imago* - 2 Cor. 4:4, Col. 1:15) while man is made in the image of (*ad imaginem*). Eckhart uses both forms to describe the human intellect. In keeping with this, Eckhart uses *ad imaginem* to describe the human intellect insofar as it has *esse formale*. In Scripture, Paul uses 'in Christ' consistently to refer to the relation between the believer and Christ in this life.

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passage 'The word was with God', *Verbum erat apud Deum*). Though there are subtle shades of difference between *mit*, *apud* and *with*, they all indicates a close relation rather than straightforward equality, which is what matters most for interpreting what Eckhart is doing with these words.

[48] As Fox describes in one passage, we live in and with and though the inner man just as we do with Christ (Fox 1991, 474).

[49] *wir leben mit dem sune und in dem sune und durch den sun* (DW I, Sermon 5b)

[50] "Eckhart [applies] to the human 'intellect' (or sometimes to what he calls the 'something' in the soul) the terms which are normally reserved for God in the tradition of apophatic theology and of which he himself makes abundant use in his discussion of the divinity. As in the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic traditions generally, the 'intellect' is accordingly free of specific being in the 'here' and 'now', it has nothing in common with anything else, it is entirely united within itself and it reflects upon itself inwardly. These are all precisely the terms which Eckhart has applied to God in his Latin works and which he is now using with reference to the human 'intellect'. And in a further passage we find additional imagery which Eckhart has applied to God and which he is now using to describe the 'intellect'. These are chiefly uncreatedness, unnameability, and the concept of the divine ground and desert" (Davies 1991, 137; cf. Sermon 28).

While he seems to reserve “with Christ” (*syn Christō* or *kyriō*) for the life to come, in Galatians 2:19-20, he says “I have been crucified with Christ, and I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me” (McGinn 1992, 73). We frequently hear this verse quoted, but we are only likely to notice the pattern of usage in the otherwise innocuous-sounding particles if we consider the Pauline writings as a whole. A similar strategy suggests itself with Eckhart. For example, in describing Christ’s soul, Eckhart says, “its life was with the body, yet above the body immediately in God without any hindrance.”[51] Eckhart consistently describes Christ’s soul in the same way that he describes individual souls. The full significance of this will be explored after we have more fully articulated Eckhart’s notion of the individual.

The situation is somewhat different with ‘substantive’ pronouns. These are words that refer to things that are substantial and have existence in their own right. For Eckhart, the proper referents of substantial pronouns can only be God since all existence is in God and from God and does not belong to the individual thing, “‘Ego’, the [Latin] word for ‘I’, is proper to no one other than God alone in his oneness.”[52] Further, “these three words ‘I,’ ‘am,’ and ‘who’ belong to God in the most proper sense. … A distinguishing pronoun signifies the pure substance – pure, I say, without any accident, without anything foreign, the substance without quality … These things belong to God alone” (TP 45; *Comm. Ex.* n.14; cf. LW IV, Sermon XXII). Sermon 77 contains the

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[51] *Aber ir leben was mít dem lîbe bóben dem lîbe sunder mittel in gote âne alle hindernisse.* (Sermon 49, DW II 442.6-7)

[52] *‘Ego’, daȥ wort ‘ich’, enist nieman eigen dan gote aleine in sîner einicheit* (Sermon 28, DW II 68.4-5). The same holds for the other transcendentals that are convertible with being like goodness, truth and justice, “[all good comes] in him and with him and through him” (TP 156; *Comm. Wis.* n.96).

longest exposition on substantive pronouns. In it, Eckhart tells us that 'I' "means a kind of perfection of the designation 'I,' for it is not a proper name: we use it for a name and for the perfection of that name and it denotes immovability and immobility. It means that God is immovable, immobile, and eternal constancy."[53] This same treatment of the substantive informs Eckhart's use of the otherwise insignificant word 'something' (*etwaȥ*). As he explains, "This pure, bare being is called by Aristotle a 'something.' That is the highest thing that Aristotle ever said about natural knowledge. No master can ever say anything higher that is beyond this unless he were speaking in the Holy Spirit."[54] Despite such substantives belonging only to God, Eckhart uses them for the soul and thinks of the soul qua divine as properly being able to use the same substantive 'I.'

Eckhart does something similar with 'am' and 'was' and the difference in tenses, "The word 'erat' most properly belongs to God. In the Latin tongue no word is as proper to God as 'erat'. … All things add something, but it adds nothing other than thought."[55] This notion of adding in thought but not substantively is how Eckhart allows for difference in the divine Persons without disturbing divine oneness. Regarding the tenses, Eckhart says, "*erat* signifies a birth, a perfect becoming. I have come now, I was

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[53] *meinet daȥ wort 'ich' umbe etwaȥ volkomenheit des namen 'ich', wan eȥ enist kein eigen name: eȥ ist umbe einen namen und umbe volkomenheit des namen und meinet eine unbewegelicheit und unberüerlicheit, und dar umbe meinet eȥ, daȥ got unbewegelich und unberüerlich ist und êwigiu stæticheit ist.* (Sermon 77, DW III 340.10-341.1)

[54] *Dis luter bloss wesen nemmet Aristotiles ain 'was'. Das ist das hȍchst, das Aristotiles von natůrlichen kůnsten ie gesprach, vnd ůber das so enmag kain maister hȍher gesprechen, er sprȃch dann in dem hailgen gaist.* (Sermon 15, DW I 251.10-13)

[55] *Daȥ wort 'erat' gehœret gote allereigenlîchest zuo. In latînischer zungen sô enist kein wort, daȥ gote als eigen sî als 'erat'. ... Alliu dinc legent zuo, eȥ enleget niht zuo dan in einem gedanke* (Sermon 44, DW II 347.7-8, 348.1)

coming[56] today. If time were taken away from 'I come' and 'I have come', then the coming and have-come would be united and would be one."[57] As the different tenses refer to aspects of temporality, if *erat* compresses them together in birth (since such generation occurs ceaselessly in eternity), then this tense points beyond time and thereby collapses the meaning of the various past tenses together. Such attention to fine grained grammatical detail characterizes Eckhart's rhetoric generally. Even where he does not explicitly call out grammatical subtlety, this thought lies in the background.

Since the string of particles also refers to divine oneness, Eckhart can conclude, "these three terms (from, through, and in) seem to be not only appropriated, but proper to the divine Persons" and that "universally, even in creatures, that 'from which' any single thing is, is the same as that 'through' and 'in' which it is" (*TP* 207; Sermo IV,1). This is because 'from which,' 'through' and 'in' point to being, which only properly belongs to God. However, when they point to existence (which involves alteration and production) rather than being itself (which involves creation), these words can be applied to artists and artisans. The same holds for the relation between parts and wholes, moving from particular to universal, "the parts of any whole … receive existence from, through, and in the whole" (*TP* 155; *Comm. Wis.* n.40).

The difference in particles is one of intimacy. As William James commented, "Philosophy has always turned on grammatical particles. With, near, next, like, from, towards, against, because, for, through, my - these words designate types of

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[56] As Walshe explains (147n7), *was komende* is straightforwardly 'was coming' in both Middle High German and English, but it is impossible in modern German.

[57] *'erat' meinet eine geburt, ein volkomen gewerden. Ich bin nû komen, ich was hiute komende, und wære diu zît abe in dem, daȝ ich kam und komen bin, sô wære daȝ komende und komen-bin in ein geslozȝen und wære ein.* (Sermon 44, DW II 348.4-349.1)

conjunctive relation arranged in a roughly ascending order of intimacy and inclusiveness" (James 1912, 45). Lakoff and Johnson say that 'with' indicates accompaniment (as a companion) and instrumentality (Lakoff and Johnson 133-5). Little words like 'in' and 'at' indicate metaphorical relationships. It is in this context that we should understand Michael Sells (1994) contention that Eckhart uses 'in' to refer to things that have no place[58]. The particle 'in' indicates great intimacy. The case of spiritual things illustrates the significance of the notion of 'in,'

> A master says: if all intermediaries were removed between me and the wall, I would be at the wall but not in it. This is not the case with spiritual things, where one thing is always *in* the other. What receives is the same as what is received, for it receives nothing other than itself.[59]

To emphasize the centrality of this point, Eckhart continues by including one of his characteristic statements, "This is subtle. Whoever understands this has been preached to enough."[60] Such statements tell us more than just to be attentive. They signal that the point of Eckhart's preaching is not in conceptual understanding of a theological system. The ultimate aim is in an experience of 'understanding' that strains the idea of understanding.

Thoguh Eckhart's use of 'in' indeed *reflects* the structure of his thought, it would be difficult to argue that it has primacy and actively *structures* his thought in the manner

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[58] For example, "he himself is the place where he wants to work" (*er selbe sî diu stat, dar inne er würken wil*; Sermon 52, DW II 501.1). This is clearly a place that is no place.

[59] *Een meester sprect: ware alle middel af tusscen mi ende dien muer, soe waric ane den muer, nochtan en waric in den muer niet. aldus en eest niet in gheesteliken dingen, want dat een es emmer in den anderen; dat daer ontfaet, dat es dat daer ontfangen wert, want en ontfaet niet dan hē seluen.* (Sermon 16a, DW I 258.1-8).

[60] *Dit es subtijl. die dit verstaet, hē es gnoech ghepredecht.* (Sermon 16a, DW I 258.9-10)

Lakoff and Johnson argue. Instead, Eckhart harnesses this quality in his listeners and plays off of their existing concept of 'in' and enriches it by pushing it in new directions. Thus, Augustine says, "The image [of God] is in the mind," and Eckhart comments, "it says: *in* the mind and not *from*. This is because the soul should be solid and closed all around so that it can produce the image of God like a mountain which produces an echo"[61] This passage in particular demonstrates the difference between an explicit simile (the echo) and a more subtle metaphor (being 'in' rather than 'from'). Eckhart would have us take our existing intuition about what interiority and embeddedness 'in' implies and apply that *feeling* to what it means for us to be images of God. This is distinctly different than arguing for the conceptual coherence and philosophical rightness of a position. Recalling the claims made about haiku, we should understand Eckhart's metaphors as intentional appeals to experience[62]. This is the same strategy Augustine adopts in pointing us to the moment when we first heard 'truth,' as mentioned above.

Another inflection of note in Eckhart's dialectic of particles is his use of chiasmus. For example, "There is a something in the soul in which God lives, and there is a something in the soul in which the soul lives in God."[63] Similarly, the human spirit, "will be broken through by God. As he breaks through me, I break through him in return!"[64]

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[61] *Imago in menta est* [Augustine, *De Trin.* XIV.8.11] ... *dicit: in mente, non: ex. Oportet enim quod anima sit solida et clausa circumquaque, ut in ipsa gignatur species dei ad modum montis gignentis ipsum echo.* (Sermon XL,3, LW IV 345.6-9)

[62] Incidentally, we see this same strategy employed by one of Eckhart's later readers, Nicholas of Cusa, in his *De Visione Dei*.

[63] *eȥ ist ein etwaȥ in der sêle, dâ got inne lebet, und ist ein etwaȥ in der sêle, dâ diu sêle lebet in gote.* (Sermon 42, DW II 301.5-6)

[64] *er wirt von gote durchbrochen; und alsô, als er mich durchbrichet, alsô durchbrichet ich in wider.* (Sermon 29, DW II 76.3-1)

This is a kind of chiasmus that emphasizes unity by reciprocity. If I cause something and that something causes me, then in trying to think the two statements together, I come to see that they must be the same thing. This is a form of guiding thought toward a conclusion, rhetorically much more effective than simply stating that "the two are one". Such flat statements are not only rhetorically less effective in fomenting interest and motivation, they have a logical air to them, appearing as claims and statements that must be intellectualized. Eckhart's rhetoric, by contrast, guides us down a prescribed path of thought in an effort to recreate an experience in us of seeing and experiencing firsthand. As an example of this in the form of a riddle, "To find God, there is no better advice than to look for him where you left him."[65] This is a loaded statement. We 'left' him where we began to have distance from God. So, it's a truism, ultimately, but a *guiding* and *useful* riddle that appeals to the personal experience of each listener. By using chiasmus, reflexive relations are described where they are not normally possible. The effect of the paradox is the dissolution of the relation. This manner of guiding thought by straining concepts until they break is characteristic of explosive metaphors. It is to this kind of dynamic that we now turn.

6.1.3 Explosivity and Eckhart's mathematical metaphors

Eckhart's rhetoric has motion, often a topsy-turvy, dizzying back and forth that elicits confusion, which provokes us to look carefully at what he says. This confusion is educative and guides us in the right 'direction,' so to speak, since the proper 'direction' is to unravel the very idea of direction. We may understand Eckhart's dialectical yo-yo

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[65] *Eȝ enist kein rât als guot, got ze vindenne, dan wâ man got læȝet* (*Counsels on Discernment* §11, DW V 225.3)

motion as ‘explosive’ in its dynamics, even where his metaphors are not ‘explosive’ according to the Blumenbergian typology. For example, “The gist of all that one can learn about or be advised of is this: a man should allow himself to be advised by God and see nothing other than him, although this can be articulated using many splendid ways.”[66] This is self-contradictory since he is advising you not to take advice from anyone but God. Should we understand the contradiction to destroy his assertion? Or rather, is Eckhart’s meta-advice coming from the divine speaking through him?

Just as Blumenberg identified Cusanus’ mathematical metaphors as explosive, with Eckhart as well we see explosive mathematical metaphors. Explosive mathematical metaphorics is an underlying theme throughout Eckhart’s work. It appears in passages that are not otherwise ostensibly mathematical. This is perhaps less an indication of cleverly designed subtlety than it is merely an indication of the terms in which Eckhart was perhaps naturally predisposed to think. For example, Eckhart conceives of the relation between forms and manifestations according to a mathematical metaphor: “the principle of anything is never the thing itself, but is outside and above the genus of the thing of which it is the principle. For example, a point has no quantity of magnitude and does not lengthen the line of which it is the principle.” (EE 100; *Prol. Par. Gen.* n.20; cf. DW I, Sermon 19). The points are infinitesimally small and can be said to be in all parts of a line equally without adding any length to the line.

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[66] *Her ûf gât alleȝ, daȝ man gerâten oder gelêren mac: daȝ im ein mensche selben râten læȝet und ûf niht ensehe wan aleine ûf got, aleine man diȝ in vil und in sunderlîchen worten mac vürbringen* (Sermon 62, DW III 65.6-66.1)

Elsewhere in Eckhart's thought, we find examples that are not explicitly mathematical, but seem to draw from the same manner of thinking. In Sermon 68, we read, "Heaven is in all directions equally distant from the earth. Likewise, should the soul be equally distant from all earthly things, not nearer to one than to the others."[67] For the mind, all physical places are similarly equidistant from my present location, as we read in Sermon 42, "Jerusalem is as close to my soul as this place is."[68]

Explosive metaphors can function by covering the entire territory in which a particular idea can work. In other words, if we think about the range of possible uses for a given idea as a range of values, one way of getting us to abandon the idea is to cover the entire landscape of possibility and show its insufficiency. For example, "If one takes time, and takes it in its smallest part, the now, it is still time and is a point in time itself."[69] If time is a line, then Now is a point, which has no length. Even in this limit case, making the slice of time as small as possible, it is still time. In other words, simply by focusing on the present moment, we are still in the field of time and have not gone beyond it. Going to the other extreme with hyperbole, which is perhaps an easier form of this kind for us to recognize, is the following. Eckhart says that if someone who was about to starve to death "was offered the best food, they would starve before ever biting or tasting it if God's likeness was not in it. And if someone was freezing to death, whatever clothing they were offered, they could never accept it or put it on if God's likeness were

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[67] *Der himel ist ouch an allen enden glîche verre der erden. Alsô sol ouch diu sêle glîche verre sîn allen irdischen dingen, daȝ si dem einen niht næher ensî dan dem andern* (Sermon 68, DW III 147.1-2).
[68] *Jêrusalem ist mîner sêle als nâhe als diu stat* (Sermon 42, DW II 305.3).
[69] *Dâ man zît nimet, und nimet man sie von dem minsten, nû, daȝ ist zît und stat in im selber.* (Sermon 10, DW I 169.8-10)

not in it."[70] That there is no overlap between God and the finest worldly taste tells us that the material and spiritual are utterly incomparable. The spiritual is beyond the material in every possible way.

Eckhart conceives of one and two as outside of number, following Augustine (*Comm. Ex.* n.130). Things that are further from God have more multiplicity and thus correspond to higher numbers, which are further from God since "number always comes from imperfection" (TP 162; *Comm. Wis.* n.111)[71]. Thus, in approaching a minimum, one moves closer to God and prepares for crossing over from multiplicity to oneness. Strictly speaking, number belongs to matter and the corporeal world while multitude[72] and negation without privation belongs to spiritual things (*Comm. Wis.* n.112).

In effort to help us to think beyond number for spiritual things, Eckhart often calls upon the example of innumerable angels (e.g., Sermons 40, 63, 74, 84, 91, *Comm. Wis.* n.113). For example, "The angels are innumerable. They do not make up any particular number, for they are without number because of their great simplicity"[73]. The idea of number not applying to angels guides thought as a kind of riddle: can you think of innumerable angels that make up no number? It is a kind of thought experiment: What

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[70] *und büte man im die besten spîse, er stürbe ê hungers , ê er ir iemer gesmeckte oder enbizze, gotes glîchnisse enwære dar ane. Und ob der mensche ze tôde vrostic wære, swaȥ kleider man im büte, er enmöhte niemer hant dar ane gelegen noch an sich geziehen, gotes glîchnisse enwære denne dar ane.* (Sermon 58, DW II 612.12-15)

[71] See also: "*number and division always belong to imperfect things and come from imperfection. In itself number is an imperfection, because it is a falling away or lapse outside the One*" (EE 99; *Prol. Par. Gen*. n.17).

[72] Multitude results from a formal distinction while multiplicity results from a material distinction. McGinn tells us that this is not Scotist and instead refers us to Aquinas (TP 162n115).

[73] *Der engel ist vil âne zal, wan sie enmachent niht ‚sunder-zal', wan sie sint âne zal; daȥ ist von ir grôȥen einvalticheit.* (Sermon 40; DW II 274.8-9). Also, Eckhart conceives of each angel as having its own species, following Aquinas (Sermon 38, DW II).

is it like to think of distinction without number? To emphasize the difference, Eckhart will compare the angels to other things that do have number, “there are more angels than grains of sand, blades of grass, or leaves.”[74] Eckhart explains this idea more fully, “I was asked the other day how it could be that there were more angels than the number of all corporeal things … So I say: those things are great in number when God is properly in them himself and when they possess God and they are near God”[75] A ‘place’ where God ‘abides’ amounts to saying that it is divine. The angels have more or less of God according to their receptivity, as he will say of powers of the soul. We should therefore understand the continuum of spiritual things to be ordered according the receptivity for the divine, but all are beyond number.

Mathematical metaphors fit naturally with his thought. As with the privileged place that mathematics had in Plato’s Academy, Eckhart may have chosen mathematical metaphors because they have special advantages. If I am considering a new mathematical proof for a particular theorem, my habitual approach to mathematics dictates that I will more conscientiously reevaluate each step for accuracy *even if I already understand it*. Let us consider some explicitly mathematical examples. The following passage is from Latin *Sermo* XXIV,2:

> Take note: when we hear and read, God speaks to us. When we pray, we speak to God. Take note: the masters say that the lower angels want to speak to the higher angels, not to illuminate them. But if we properly consider it, all who speak

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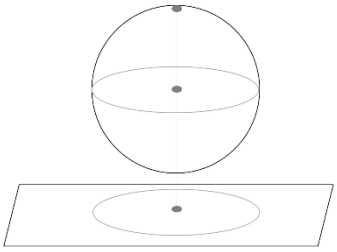
[74] *daȝ mê engel sint dan grieȝ oder gras und loubes.* (Sermon 84, DW III 457.2; cf. Sermon 74)
[75] *Ich bin neüwlich gefraget, wie das müg sein, das der engeln mer sey denn aller leiplichen dinge zal ... So sprich ich: Die ding mů̈ssent groß sein, da sich gott inn <ei>ge<n>t vnd die gott in im eige<n>t vnd die gott nahe seind.* (Sermon 74, DW III 276.9-277.2)

are of that higher and primary order. Therefore, it is clear how much the soul must be elevated if it wants to speak to God. According to [what was said of] how this is, elevation becomes only the low and humble. When projecting a sphere onto a plane, the pole and the center are the same[76]. Say how to pray 'in spirit and mind' (1 Cor 14:15) according to the Apostle, as you with the weakness of the whole world cast before the feet of God, and secondly, you offer to God the merit and light of the mother of God and all the saints, and thirdly, in what way in the Word itself, in that purity, present to and representing the Father for in that alone are all things pleasing. Luke: 'in you I am very pleased.'[77]



Projecting a circle onto a plane, the image used in XXIV,1 and XXIV,2

Josef Quint rightly points us to two similar passages in *Sermo* XXIV,1 and XXXVIII.

[76] This is one of the clearest cases where Eckhart's use of paradox parallels Cusanus' coincidence of opposites.

[77] Nota: cum audimus aut legimus, deus nobis loquitur; cum oramus, deo loquimur. Nota: doctores volunt inferiores angelos loqui superioribus, non autem illuminare; sed si proprie inspicimus, omnis loquens est in illo ordine superior et primus. Patet igitur, quanta requiritur elevatio animae et altitudo, quae deo vult loqui. Iuxta <quod dic> quomodo haec, scilicet elevatio, fit humilitate solum. In proiectione enim sphaerae in planum polus et centrum idem. Dic quomodo orandum 'spiritu et mente' secundum Apostolum, ut te cum omnis mundi praesentis defectu proicias ante pedes dei, secundo cum matris dei et omnium sanctorum meritis et luce offeras deo, tertio quomodo in ipso verbo, in illa puritate, patri praesentes et repreaesentes; nam in illo solo placent omnia, Lucae: 'in te complacuit mihi' (Sermo XXIV,2, LW IV 225 n.245).

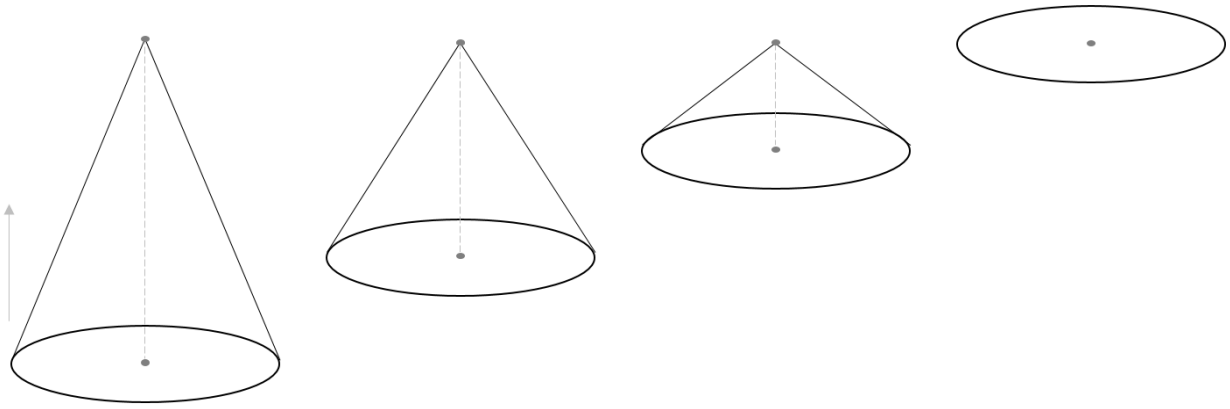
In Augustine's Confessions XI.6, ‘I have given you today,’ then he says [of God], ‘one day of your year and a day for you is not a daily thing. Rather, it is today, because your today is not followed by tomorrow nor does it follow yesterday. Your today is eternity.’ For this, however, humility is the depth or sublimity of this house. Augustine [said] to the Sabines, ‘you all who are at home, speak,’ and further, ‘ask them with great humility before God,’ ‘because humility is the sublime virtue.’ Hence, if we imagine the center of a circle rises in a sphere, it becomes the pole. Conversely, if the sphere is projected onto a plane, the pole becomes the center.[78]

Humility draws its name from ‘to bury in the earth.’ Earth truly has its fixity and stability as its own from its form. As with the Psalmist and in Hebrews 1, ‘in the beginning, Lord, you created the earth.’ ‘In the beginning.’ The first in everything is the cause of all else. Because of which, the commentator himself locates and founds heaven by the earth or the center. Psalmist: ‘you have founded the earth on its own basis’ etc.

Necessarily, however, nature, mathematics and scripture teach both the stability and the benefit of humility in the ascent of the spirit. Nature, because although for the earth there is the greatest difference between all corporeality

[78] Augustinus XI Confessionum c.6 tractans illud: 'ego hodie genui te' sic dicit: »anni tui dies unus et dies tuus non cotidie, sed hodie, quia hodiernus tuus non crastino neque enim succedit hesterno. Hodiernus tuus aeternitas.« Haec autem humilitas est domus istius altitudo sive sublimitas. Augustinus ad Sabinum: »omnibus, qui in domo tua sunt, praecipe« et, infra, »roga eos, ut humiliter coram deo agant«, »quia humilitas virtutum est sublimitas«. Unde et centrum circuli, si imaginetur surgere in sphaeram, fit polus, et e converso si sphaera proiciatur in planum, de polo fit centrum (Sermo XXIV,1, LW IV 219 n.235).

and heaven, so the situation is with nature which is as if it were another that is opposed and inimical to itself. So, because the earth humbles itself and almost subjects itself in its entirety to heaven, the innermost heaven, so to speak, reconciles itself entirely with the earth, infused with all the stars and the planets. So it is that diversity of multiplicitous things which are born and live upon the earth is made manifest. Psalmist: ‘you [Christ] visited the earth’ etc. For mathematics, first, as follows: a vessel holds more as [its bottom] is lower. Second, as the circle rises in a cone, the pole becomes the center.[79]



As the base of a cone rises, the center of the circle becomes the tip of the cone

[79] Humilitas ab humo nomen trahit; humus terra. Terra vero proprie habet ex specie sua fixionem et stabilitatem, Psalmus et Hebr. 1: "in initio tu, domine, terram fundasti'. 'In initio'. »Primum in unoquoque est causa omnium aliorum«. Propter quod commentator ipsum caelum locat et fundat per terram sive centrum. Psalmus: 'fundasti terram super stabilitatem suam' etc.

Necessitatem autem et stabilitatem et utilitatem humilitatis in ascensu spirituali docet natura, mathematica et scriptura. Natura, quia licet terra maxime distet inter omnia corporalia a caelo tam in natura quam in situ et quasi sibi invicem adversentur ut inimica, tamen, quia terra se humiliat et quasi substernit se totam ipsi caelo, intimum caelum, ut sic dicam, reconciliat, ut se toto et omnibus stellis et planetis infundat terrae, sicut ostendit rerum diversitas multiplex, quae in terra et super terram generantur et vivunt, Psalmus 'visitasti terram' etc. Mathematica primo sic: vas tanto est capacius, quanto inferius; secundo, quod circulo surgente in conum centrum fit polus (Sermo XXXVIII, LW IV 327-8 n.382).

In the passage from *Sermo* XXXVIII, the vessel is not only deeper. Its bottom is 'lower,' *inferius*, a word recalling the idea of humbling. Christ visited the earth and 'reconciled' heaven and earth by bringing them together. So, Christ's becoming man brought divinity and creation together, just as the center of a circle may rise in a cone and become the tip of the cone. When this happens, of course, it is no longer a proper cone at all, just as Eckhart's sphere projected onto a plane is no longer a sphere. The mathematical projection of a cone on a plane removes the third dimension and makes the cone into a two dimensional object, a circle. Eckhart describes the desirability of this way of thinking,

> The thought came to me last night that God's highness depends on my lowliness; by my lowering myself, God will be raised. … What's more, I thought last night that God should be brought down, not in all but in me. I liked this 'God brought down' so much that I wrote it in my book.[80]

That God should be 'brought down' corresponds to the leveling of any difference between God and the soul. Importantly, instead of the usual metaphor of the soul's ascent to God, here God is brought down to the soul. This implies that the soul is divine from the onset and perhaps, as he implies here and elsewhere, God needs the soul for his majesty and even for God to be God, "God can do as little without us as we can without him."[81] As the humble person is one with God, "If God's loving us was taken

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[80] *jch dachte zo nachte, godes hoicheit lege an miner nederheit; dar ich mych nederde, dair wirt got erhoeget. … mer ich gedachte zo nachte, dat got inthoeget solde werden, neit ey alle me ey in, ind sprycht also vyle as inthoeget got, dat myr also wayle behagede, dat ich it in myn boich schryff.* (Sermon 14, DW I 237.3-5,6-8)

[81] *got enmac unser als wênic enbern, als wir sîn* (Sermon 26, DW II 35.1-2)

away, his being and divinity would be taken away, for his being flows from his loving us."[82] That is, his love for us *is* his being. Instead of seeing a complete leveling of the hierarchy of being, in fact what we see is that man and God are outside of the hierarchy, "He is as high above being as the highest angel is above a gnat. … God is not a being and is above being, I have not denied being to God; rather, I have elevated it in him" (TP 256; DW I, Sermon 9) The metaphor of 'elevated' or 'rising' here is an instance of the same mathematical thinking that results in Eckhart's sphere and cone metaphors. Eckhart wants us to see both directions in his metaphors, where the soul rises to God and God is brought down to the soul.

Eckhart's account of the eternal forms and material manifestations implies the idea of an *intensive infinity* of forms in their manifestations, meaning that the whole form is contained in the smallest part of a manifestation. Eckhart explains, "*With his whole being God is present whole and entire as much in the least thing as in the greatest*" (TP 75; *Comm. Ex.* n.91)[83]. This enables a chiastic formulation as well, "All things are in him in equal fashion, and he is equally all things" (TP 156; *Comm. Wis.* n.96). This may derive from the *Book of the Twenty-Four Philosophers*' maxim where God's center is everywhere, though Eckhart refers us to an earlier source of this idea in Book I of Augustine's *Confessions* (*Prologue to the Book of Propositions*). Moving down from

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[82] *Der got daȝ benæme, daȝ er uns minnet, der benæme im sîn wesen und sîne gotheit, wan sîn wesen swebet dar ane daȝ er mich minnet.* (Sermon 41, DW II 287.3-4)

[83] Though Eckhart does not often use the metaphor of nature as a book, when he does, it relates to this topic, "every creature is full of God and is a book" (*ieglîchiu crêatûre ist vol gotes und ist ein buoch*; Sermon 9, DW I 156.9). The idea is that we can and "we must take him equally in all things" *müssen wir in glich nieman in allen dingen* (Sermon 5a, DW I 81.8-9). This is more than an intellectual comprehension, it is to experience the world as full of God in the least part. Also connected to experience is Eckhart's contention that this applies to moral things as well, "Virtue or moral integrity in like fashion is totally equal in one as in a thousand acts as far as number goes, and in the least act as well as the greatest as far as size goes" (TP 165; *Comm. Wis.* n.119).

God, Eckhart explains that this applies to all forms and manifestations, “There is an example of this in the sacrament of the Lord’s Body which is entire in the smallest part of the consecrated host, and also in every substantial form,” and also, “the whole soul is found in the smallest part of the body it gives life to” (TP 75; *Comm. Ex.* n.92; cf. Sermon 20a, DW I, and Sermon 35, DW II). This whole-in-part relation confounds our usual notion of spatial position. This leads to another quasi-mathematical metaphor, “if a man’s head is imagined to be at the north pole and feet at the south pole, his foot will be no further from his head than from itself,” as Eckhart says quite plainly, “In unity, then, there is no distance, nothing below another, utterly no distinction of shape, order or act.”[84] This is a revealing example of how Eckhart approaches rhetoric. The point he sets out to make is simple: the soul, existence, living and life cannot be divided into parts like the parts of the body. They do not have any space or place in particular, but rather relate to the whole. Given that these things cannot be split into pieces in space, Eckhart tends to take the most extreme spatial examples to make his point. Instead of just saying that they are nonspatial, he gives us a paradox of spatiality, saying that the “foot will not be father from his head than from itself,” which confounds our usual way of thinking about feet and heads, and excites a pleasant confusion. This guides thought in a straightforward way: if a spatial paradox applies to the soul, living, existence and life, then I must reject any and all spatial thinking with respect to them. If Eckhart simply stated that soul, living, existence and life were beyond spatial thinking, this would not guide thought and provoke the use of mental resources to try and understand

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[84] *in tantum quod si caput hominis imaginaretur in polo arctico et pedes in polo antarctico, non plus distabit pes a capite quam a se ipso nec erit inferior capite ... In uno enim nulla est distantia, nihil inferius altero, nulla prorsus distinctio figurae, ordinis aut actus.* (*General Prologue*, LW I,1 155.8-156.3)

something new. Such simple statements are effective primarily when we *already* understand something. For example, he tells us that God is “totally within and totally without,” which appears paradoxical (TP 95; *Comm. Ex.* n.163; cf. *Comm. Ioh.* n.12). This sort of rhetorical approach and awareness is rarely seen in contemporary philosophical circles. Instead, it is too often implicitly assumed that readers should have inexhaustible motivation that, if they apply their reasoning faculties rightly, then they can work through the subtleties of the logical argumentation because the argumentation is supposed to play by existing, familiar rules of thought. Even in his Latin works Eckhart does not do this.

6.2 Metaphors of desire and personal experience

6.2.1 Desire

For Eckhart, love inheres in all created things: “every action of nature, morality, and art in its wholeness possesses three things: something generating, something generated, and the love of what generates for what is generated and vice versa” (TP 150; *Comm. Wis.* n.28; cf. *Comm. Ioh.* n.82). This applies even on the largest scale, “every part of the heavenly sphere, because it has a power and hence a thirst and desire in relation to each and every other position. … This is the one true cause of the perpetual motion that is naturally in that body” (TP 174; Comm. Eccl. n.42). This points to Eckhart’s general principle of desire: desire puts things in motion. Our impulse to love comes only from the Holy Spirit, with the most detached form of that love being God itself (Sermon 27, DW II). Inanimate things also ‘love’ insofar as they are moved to fall to the ground as a stone is (Sermon 19, DW I). The stone does not love anything higher because it has no power to recognize any other good, “If a stone were a reasoning thing, it would have to

pursue God with love. If one asked a tree why it bore its fruit, if it were a reasoning thing, it would say, 'I renew myself through the fruit in order to approach my origin in the renewal."[85] All things are stimulated to motion by what they *recognize* to be good, "We love all things according to goodness."[86] The recognition of goodness comprises our anticipation or expectation whereupon we desire to move toward what we love, up to and including the birth of the Word in the soul (Sermon 44, DW II). This makes the proper work of the soul to desire God while God's proper work is to give birth to the Word in the soul (Sermon 44, DW II). Will, as manifested in love, is not itself worldly for Eckhart, though it may be wrongly directed at worldly things if we are not acquainted with spiritual things. One of Eckhart's most provocative statements concerns this, "those who have never been familiar with inward things do not know what God is. Like a man who has wine in his cellar but has never tasted it, he does not know that it is good."[87] This points clearly to experience, something that will be more apparent when we discuss the 'taste' metaphor.

This implies a principle of ascent: things desire what is the same or better than themselves. This is why everything must seek God whether it wants to or not (Sermon 65, DW III; cf. Sermon 27, DW II). God's being lovable derives solely from his goodness, as goodness is the foundation love, "if God lost the name 'goodness,' no

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[85] *wär ain stain vernünftig, er mo̊st got iagen mit mynne. der ain böm fragti, war vmb er bäri sin frucht, wär er vernünftig, er spräche: das ich mich vernüwere in der frucht, das to̊n ich dar vmb, das ich in der nüwe minem vrsprung mich nähi* (Sermon 63, DW III 76.1-3)

[86] *nâch der güete minnet man alliu dinc.* (Sermon 81; DW III 404.8-10)

[87] *dem menschen, der von inwendigen dingen nie gewon enist, der enweiȝniht, waȝ got ist. Als ein man, hât er wîn in sînem keller und enhæte er sîn niht getrunken noch versuochet, sô enweiȝ er niht, daȝ er guot ist.* (Sermon 10, DW I 164.5-8).

more love would arise. Love takes God under a cloak, under a garment."[88] This is related to how Eckhart understands hate in Scripture, what we see in Lk 14:26 for example, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (KJV). Eckhart traces detachment to Mt 10:34-36 (and perhaps Lk 14:26 as well) which speaks of cutting away all things and separating a person from all those who are close to him (DW IV.1 Sermon 102). Those things which are opposed to our ascent become foes of our desires as the desires become more closely attuned to and capable of receiving God.

Things strive to create what is like themselves, from God down to the lowest creature. The generator and generated love because of likeness, "The greatest delight in heaven and earth lies in likeness."[89] Thus, as love is based on what is perceived to be good, and that appearance of goodness is based on likeness, we therefore love what we recognize of ourselves in others (Sermons 6, 63). The closer one gets, the faster one travels and the more one enjoys the pursuit (*Book of Divine Consolation* §2). With worldly things, however, getting what one desires results in an attentuation of that desire. Similarly, familiarity with something likewise attenuates desire, "There was never a creature so beautiful or noble that one could look at it for a long time without it becoming annoying to do so."[90] This follows for creatures but it does not follow for God.

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[88] *entviele got den namen güete, minne enkünde niemer vürbaȥ. Minne nimet got under einem velle, under einem kleide.* (Sermon 7, DW I 122.123.1)
[89] *Diu grœste wollust in himelrîche und in ertrîche diu liget an glîchnisse* (Sermon 81, DW III 401.13-402.1). This may also link the Christian emphasis on love to the Platonic demiurge's attempt to create what is most like himself.
[90] *Eȥ enwart nie crêatûre sô schœne noch sô edel, man enmöhte sie sô lange anesehen, si enwürde verdrôȥlich.* (Sermon 91, DW IV.1 91.49-50)

Thus, since God is beyond finitude, so too must the love for God be without bound (Sermon 82, DW III). Likewise, in speaking of those who desire worldly things, “having gained the goal, they eat and drink and no longer hunger and thirst at all. … It is the opposite in things whose goal is infinite, for such things always hunger and thirst, and hunger more argently and more avidly the more they eat” (TP 174; *Comm. Eccl.* n.42). Naturally then, our thirst for God only increases with familiarity. This is part of the general desire of everything for existence. Just as with Plato’s divided line metaphor in the *Republic*, Eckhart envisions a continuum of goodness and being. Lower things desire higher things because they desire to have more being, “every being, in that it is empty in and of itself, thirsts for and desires existence” (TP 175; *Comm. Eccl.* n.45).

Conversely, we fear what threatens to take the measure of being that we have (Sermon 15, DW I)[91]. This is why Eckhart proscribes fearing God, “A man should not fear God, for who fears him flees from him.”[92] This is sensible since “man must not be afraid of God” so that “he can boldly go toward God with all that is his”[93]. While this fits neatly with his take on love, Eckhart has something more general in mind with this proscription of fear, “man must fear neither the devil, nor the world, nor his own flesh, nor our Lord God.”[94] Eckhart appears to see something counterproductive in any fear that does not properly look to God as a positive goal of striving.

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[91] “there is no thing what that does not flee from what could destroy it” (*es ist enhain ding, es flihe das, das es ze niht möhte gemachen*; Sermon 15, DW I 248.1-2).
[92] *Der mensche ensol got niht vürhten, wan der, der in vürhtet, der vliuhet in.* (Sermon 22, DW I 385.15-16; cf. Sermon 95, DW IV.1)
[93] *der mensch enmüge mit allen sînen sachen küenlîche ze gote gân.* (Sermon 87; DW IV.1 24.37-38)
[94] *der mensch niht vorhten den tiuvel noch die werlt noch sîn eigen vleisch noch unser herren got.* (Sermon 87; DW IV.1 23.28-29)

As for the dynamic of what love actually does to the lover, Eckhart follows Augustine in asserting that we become what we love:

> St. Augustine says: 'The soul becomes like whatever it loves. If it loves earthly things, then it becomes earthly. If it loves God,' we might ask, 'does it then become God?' If I said that, it would cry out as something unbelievable to those of unsound mind who cannot grasp it. Augustine says further, 'I do not say it, but rather I point you to Scripture, where it says: 'I have said that you are gods!'' (Ps. 82.6)[95]

This is a rare passage where Eckhart explicitly acknowledges that an idea sounds dangerously radical. Saliently, with this as well he follows Augustine since Augustine also recognized the idea as sounding dangerous. To love something, one must be capable of loving it and must be able to know it. Once a good is recognized as good, desire ineluctably flows[96]. Though all things are naturally drawn to God and the human soul has an innate sense that things do not exist of themselves (DW IV.2, Sermon 115), we begin by loving creatures, which, by this principle, makes us nothing since creatures are nothing in themselves (TP 153; *Comm. Wis.* n.34). To rise beyond this, we must recognize higher things as good in a quasi-Epicurean fashion, by becoming more

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[95] *Sant Augustînus sprichet: »swaȥ diu sêle minnet, dem wirt si glîch. Minnet si irdischiu dinc, sô wirt si irdisch. Minnet si got«, sô möhte man vrâgen, »wirt si danne got?« Spræche ich daȥ, daȥ lûtte unglouplich den, die ze kranken sin hânt und eȥ niht vernement. Mêr: sant Augustînus sprichet: »ich ensprich eȥ niht, mêr: ich wîse iuch an die schrift, diu dâ sprichet: 'ich hân gesprochen, daȥ ir gote sît'«* (Sermon 38, DW II 238.10-239.3; Quint tells us that the quotation is from Augustine's *On the Epistle of John to the Parthians* tr.2 n.14). Eckhart refers to this idea, frequently naming Augustine in association with it (e.g., DW II, Sermon 44)

[96] In the *Parisian Questions*, Eckhart says that knowledge prepares the way for love and makes love possible, which enables him to assert the supremacy of knowledge, a typically Dominican position. It is not clear that Eckhart maintained this stance in his other works, however, where he views love and knowledge as on par with one another. For Eckhart, God is beyond both love and knowledge.

acquainted with higher goods and thus enabling us to desire them. In the end, Eckhart tells us, if a person "steps with understanding in his heart"[97] (perfectly rational, with reason thus ordering desire) then that person will love "nothing but perfect good."[98]

If we become what we love, how does this process happen? Eckhart says of the object of apprehension, "If it is pleasing, then he will adhere to it, and it will stick to him, inhere in him, and so be conceived" (TP 108; *Comm. Ex.* n.206). As part of the lover's impulse to unite with the beloved, we first attempt to reach the beloved and stick to it. Then it inheres in us. Finally, it is conceived and the two are born into one another, as we will see with his metaphor of birth that describes this moment between the soul and God[99]. When this process completes, Eckhart uses the metaphor of property/ownership, "make God your own so that God will be your own as he is his own himself. He will be God for you as he is God for himself, nothing less. Whatever is mine, I received from no one."[100] As usual, Eckhart pushes the limits with this metaphor. Not only is the beloved mine, but I received it from no one since it was always a part of me. As he says, "Love does not unite in any way. It stitches together things that are already united and ties them together."[101] Thus, to love another is to love what is already yours and like yourself

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[97] *trete mit verstantnisse in sîn herze* (Sermon 93, DW IV.1 129.43)
[98] *er niht liep enhât dan volkomene güete* (Sermon 93, DW IV.1 129.43-44)
[99] Also see the description of the stages of this ascent in Sermon 84 whereby one begins in hope and fear, then forgets temporal things and finally strides into God permanently.
[100] *eigene dich gote, sô wirt got dîn eigen, als er sîn selbes eigen ist, und er ist dir got, als er im selben got ist, und niht minner. Waȝ mîn ist, daȝ hân ich von niemanne* (Sermon 30, DW II 108.1-3; cf. DW III, Sermon 65). Interestingly, Eckhart mentions ownership elsewhere in a disparaging fashion, saying that people who taste of God in one way but not another are tolerable, but still wrong (Sermon 5a, DW I). Looking only at this passage, it is not obvious that Eckhart does not object to applying the idea of ownership to God, he merely objects to doing so through an intermediary.
[101] *Minne eneiniget niht, enkeine wîs niht; daȝ geeiniget ist, daȝ heftet si zesamen und bindet eȝ zuo.* (Sermon 7, DW I 122.3-4; cf. Sermon 21, DW I; Sermon XXIX, LW IV). Though it is not obvious (Tobin:

in the other. Taken to the extreme, with God, who is all in all, the soul loves God and makes God its own through love, which amounts to saying that the soul comes to recognize and unite through desire what it had in itself all along, only it did not know it[102].

The dynamics described here also explain why God loves creatures not as creatures but as himself in creatures (Sermon 109, DW IV.2; cf. Sermon VI,1, LW IV). At one point, Eckhart emphasizes the greatness of this love, saying that "God loves the soul so powerfully, which is a wonder."[103] This is sensible since he elsewhere says that God is infinitely lovable and thereby he loves the soul with this selfsame infinite love. The statement provides a characteristically Eckhartian riddle, though. How can we understand infinite love? The trouble is, the infinite is not simply of great magnitude, which means that Eckhart does not simply recommend understanding God's love by analogy with our lesser love that is of the same kind. About this approach, Eckhart says with respect to understanding the question of innumerable angels, "It exceeds the number in that it is without number and above number, and not, as many wrongly say, 'exceeding the number of corporeal things' because it is greater in number (this is properly not to exceed number, but to be subject to it)" (TP 163; *Comm. Wis.* n.113). Given that Eckhart's mathematical thinking applies to both topics equally well, we may

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"fastens together and binds"; Fox: "sticks together and binds"; Walshe: "fastens together and binds close") since both verbs in the second clause are separable, *zesameneheften* (NHG zusammenheften) and *zuobinden* (NHG zusammenbinden) both refer to sewing and tying things together. This image of stitching together is part of Eckhart's dialectic of detaching/attaching that runs throughout this sermon.

[102] Eckhart emphasizes this point of having the beloved in oneself in Sermon 27, "'Love one another!' That is: in one another. Scripture says this very clearly. St. John says, 'God is love, and whoever is in love is in God and God is in him' (1 Jn. 4:16)." (*'minnet under einander!', daȝ ist: in einander. Dâ von sprichet diu shrift gar wol. Sant Johannes sprichet: 'got ist diu minne, und der in der minne ist, der ist in gote, und got ist in im'*; Sermon 27, DW II 49.3-5).

[103] *got die sêle als kreftlîche minnet, daȝ eȝ wunder ist.* (Sermon 69, 163.6; cf. Sermon 82, DW III)

reasonably conclude that the argument applies to love as well and any of the other divine attributes or transcendental which God properly transcends.

Eckhart uses the rather unusual analogy of loving a picture that hangs on a wall without the wall to describe the transition from loving things that are beneath God to loving God himself:

> When an image is painted on a wall, the wall is the support of the image. If anyone loves the image on the wall, he thereby loves the wall. If the wall is removed so that the image remains, then the image is its own support. Whoever then loves the image, loves only the image. When you love all that is lovable and not those things on account of which they appear lovable, you love nothing but God[104]

When we love anything less than God, we love the goodness that we recognize in that thing. This particular goodness is the 'support' that props up our love. Thus, if we seek to love that which has no support, since love is always based on what we recognize as good, the only choice is the good itself, which points us to God. The point he makes with this metaphor is not mysterious, but the metaphor itself is strange. If we step back and look at Eckhart's tendencies more broadly, we will see this same sort of train of thought in other places. Eckhart often begins with an ostensibly mundane example, like the picture on the wall. He then transforms the image into something unusual, which makes us scratch our heads and pause. The unusual image, like the picture in midair, is representative of the kind of image that Eckhart uses generally when he crosses over

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[104] *der ain bilde malet an ain wand, so ist die wand ain enthalt des bildes. wer nun mynnet das bilde an der wand, der mynnet die wand dar mitte; der die wand danne<n> näme och das bild dannan. nun nement dannen die wand, also das das bilde beleibe, so ist das bild sein selbs enthalt; wer dénn mynnet das bilde, der mynnet ain lauter bilde. nun mynnent alles, das mynneclich ist, vnd nit, an dem es mynneclich schinet, so mynnest du lauter got* (Sermon 63, DW III 78.6-177)

from the temporal/familiar to the eternal/unfamiliar. The abruptness of the transition is part of what seems so strange about this metaphor. It is not any more unusual than the wood/eye example of Sermon 48:

> As I was coming here today, I was thinking of how I might so intelligently preach to you that you would understand me well. Then I thought of an analogy. If you can understand it well, you will understand both my sense and the ground of all my ideas that I have ever preached. The analogy was about my eye and a piece of wood. When my eye opens, it is an eye. When it is closed, it is still the same eye. … If it happens that my eye, which is one and simple in itself, opens and looks upon the piece of wood with the power of sight, each remains what it is and yet become one in the act of sight that we can truly say the wood is my eye and call this 'eye-wood.' If the wood was without matter and it was entirely spiritual like my eye's power of sight then we could truly say that the piece of wood and my eye share a single being in the act of sight.[105]

The example is entirely intelligible until the very last sentence. There, an abrupt transition is introduced as we cross over from familiar to unfamiliar, from worldly to spiritual things. As a general observation, Eckhart capitalizes on the shock value of these sudden discontinuities. He lulls the mind to rest in a comfortable place with

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[105] *Dô ich hiute her gienc, dô gedâhte ich, wie ich iu alsô vernünfticlîche gepredigete, daȝ ir mich vol verstüendet. Dô gedâhte ich ein glîchnisse, und kündet ir daȝ vol verstân, sô verstüendet ir mînen sin und den grunt aller mîner meinunge, den ich ie gepredigete, und was daȝ glîchnisse von mînem ougen und von dem holze: wirt mîn ouge ûfgetân, sô ist eȝ ein ouge; ist es zuo, sô ist eȝ daȝ selbe ouge ... Geschihet aber daȝ, daȝ mîn ouge ein und einvaltic ist in im selben und ûfgetân wirt und ûf daȝ holz geworfen wirt mit einer angesiht, sô blîbet ein ieglîcheȝ, daȝ eȝ ist, und werdent doch in der würklichkeit der angesiht als ein, daȝ man mac gesprechen in der wârheit: ouge-holz, und daȝ holz ist mîn ouge. Wære aber daȝ holz âne materie und eȝ zemâle geistlich wære als diu gesiht mînes ougen, sô möhte man sprechen in der wârheit, daȝ in der würklichkeit der gesiht daȝ holz und mîn ouge bestüenden in éinem wesene.* (Sermon 48, DW II 416.1-12)

familiarity, only to introduce a new element that shatters the comfort and cannot be squared with the same mode of thinking. This dynamic is simply a different form of the mechanics of explosive metaphors.

6.2.2 Taste

One of the principle metaphors that Eckhart uses for desire is taste. In doing so, he builds on a tradition going back to Scripture that describes God's 'sweetness' (e.g., Ps. 33:9, Si. 24:27). In Latin, the key term is *sapio*, I taste*,* just as in Middle High German the word is *smecken,* to taste. In Middle High German, there is a dual connotation with *taste* and *smell*. Further, just as we use the phrase "smacks of" or "reeks of," the same is possible for Eckhart. The Latin *sapio* has the further connotation of being wise or discerning, recalling the related term *sapientia*, wisdom, which fits nicely for Eckhart.

Taste is a decidedly personal experience that is difficult if not impossible to convey to another person in all its richness. The idea of taste feels intuitively wrong when it is applied to something that cannot also have a personality, at least metaphorically. Dogs can taste things. With plants, it feels like a stretch. And with inanimate things, it seems wrong, though we regularly apply metaphors like love and desire to them.

So how far does taste go? It goes beyond truth and intelligibility. The soul "tastes God before he is shrouded in intelligibility or truth."[106] The intellect is not limited to intelligible things, which includes all forms since the intellect can assume any form[107].

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[106] *gotes gesmecket, ê er wârheit oder bekantlicheit an sich vâhe* (Sermon 3, DW I 56.2-3)
[107] As Eckhart often says when this subject arises: just as the eye is without color and so it can see color. This idea traces back to Aristotle.

This is why the intellect can still taste (Sermon 69, DW III). Further, God tastes himself in the soul of one who is "stripped of time and all creaturely flavor."[108] This tells us that the taste dynamic goes all the way to God. The soul's ground is excluded from this, however, just as God is somehow beyond desire, "she indeed receives light, sweetness and grace in her powers, but may only receive God naked in the soul's ground."[109]

Fundamentally, taste describes the expereince of having limited contact with something that is desirable, that is, something of equal or higher station. In its smallest manifestation, the taste metaphor yields to smell, which is much less common for Eckhart, since smells can linger after an object leaves in a way that taste cannot. Eckhart tells us that Mary went to Christ's tomb because she hoped "something of God remained in the grave. As if I held an apple in my hand for a while, when I put it down, something of the smell would remain."[110] Similarly, God does not even have "the scent or flavor of time – just as a smell remains where an apple was lying."[111]

As the soul ascends, it loses its taste for worldly things and finally has a taste only for God, "what was sweet to her becomes bitter."[112] This dynamic is quite simple. Where it attains useful rhetorical complexity is in its exciting in us the full richness of experience. We may think about connections in terms of love and desire (though they become more personal by doing so), but when we hear of *savoring* something, this

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[108] *entblœʒet ... von zîtlîcheit und von allem gesmacke der crêatûren* (Sermon 73, DW III 266.1-2)
[109] *si enpfæhet in irn kreften wol lieht und süeʒicheit und gnâde; aber in der sêle grunt enmac niht în wan blôʒ got.* (Sermon 72, DW III 252.3-4)
[110] *etwas gotes in dem grabe bliben wære. Als ob ich einen apfel hæte gehabet in mîner hant eteswie lange; swanne ich in dar ûʒ tæte, so blibe sîn etwaʒ dar inne als vil ein gesmak.* (Sermon 55, DW II 579.3-5)
[111] *einen rŏch und einen smak der zit, – als da ein apfel ist gelegen, da belibet ein smak* (Sermon 50, DW II 456.2-3)
[112] *daʒ ir vor süeʒlich was, daʒ ir daʒ bitter werde* (Sermon 56, DW II 589.10-11; cf. DW III, Sermon 73; DW III, Sermon 81; Counsels on Discernment §20)

brings to mind the full richness of experience. I am reminded here of Marcel Proust's famous madeleine, the taste of which evoked significant, rich memory. This is an extreme example perhaps, but even the idea of tasting a particular food is quite effective at bringing to mind the taste, smell and overall experience of our encounter with a particular thing.

Further, "Whoever has let go of all of their will, will savor my teaching and hear my words."[113] That his words should taste good implies that he may either exhibit something recognizably good with them or – even better – bring his audience to a new understanding of something as good. As he explains, "an angel pours out his life and his power into heaven and drives it around without stopping. With heaven, he gives motion to the life and power of creatures. In the same way, I intend what I have understood in my heart, words pour out from my hand as I write letters with my pen."[114]

When one desires a taste after becoming acquainted with it being good, we call this hunger. In fact, hunger is necessary for something to be tasty (TP 179; *Comm. Eccl.* n.54). Hunger can only occur in the absence of what is desired. Thus, "all things feed on him, because he is totally within; they hunger for him, because he is totally without" (TP 179; *Comm. Eccl.* n.54). Just as we are not hungry all the time for a particular taste but can desire it after being reminded of it, "So it is then with a man who

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[113] *Der allen sînen willen hât gelâȝen, dem smacket mîn lêre und hœret mîn wort.* (Sermon 10, DW I 170.4-5)

[114] *Dar umbe giuȝet der engel sîn leben und sîne kraft an den himel und trîbet in âne underlâȝ umbe und würket alsô mit dem himel alliu leben und alle kraft an den crêatûren. Als ich den willen, den ich in dem herzen begriffen hân, an einen brief giuȝe mit der hant, daȝ ich den buochstaben rüere mit der vedern* (Sermon 81, DW III 403.12-16).

has seen God and caught his scent. He keeps up the chase and will not let up."[115] Importantly, the hunger that we have for worldly things follows the usual dynamics of eating: it is pleasant when one is hungry, but disgusting if one is quite full. Thus, the concomitant image of 'satiety' corresponds with the hunger for worldly things. Eckhart makes a quick move into unfamiliar territory by telling us that we only hunger perpetually and without satiety for God, because he is infinite[116]. In sum, "in corporeal things eating ultimately brings on disgust, but in divine things as such eating causes hunger" (TP 180; *Comm. Eccl.* n.57).

Finally, Eckhart explains those who do not know to desire God as being akin to a sick man, "if a sick man drinks sweet wine, … the wine loses all its sweetness on the bitterness that is on the outside of the tongue, before it can come inside where the soul identifies and judges its flavor."[117] Similarly, "However pure and noble a drink is, if drunk from a dirty vessel, it will have an ignoble taste."[118] However, for one who has a taste for God, "everything takes its flavor from God and becomes divine."[119]

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[115] *Alsô ist eȥ umbe ein menschen, der got gesehen hât und sîn gesmecket hât: der enlæȥet niht abe, er loufet alwege.* (Sermon 59, DW II 633.6-8)
[116] This idea receives one of Eckhart's most interesting and amusing use of repetition in his Latin works, "he consumes hunger; the more he eats, the more hungry he gets. … By eating he gets hungry and by getting hungry he eats, and he hungers to get hungry for hunger" (TP 180; *Comm. Eccl.* n.58).
[117] *sô der sieche mensche trinket den süeȥen wîn, ... der wîn verliuset alle sîne süeȥicheit in der bitterkeit der zungen uȥerlîche, ê dan der wîn kome inwendic, dâ diu sêle bekennet und urteilet den gesmak.* (*Book of Divine Consolation* §2, DW V 52.11-14; cf. DW I, Sermon 11; Comm. Ex. n.12; DW I, Sermon 22)
[118] *Wie lûter und edel ein trank ist, giuȥet man in ein snœde vaȥ, er wirt deste unedeler* (Sermon 91, DW IV.1 92.58-60)
[119] *eȥ nimet alleȥ sînen smak an gote und wirt götlich* (*Counsels on Discernment* §11, DW V 229.10-230.1)

6.2.3 Joy

Eckhart has a theology of joy, not fear. He speaks of joy because being stripped of all images and attachments naturally produces "spiritual joy, coming from pure awareness and that makes a man light to all things and raises him above himself."[120] Though he calls it an 'outcome,' it is not anywhere in Eckhart a philosophical *consequence*. Joy does not follow logically from anything. Eckhart is observing and describing the quality of religious experience in order to prime the minds of his listeners, just as Augustine describes the effect of hearing about the life of Antony in the *Confessions*.

Aside from the experiential reference that lies in the background, joy also fits nicely into his theology in two ways: first, as delight that accompanies being in contact with what one desires; second, as a side effect of being detached from worldly things. Though we might rightly recognize joy as an excitation of the soul, Eckhart warns us against thinking that the saints and perfected people are barred from being moved, "there was never a saint so great that he could not be moved. … Do you think that as long as words can move you to joy or sorrow, you are imperfect? It is not so. Christ was not like that."[121] Of course, Eckhart cannot be thinking of movement away from God in sin. He clarifies, "Great pleasure is not excluded from a sober virtuous person, but burning desire and disturbance of soul and disordered passion" (EE 117; *Prol. Par. Gen.* n.155). How high does joy go? Eckhart tells us that our eternal joy is more important than existing itself (DW IV.1 Sermon 87). Eckhart explains this more

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[120] *geistlîchiu vröude; diu komet von lûterer samewiȥȥecheit, diu machet den menschen lîht ze allen guoten dingen und erhebet in boben sich selben* (Sermon 92, DW IV.1 104.21-23)
[121] *daȥ heilige sô grôȥ nie enwart, er enmöhte beweget werden. ... Ir wænet, alle die wîle wort wegen mügen in liep und in leit, sô sît ir unvolkomen. Des enist niht. Kristus enhâte sîn niht.* (Sermon 86, DW III 490.9-12)

completely in another sermon. Regarding the overflowing of heavenly joy, “first, because it has no end; second, because it surpasses merit; third, because it surpasses hope; fourth, because it surpasses desire; fifth, because it surpasses understanding and all apprehension.”[122] So, we hear of God feeling joy, Christ being moved, and joy ‘overflowing,’ reminiscent of *ebullitio*, ‘boiling over,’ whereby God’s inner boiling spills over and creates the world. In short, Eckhart uses the joy metaphor in the same way he speaks of God generally.

As joy is intimately linked with the eternal, it has a loftier place than existence itself. Thus, Eckhart describes God as being joyous, “God has pure amusement and laughter over a good deed”[123]. Eckhart asks, “what is the joy of the Lord? A marvelous thing to talk about! How can anyone determine or speak of what no one can understand or know! Still, here is something about it. The joy of the Lord is the Lord himself and no other.”[124] Thus we come to a general principle: joy is divine.

The joy metaphor is not simply identified with the divine, nor does Eckhart only apply it to being in general, which is present in every created thing (Sermon 66). He applies it specifically to the rational creature, saying that God is in man “in another way which makes him blessed and good, for he is in him joyously, living in and with him

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[122] *primo, quia non habet terminum; secundo, quia supra meritum; tertio, quia supra speratum; quarto, quia supra desideratum; quinto, quia supra intellectum et omne apprehensum.* (Sermon XII, LW IV 135.1-3)

[123] *got hât rehte ein spiln, ein lachen in dem guoten werke* (Sermon 79, DW III 364.8; with justice and the just person, cf. DW II, Sermon 39; joyfully working in the soul, cf. Sermon 82, DW III). Similarly, “One should give joy to the angels and saints” (*Man sol geben den angeln und den heiligen vröude.* Sermon 6, DW I 101.1).

[124] *waȥ ist diu vröude des herren? Ein wunderlîchiu rede! Wie möhte man daȥ berihten oder gesprechen, daȥ nieman verstân enkan noch bekennen enmac! Mêr: doch etwaȥ dâ von. Diu vröude des herren daȥ ist der herre selber und kein ander* (Sermon 66, DW III 123.11-124.2)

blissfully and rationally as in himself and with himself."[125] Thus, God dwells in the rational person, making him blessed and joyous. The difference is one of *awareness*. As rational creatures, we have the capacity to be aware of God. That is, we can come to know God as good and thereby pursue him. Eckhart highlights the fact that only this awareness separates non-rational things from higher joy, "If a piece of wood knew God and recognized how near he is to him, as the highest angel knows, it would be as happy as the highest angel."[126]

6.3 Eckhart's anthropology: passivity, activity and the individual

Eckhart advocates an active participation in the world, not a detached contemplation that entirely denigrates the value of the body and lived experience. To say that embodied existence has value is to say that it is not devoid of goodness. As the notion of the individual expands around Eckhart's time, it is only natural that as individual human life waxes in worth, so too does human *activity*. This is crucial since human activity here refers to life as a particular individual and not just life as an instantiation of an archetype. This should call to mind a certain tension in Eckhart's works: the lowliness of matter and created things in tension with the value of embodied human activity. Recall that for Aristotle, matter is the principle of individuation. We should expect then that as we approach the level of the individual, we see a concomitant increase in imperfection. The exception to this rule is the individual soul. The world of created things is infused with God's being, which thereby prevents the hierarchy of

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[125] *in einer andern wîse, dar abe er sælic ist und guot, wan er ist im lustbærlîche und lebet in im und mit im vrœlîche und vernünfticlîche als in im selben und mit im selben* (Sermon 66, DW III 111.1-3)

[126] *Weste daȝ holz got und bekente, wie nâhe er im ist, als eȝ der hœhste engel weiȝ, eȝ wære als sælic als der hœhste engel.* (Sermon 68, DW III 142.4-5)

things from being a simple scale of value. Even though the lowliest creature is far from God and participates only a little in being, since God is present in the smallest part in his entirety, the hierarchy compresses: everything is divine insofar as we consider its being.

The case is different with the individual rational soul. This soul is endued with the spark of divinity, meaning that it shares in God qua intellect in addition to sharing in God qua being. The difference between intellect and being is most significant for Eckhart. He sees intellect as prior to being in God, as we see in Eckhart's first thesis in the *Prologue to the Book of Propositions*: Esse est deus (existence is God), a reversal of Aquinas' formula *Deus est esse* (God is existence) (LW I,1 38). As with being, we share in God's divinity as it is in God, not in a merely analogous fashion. Recall that for Eckhart, an image receives its entire being from what it images. Further, for spiritual things, this implies a wholesale conveyance of its essence. Thus, to borrow from Luke 17:21, the kingdom of God is in you, truly in you in its essence and all that it is, not just in an analogous way or as a mere reflection. Eckhart is being more emphatic than hyperbolic when he emphasizes the sameness of the divinity within the soul and God. Further, as we have already seen and will continue to see throughout this analysis, the individual soul is not the same as the individual self which is imperfect in its particularity and its worldly cares. Eckhart tells us that Christ took on human nature, not the particularity of an imperfect individual. Indeed, the soul ascends by denying and annihilating its 'self' (*vernihten sîn selbes*)[127]. Yet this 'self' is not the individuality of the soul. As Eckhart

[127] "annihilation of self" (*On Detachment*)

says, “a man must be killed and wholly dead and nothing to himself, wholly unlike anyone and being like no one. Then he is truly like God.”[128] The soul is not less for losing this worldly attachment. In fact, the worldly attachment in the form of desire for worldly things, makes the soul *nothing*. So, to rise to God is to rise in being, to move away from nothing, and to shed ‘self,’ including individual will. By detaching ourselves from what is worldly and particular about us, we are left with bare human nature, which is divine.

If the world itself is replete with divinity even in its smallest part and if mankind has divinity as his own in the innermost reaches of the soul, the stage is set for Eckhart to likewise ennoble *activity* over contemplation. As alluded to earlier, the seed for this is found in the idea of the Incarnation itself. The idea that God can come into the world as a person is possible only if the human individual shares in divinity. If humanity itself is so closely linked with the divine, this enables us to think that human activity likewise is divine. This brings us to a conclusion that Eckhart would have probably appreciated: his notion of the individual, which gives his work so much of its distinct chararacter, builds upon a theme that is at the very heart of Christianity.

6.3.1 The contemplative life and the active life

Eckhart argues that the contemplative ideal is simply not possible. As living things, we cannot avoid activity altogether. The saints and even Christ were moved and continued to be moved even in their perfection (cf. Sermon 86, DW III; *Book of Divine Consolation*

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[128] *muoz der mensche getœtet sîn und gar tôt sîn und an im selben niht sîn und gar entglîchet und niemane glîch sîn, sô ist er gote eigenlîche glîch.* (Sermon 29, DW II 89.4-6)

§2; Sermon 95, DW IV.1). As he says piquantly, “I will never arrive at the point where an excruciating racket is as delightful to my ears as a sweet piece of string music.”[129] Importantly, as he goes on to say, though being moved is inevitable, suffering is not. Once one moves beyond the ‘sensible will’ (*sinnelîcher wille*) which is in need of instruction and attains to a ‘rational will’ (*redelîcher wille*) that moves closer to God, one approaches the ‘eternal will’ (*ewiger wille*) where the will assents to all things (Sermon 86, DW III 489.20). With such a will, pleasure and pain are still ineluctably felt, but suffering is not. Beyond prosaic matters, to reach God,

> One of two things must always happen: either we will take God and learn to hold him in all activity, or we must give up action altogether. Now since man in this life cannot be without activity, which is so plentiful and is part of being human, we must learn to hold God in all things and everywhere remain unhindered in all activity.[130]

Though the contemplative ideal is impossible, Eckhart tells us what character our activity should have. We must “possess God in all things.” Once again, he uses the language of ownership and property, which emphasizes the role of individuality in activity. Contemplation at its highest levels tends to imply losing individuality. Here again, Eckhart’s notion of activity (even in contemplation) maintains the rhetoric of the individual even though the activity is properly God’s. That is, the activity that is one with

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[129] *Daȝ ein pînlich gedœne mînen ôren als lustic sî als ein süeȝeȝ seitenspil, daȝ erkriege ich niemer.* (Sermon 86, DW III 491.19-20)

[130] *Dem muoȝ ie under zwein dingen einеȝ geschehen: eintweder er sol got nemen und lernen haben ín den werken, oder er sol alliu werk lâȝen. Wan nû der mensche niht in disem lebene mac gesîn âne werk, diu menschlich sint, der vil ist, dar umbe sô lerne der mensch sînen got haben in allen dingen und ungehindert blîben in allen werken und steten.* (Counsels on Discernment §7, DW V 211.6-10)

contemplation properly belongs to God just as God belongs to such an individual. The chiasmus here, just as it does in Eckhart's own rhetoric, emphasizes oneness.

Eckhart's exalting the *vita activa*, the active life, is ostensibly in opposition to the *vita contemplativa*, the contemplative life. By Eckhart's time, there was a long tradition of holding up the contemplative ideal, which effectively advocated a world-denying approach, one that put down all things material as less worthy than the contemplative. At times, Eckhart seems to speak in this rather Platonic way. He often tells us, "Every capacity for change, privation, defect, and evil in things comes from matter" (TP 183; *Comm. Ioh*. n.551). Further, temporality and corporeality are the greatest hindrances (Sermon 68, DW III; cf. Sermon 12, DW I). Still, as God is wholly present in the least thing in its being, even matter cannot be purely nothing. The world is no illusion for Eckhart. Its reality is meaningful and suffused with God. Therefore, Eckhart cannot advocate the contemplative ideal that puts down all that is worldly as if it had no value. However, Eckhart does not leave contemplation behind either (cf. Fox 1991, 486). Instead, he takes the provocative stance that contemplation and action are *one.*

> Master Thomas says: the active life is better than the contemplative life, as the active man pours out from love what he received in contemplation. They are the same thing, for man does not apprehend things from anywhere other than the ground of contemplation itself and then make them fruitful in action. This brings contemplation to perfection. Though action happens, it is nothing other than one. It comes out of one end, which is God, and comes back into the same. Just as when I go from one end to the other in a house: that would certainly be motion, but it would be nothing other than one in the same. So in this activity, man has

> nothing other than one contemplation in God. The one rests in the other and perfects the other[131]

First, of course, in light of the traditional tension between contempaltion and action, it is unusual for Eckhart to claim that they are one[132]. In doing so, he does more than adopt a middle ground. Eckhart's account of divine activity and the soul's participation in it naturally implies the statement that contemplation and action are one. Everything that is God is wholly God, by his thoroughgoing oneness. As the soul is divine itself in its innermost reaches, when man clears away what is created and acts out of this innermost ground, his actions are necessarily divine. Since the innermost ground is one of contemplation and ultimately one of rest and repose, as we will see later, man is at once active and contemplative, just as God is at once at rest and also at work. In this way, action and contemplation are one. This is the well-known dynamic of 'boiling' or 'melting' which occurs interiorly with God while not 'adding' anything of multiplicity to God.

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[131] *Meister Thomas sprichet: dâ sî daȥ würkende leben beȥȥer dan daȥ schouwende leben, dâ man in der würklicheit ûȥgiuȥet von minne, daȥ man îngenomen hât in der schouwunge. Dâ enist niht dan einȥ wan man engrîfet niergen dan in dem selben grunde der schouwunge und maht daȥ vruhtbære in der würkunge; und dâ wirt diu meinunge der schouwunge volbrâht. Aleine beschehent dâ bewegunge, eȥ enist niht dan einȥ: eȥ kumet ûȥ einem ende, daȥ got ist, und gât wider in daȥ selbe, als ob ich gienge in dem hûse von einem ende an daȥ ander. Daȥ wære wol bewegunge und enwære doch niht dan einȥ in einem. Alsô in dirre würklicheit enhât man anders niht dan eine schouwelicheit in gote: daȥ eine ruowet in dem andern und volbringet daȥ ander.* (Sermon 104a, DW IV.1 579.155-581.171)

[132] Once again, this is a theme that will sound familiar to Mahayana Buddhists. The idea, for example, of the *bodhisattva* is one where someone ascends to the divine and then returns to the world to be fruitful and compassionate in action to others. Compare this to Eckhart's interpretation of Scripture where it describes how "a person of royal birth went to a distant country to be appointed king, and afterward, he returned" (Fox 1991, 518; "On the Nobleman").

When one begins, however, Eckhart does not advocate just any action[133]. For the beginner, he says, “a beginner who wants to have a good life should consider this analogy: whoever wants to make a circle first sets his foot down and keeps it still until he makes the ring.”[134] This means, he continues, “that their hearts must be constant.” This is a version of the hinge metaphor in *On Detachment*. The foot on the outside that describes a circular orbit is in motion while the center, which is the heart, remains constant. With respect to contemplation and action, the metaphor that follows extends the foot/hinge metaphors in an important fashion. He describes the motion of an anchored boat, sea travelers, “If they want to sleep, they throw an anchor into the water so the ship will stop. They still rock up and down in the water, but they do not wander about.”[135] As a circle is two dimensional and part of a plane (recalling the importance of the second and third dimensions of the sphere and cone that are projected to circles and thus lose the third dimension), motion in the third dimension does not affect the constancy and motionlessness of the center in two dimensions.

6.3.2 Activity and passivity

The rhetoric of activity and passivity figures centrally in Eckhart’s rhetoric of the individual. For something to be active and perform an action, it must be a substantial subject that is capable of having actions attributed to it. Eckhart understands active and passive principles to be fundamental, “the entire universe created by God is

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[133] Passages which imply or overtly say this sort of thing should remind us of what may have been the most pressing issue in the phrasing of the bull against some of what Eckhart said.

[134] *ein beginnære, der eines guoten lebens beginnen sol, der neme ein glîchnisse: der einen zirkel machen wil, - als er den êrsten vuoz setzet, alsô stât er, biz er den zirkel gemachet* (Sermon 81, DW III 397.4-6)

[135] *als man slâfen wil, sô wirfet man den anker in daz wazzer, so bestât daz schif; sie wankelnt wol ûf dem wazzer, sie envarnt aber niht.* (Sermon 81, DW III 398.1-3)

distinguished into two principles, the active and the passive. These two can be found in every nature" (EE 101; *Prol. Par. Gen.* n.21; cf. Sermon XXIX, LW IV). For something to be active means that it either creates or at least issues forth action that is not caused externally. Specifically, the acted is not acted upon when it acts (EE 101; *Prol. Par. Gen.* n.22). Importantly, the action is one-way where the active principle "takes nothing at all from its passive principle" and instead pours action into the passive principle (EE 103; *Prol. Par. Gen.* n.26). Further, the relation of actor to acted upon is one of superior to inferior. To have the capacity to be acted upon implies *likeness* between actor and acted upon. Consequently, there is reciprocal love, especially when the action is generation (*Comm. Wis.* n.28). Since love and desire are at play due to likeness, this straightforwardly implies that "what is passive always thirsts for what is active even when drinking it" (EE 102; *Prol. Par. Gen.* n.25).

When the boundary between superior and inferior is crossed in action and the superior acts on the inferior, Eckhart identifies two possibilities. The first is that the active principle touches upon the passive principle so long as it is present, but the effect departs as soon as the active principle leaves. Such is the case with sunlight in a medium. The sun spreads light throughout, but that light does not inhere and 'take root' in what is lighted. This means that the thing lighted ceases to be lit as soon as the light is taken away. Eckhart explains, "Fire sends its root into water with heat, for when the fire is removed, the warmth remains for a while," but this is different in the case of sunlight, which "lights the air and shines through it, but does not send its root into it, for

whenever the sun is no longer present, we have no more light."[136] As he explains in another metaphor, sending a root means to give possession to the thing, while not sending a root means to loan it instead (*Book of Divine Consolation* §2). This is the relationship between God and creatures. God does not send the 'root' (*wurzel*) of being into creatures. If God were to withdraw, creatures would cease to be. As we see here in various forms, the idea of action describes relations from highest to lowest in Eckhart's celestial hierarchy. This is why action itself cannot be a created thing.

Eckhart understands unity of being and unity of activity in different ways, "My body and my soul are united in one being, not as one activity. As my soul is one with my eye in one activity, which is seeing. So, the food I eat has one being with my nature, not united in one activity."[137] Action or movement can be described of both physical and spiritual things, but they are not the same. The action of physical things unites disparate things in order to act. The act of seeing is not just the eye or the soul, but the work of both as a kind of unity, rather like we speak of a single subject who sees. Once again, this is the familiar case. We know what it is like to see and to lift a stone. We know that when we do these things, it is many powers and things acting in concert, which makes them unified in performing the action. As before, we cross from familiar to unfamiliar with spiritual things. Spiritual things are not separate like physical things in action. When

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[136] *daȥ viur daȥ wirfet wol sîne wurzel ûȥ in daz waȥȥer mit der hitze, wan als man daȥ viur abetuot, sô blîbet dâ wol eine wîle diu werme in dem waȥȥer und ouch in dem holze; ... Aber diu sunne erliuhtet wol den luft und durchliuhtet in; si wirfet aber ir wurzel niht dar în; wan swenne diu sunne niht mê gegenwertic enist, sô enhân wir ouch niht mê liehtes.* (Sermon 41, DW II 294.7-12)

[137] *Mîn lîp und mîn sêle diu sint vereinet an einem wesene, niht als an einem werke, als mîn sêle, diu einiget sich dem ougen an einem werke, daȥ ist, daȥ eȥ sihet. Alsô hât diu spîse, die ich iȥȥe, ein wesen mit mîner natûre, niht vereinet an einem werke* (Sermon 7, DW I 119.2-5)

God works in me, his work is done by him in his entirety and the work is God in his unity.

6.3.3 Metaphors for passivity

Action transforms what is passive, potentially transforming a lower substance into a higher one. When something catches fire and burns up completely, Eckhart understands this process in terms of the fire transforming the burning thing entirely into itself. In the same way, he tells us, "We must put on Christ as iron puts on fire, as air does sunlight and as wool does color. Iron puts on fire such that it becomes entirely fire."[138] The active/passive dynamic at work here speaks to the way Eckhart sees man's transformation. Just as fire is active and iron is passive, so God actively works and the soul must passively receive. This is why Eckhart describes the soul as "suffering" or "undergoing" (*lîden*) God. As Eckhart says, "Only God must be active. You only have to undergo it."[139] Likewise, "the best and most perfectly noble place you can come to in this life is when you are silent and allow God to work and speak."[140] Pure passivity is key. Just as the humble man empties himself (think kenosis) and compels God to flow into him as if to fill the void, so the purely passive person creates a kind of vacuum of

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[138] *Christum induere debemus, sicut ferrum induit ignem, aer solum, lana colorem. Ferrum sich induit ignem quod totum est ignis* (Sermon LII, LW IV 436.5-7)
[139] *muoȝ eȝ got aleine würken und dû solt eȝ aleine lîden* (Sermon 103, DW IV.1 476.23). This is an extension of his statement that the creature desires while God works.
[140] *daȝ aller beste und daȝ aller edelste, dar man zuo komen mac, in disem lebene ist: dû solt swîgen und lâȝ got würken und sprechen.* (Sermon 101, DW IV.1 355.116-117)

agency whereby God must flow into him and work, “it is a divine work when man only follows and does not resist, where he undergoes and lets God work.”[141]

Undergoing and passvity refer to a specific *experience*. In meditation, for example, part of ‘letting go’ through detachment is allowing the calming process to continue. This means not becoming an obstacle or hindrance to it by allowing other thoughts to crowd it out. As Eckhart says, speaking of God giving us everything, “the less we strive, the more God will give.”[142] Just as Eckhart describes the way in which a single image is able to displace God, so attachment to a single thought crowds out the blissful calm of concentrated meditation. In contemplating God, it is not hard to imagine that Eckhart was referring to this very experience. The dynamics he mentions throughout his works about the effort and training required to do this match well with building meditative skill. Further, Eckhart links blessedness with undergoing God, “I am passive in hearing. I am active in seeing. Still, our bliss does not lie in our activity, but rather in that we undergo God.”[143] This passive undergoing, as Eckhart describes in quoting Dionysius in the same sermon, implies ‘ignorance’ as well, which amounts to a transformation in the conception of knowledge for the passive/detached individual.

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[141] *eȥ ist ein götlich werk, der mensche volge aleine und enwiderstâ niht, er lîde und lâȥe got würken.* (Sermon 73, DW III 270.2-3; cf. Sermon XI,2, LW IV).

[142] *ie minner wir eȥ meinen oder gern, ie mê got gibet* (Sermon 41, DW II 297.2)

[143] *daȥ hœren bin ich lîdende, aber daȥ sehen bin ich würkende. Aber unser sælicheit enliget niht an unsern werken, mêr: an dem daȥ wir got lîden* (Sermon 102, DW IV.1 421.143-422.145). One could also say, as Fox does, that “I undergo hearing.” Quint points us to a number of sources where Eckhart speaks of undergoing God: Sermon 47 (DW II 408.3-409.2), Sermon 52 (DW II 501.1-4), Sermon 83 (DW III 437.13-438.3), Sermon 31 (118.3-7), Latin sermon XI (LW IV 105.7-107.1), In Ioh n.100 (LW III 86.16-87.1), In Ioh. n.181 (149.9-13), In Ioh. n.396 (LW III 337.1f), In Ioh. n.397 (LW III 338.5f), In Eccli. N.38 (LW II 265.12f), In Ioh. n.106 (LW III 91.3), Latin Sermon IX n.100 (LW IV 95.3-5), Sermon XI,2 (LW IV 109.14-111.3), Sermon XXII n.206 (LW IV 191.2), Sermon XXV,1 n.256 (LW IV 234.3-5), Sermon 47 (DW II 400.6), Sermon 42 (DW II 309.1-5), Sermon 45 (DW II 373.3-6).

Another metaphor that Eckhart often employs for passivity is that of the wax seal or stamp. As he says, “The soul must be re-formed and pressed into the image, which is God’s Son.”[144] On its own, this depiction is too intelligible and familiar to usefully spur thinking in the right direction. He continues by saying that the Son is the image of divinity itself, the Godhead, implying that we are molded into a form that is beyond form. Eckhart brings us in with an intellgible metaphor, pushes the concept to its breaking point, and then challenges us to think through the metaphor and the inherent shortcomings of our mode of thinking and being.

Further, we have an example of connoisseurship with the wax metaphor. Eckhart says that because it leaves an impression, we can tell if a soul has grace by seeing “God’s likeness stamped into the soul.”[145] Since God’s likeness is something that requires knowledge of God for us to be able to recognize it, this means that only one who has this knowledge (and thus would manifest such grace in turn) can recognize it in others.

The idea of wax being stamped also carries the connotation of force and compulsion. Eckhart explores this in a provocative fashion. He tells us that the just man sees and hears from justice itself. Through this experience, justice “seals and impresses the truth of what it says” (EE 154; *Comm. Ioh.* n.85). This is as close as Eckhart gets to the ‘force of truth’ metaphor that Blumenberg discusses. It is only ironic seeing because in that seeing God and the person who sees are one. This strains the idea of being

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[144] *Diu sêle sol widerbildet sîn und îngedrücket in daȝ bilde und widerslagenin daȝ bilde, daȝ gotes sun ist.* (Sermon 72, DW III 244.1-2)
[145] *drücket gotes glîchnisse in die sêle* (Sermon 96, DW IV.1 215.34)

compelled by the force of truth since it amounts to being compelled by oneself to the truth that is oneself.

To a lesser extent, Eckhart also uses the wax and imprinting metaphor to discuss images and the reception of sensory stimuli and knowledge. He speaks of seeing something as requiring both the functioning of the eye due to the proximity of the thing seen as well as conscious involvement in the act, which enables knowledge to be "imprinted on and transferred to or 'dwells in' the one who sees" (EE 169; *Comm. Ioh.* n.121). This use of 'dwells in' is important since it provides a clue as to the intimacy of what the imprinting metaphor implies: that knowledge is taken into and becomes part of the soul.

Juxtaposing two different passages that use the wax metaphor in the two ways described will elucidate the difference. First, with imprinting of worldly images, Eckhart tells us that "the soul of Christ naturally has the image of all things which he gave to them. Yet he is not the same image, just as a stamp gives its form to wax while it is not one with it."[146] The second passage bears striking resemblance, but uses the metaphor in the opposite fashion, "If you press a seal into green wax, red wax or cloth, that is completely an image. If the seal is stamped totally into the wax, so that none of the wax is left over but pressed entirely into the seal, then it is one with the seal without any difference. The soul be wholly united with God like this in image and likeness"[147] In the

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[146] *Alsô hât Kristî sêle natiurlîche aller dinge bilde, daȝ er ir gegeben hât, und er doch daȝ selbe bilde niht enist, als daȝ ingesigel dem wahse sîne forme gibet und doch ein mit im niht enist.* (Sermon 90a, DW IV.1 63.110-64.115)

[147] *Drücket man ein ingesigel an ein grüene wahs oder an ein rôt oder in ein tuoch, daȝ ist alles ein bilde. Wirt daȝ ingesigel gedrücket genzlîche durch daȝ wahs, daȝ des wahses niht überblîbet, eȝ ensi zemâle*

first case, the wax is not the same as the seal, while in the second case it is. The difference is that the first case refers to the image of worldly things, while in the second case, it refers to God[148].

Eckhart sees the connection between the imprinting of worldly images and the imprinting of the soul in the image of God. He explains, “Being all mixed up with color and sound and corporeal things is indeed a good preparation and, in that way, is certainly useful for progressing. It is just an exercising of the senses whereby the soul becomes awakened and the image of knowledge is naturally imprinted on her.”[149] Knowledge of corporeal things lets us know what knowledge is, which is a useful preparation for knowledge of higher things.

The image of wax is particularly useful because wax may be molded with ease into different forms. It does not *resist* being molded. Thus, Eckhart observes, “Saint Jerome says that a piece of pure wax, malleable and good for making this or that out of it, whatever one wants, contains in itself all that one can make with it even if no one outwardly makes anything with it.”[150] That it contains within it all possible forms makes

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gedrücket in daȥ ingesigel, sô ist eȥ ein mit dem ingesigel âne underscheit. Alsô wirt diu sêle genzlîche mit gote vereinet an dem bilde und an der glîchnisse, als rüeret an rehter bekantnisse. (Sermon 32, DW II 136.2-137.1)

[148] Other examples of this image can be multiplied. For angels imprinting God’s will on the soul, see Sermons 35 and 96. For angels having the ‘impress of all creatures,’ see Sermon 72.

[149] *Eȥ ist wol ein guotiu warnunge, eȥ vürdert wol dar zuo in der wîse, wan eȥ ist verwunden mit varwe und mit dône und mit lîphaftigen dingen. Eȥ ist niuwen ein üebunge der sinne und wirt diu sêle dâ mite erwecket, und daȥ bilde der kunst ist ir natiurlîche îngedrücket* (Sermon 36a, DW II 192.2-5). Though ‘all mixed up’ is colloquial, it carries the desired negative connotation of being confused and intertwined. This is closer to Quint’s “verquickt” than Walshe’s “involved.”

[150] *Sant Jeronimus sprichet, daȥ ein reine wahs, daȥ wol weich ist und guot, dar ûȥ und dâ von ze würkenne, waȥ man sol und wil, hât in im beslozȥȥen alleȥ, daȥ man dâ von gewürken mac, aleine ouch ûȥerlîche nieman dâ von iht würke.* (*Book of Divine Consolation* §2, DW V 55.2-5)

wax an artistic medium, something that can accept the intention of the person molding it just as a sculptor manifests intention by sculpting wood or stone. We do not have to remove material from wax to mold it, however, which results in Eckhart using the wax metaphor when speaking of passivity and the sculptor example when speaking of alteration and production, as we will see shortly.

Eckhart says, “If I want to write on a wax tablet, no matter how noble the things written on it are, they prevent me from writing on it.”[151] He says this is an analogy for the heart attaining the highest place through detachment, which “must be in nothingness, for the greatest receptivity is in there.”[152] In other words, detachment gets us to a place of complete passivity. Importantly, he identifies complete passivity with “the greatest receptivity,” which is the soul’s capacity for God. As we will see, Eckhart uses the container metaphor of receptivity/capacity to describe the expansion of the soul by shedding self and also for the attuning of the lower powers to become more receptive of God.

6.3.3.1 Enlarging, expanding the soul

Being purely passive to receive God implies expanding the soul’s capacity. As Eckhart describes this, “God cannot be diminished or increased, for he is measureless and unchanging. So, the soul then must be elevated and enlarged, for she is small and changeable. Therefore she should be elevated above herself and enlarged for God’s

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[151] *Wil ich schrîben an eine wehsîn taveln, sô enmac kein dinc sô edel gesîn, daȝ an der taveln geschriben stat, eȝ enirre mich, daȝ ich niht dar ane geschrîben enmac* (“On Detachment“, DW V 425.6-8)

[152] *muoȝ sîn ûf dem nihte, wan dâ ist diu grœste enpfenclicheit inne* (“On Detachment“, DW V 425.5)

measurelessness."[153] Eckhart describes receptivity is a kind of passivity and potential. When something dies, Eckhart gives the example of wheat, it yields to potential, which in Eckhartian terms means that only its receptivity remains. Just the same, he says, the soul 'dies' in this way when it becomes entirely passive so that it can become receptive of another nature (Sermon 98, DW IV.1). This comparison reveals much about what the soul is and is not. When wheat dies, Eckhart seems to say that the matter itself remains and can be formed again into something else. With the soul, Eckhart's comparison implies, the 'death' of the soul in losing its self and all createdness does not *destroy* the soul, just as the matter that composes the wheat is not destroyed when the wheat dies. Consequently, just as the wheat's life is not necessary for the existence of the matter which composes it, neither the self nor any aspect of the soul's createdness are necessary for its being what it is. A different passage may serve to clarify this point, "As grace carries the soul into God, it carries the soul over herself, divests her of self and of all that makes her a creature, and unites her with God. The soul must make room as grace works with her, for she is a creature, until nothing remains other than God and the soul without intermediary."[154]

The greatest capacity for the soul comes with the greatest stripping away and losing all createdness and indeed anything other than God himself. This is what Eckhart

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[153] *got enmac noch geminnert noch gemêret werden, wan er unmæʒic und unwandelhaftic ist, mêr: diu sêle muoʒ erhaben und gewîtet werden, wan si kleine und wandelhaftic ist. Dar umbe sol si erhaben werden über sich selbes und gewîtet gegen gotes unmæʒikeit.* (Sermon 95a, DW IV.1 199.303-200.309)

[154] *Alsô bringet diu gnâde die sêle in got und bringet die sêle über sich selber und beroubet sie ir selbes und alles des, daʒ crêatûre ist, und vereinet die sêle mit gote. Alsô lange würket diu gnâde mit der sêle, daʒ si selber rûmen muoʒ, wan si ein crêatûre ist, daʒ dâ niht enblîbet dan got und diu sêle sunder mittel.* (Sermon 96, DW IV.1 218.51-54)

had in mind in describing the soul's capacity, "God dwells in the substance of the soul. This, therefore, is higher than the intellect. The highest is to have the capacity for God and to take on God."[155] Further, "note the way in which Plato argues for the immortality of the soul since it has the capacity for wisdom. How much greater the soul is than even that, for it can take on God."[156] In addition to modifying Plato's argument for immortality in a provocative way, Eckhart here takes the expanding capacity metaphor to its extreme. Even the smallest speck of heaven is wider than all the earth. God himself then is infinite many times over, or perhaps more simply, is beyond size. The soul's expansion therefore yields another explosive metaphor. We should hear echoes of the passage in the *Book of the Twenty-Four Philosophers* which says that God is an infinite sphere whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere. As always, the soul's expansion (which, if it has a shape, surely must be spherical) increases, we have no trouble conceptualizing an expanding container. However, when it crosses over into infinity, the ideas of 'expanding' and 'capacity' strain and burst.

Throughout this process, we should not fail to notice that the individual soul persists. Even with its "death" and emptying of all createdness, the individual soul remains - indeed, this makes it greater than ever since it thereby completes its (infinite) expansion so as to be receptive to God himself. Indeed, Eckhart tells us, God will bring

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[155] *in substantia anima habitat proprie deus. Haec autem altior est intellectu. Maximum est esse capacem dei et capere deum* (Sermon XXIV,2, LW IV 227.7-9)
[156] *nota quomodo Plato ponit animam immortalem, quia capax est sapientiae. Quanto magis, quia capax dei.* (Sermon XXIV,2, LW IV 229.5-6).

you “a new form which encloses everything within itself.”[157] Also, compare this infinite capacity for man to receive with the following passage. In speaking of God’s power, Eckhart says that God “is rich. To be rich is to have all things without ever lacking. If I am a man and am rich, I am still not another man... Therefore, no one is rich other than God alone, for he simply has all things enclosed within himself.”[158] The particularity of the individual here points to the lack of our capacity to contain all things. Of course, this refers to man insofar as he is created and not insofar as he is divine, as Eckhart explains, “I say that God offers himself to me just as he does to the highest angel. If I were ready to receive as he is, I would receive as he does.”[159]

Eckhart tells us, “Just as God is almighty in his deeds, so the soul is bottomless in her ability to undergo.”[160] This is the opposite of a metaphor of annihilation or detaching from self. In mysticism, the body and worldly things are sometimes denigrated so that they are as nothing, implying that one is better off escaping from them. Eckhart describes this same dynamic of escaping and leaving behind. However, escape for Eckhart is from what is nothing and lacks being. The individual soul and even the material world (which is a ‘footprint’ of God) does not fall into this category. In

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[157] *eine niuwe forme, diu al in ir beslo**ʒʒ**en hât* (Sermon 103, DW IV.1 477.30). Recall Eckhart’s description of the angels as having the imprint of all creatures. In this way, Eckhart is using the image of ‘containing all things’ as a provocative surrogate for spiritual things. We might notice that when Eckhart speaks of worldly things, he goes to one of two extremes: pure nothingness or intensive infinity. Both are, once again, meant to provoke the mind into a useful confusion which facilitates questioning and transforming our mode of thinking.

[158] *er rîche ist. Rîche ist da**ʒ**, da**ʒ** alle**ʒ** hât sunder deheinen gebresten. Ich bin ein mensche und bin rîche, sô enbin ich doch niht ein ander mensche. ... Dar umbe enist eigenlîche niht rîche wan got aleine, der einvalticlîche alliu dinc in im beslo**ʒʒ**en hât.* (Sermon 47, DW II 398.3-399.1)

[159] *Ich spriche, da**ʒ** sich got mir erbiutet als dem hœhsten engel, und wære ich als bereit als er, ich enpfinge als er.* (Sermon 47, DW II 399.3-5)

[160] *als got ist almehtic an dem würkenne, alsô ist diu sêle abgründic an dem lîdenne.* (Sermon 102, DW IV.1 424.152-153)

this way, Eckhart's mysticism is thoroughly embodied and 'individual' in an ironic and subtle fashion. That is, to use his language, it is individual insofar as the individual is divine. The individual soul is not identified with the self. Instead, by losing the worldly-attuned self, the soul actually expands in its capacity. The metaphor of expansion is not merely compatible with an inflated notion of the individual, it actively encourages and expresses it.

Finally, to have a capacity for something is akin to potency. Potency is unfulfilled and thirsts for its realization in existence (TP 175; *Comm. Eccl.* n.45). If man has a capacity for God, insofar as he expands his capacity, so too does he expand his thirst. Eckhart explains this in a fashion that is reminiscent of his mathematical metaphors, "the thing that grows in filling will never be full. If an excellent vessel, a cartload, swells as it is loaded and grows thereby, then it will never be full. So it is with the soul: the more she seeks, the more she will be given. The more she receives, the wider she becomes."[161] Once again, Eckhart clearly does not conceive of the soul's ascent to God as diminishing the individual soul at all, even though it loses its self and all createdness in preparation for its union with God.

6.3.3.2 Clothing, stripping away and detachment

As with Eckhart's other metaphors, his use of clothing-based metaphors have two forms: familiar and unfamiliar. The familiar, worldly form is where we strip off clothing as with any unessential thing that may be taken off, put on or exchanged without changing who we are (cf. Sermon 54b, DW II). The unfamiliar, spiritual form is where we "put on"

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[161] *daȥ dinc, daȥ vüllende wehset, daȥ enwirt niemer vol; als der næme ein vaȥ, daȥ vüederic wære, der dar în ein vuoder güȥȥe, wüehse eȥ dâ mite, sô enwürde eȥ niemer vol. Diȥ meinet die sêle: ie mê si begert, ie mê ir gegeben wirt; ie mê si enpfæhet, ie mê ir begrif wîter wirt.* (Sermon 100, DW IV.1 26-30)

Christ, in his discussion of Romans 13:14 (Sermon 24, DW I). Both forms are unified in the "universal rule that any receptive potency, such as the soul's powers, must always be naked. For example, the power that receives color must be without any color" (EE 104; *Prol. Par. Gen.* n.31). To be naked is to be receptive without any hindrance.

For familiar, worldly things, the metaphor of clothing refers to what takes us in the direction of multiplicity and thus moves away from God. Eckhart tells us that "The very first power to spring from the pure ground is bare awareness. Emerging bare into the marketplace, it is immediately clothed."[162] What goes for this first expression of the soul's powers goes for the rest of them as well. No sooner do we begin to have a mental life than our powers put on the clothing of material things, obfuscating the bare essence of the power. In speaking of going the other direction, which means to move away from the knowledge and perception of material things, Eckhart says, "if I know something, that would not be unknowing, nor would it be free and bare."[163] This parallels Eckhart's rhetoric about stripping away images from Sermon 2. Though the talk in that sermon of the 'virgin wife' clearly appeals to the notion of purity, if I was completely unattached to images, he says, "I would be a virgin, truly unimpeded by all images, as I was when I was not."[164] In this, the virgin has "receptivity."[165]

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[162] *Diu aller êrste kraft, diu dâ entspringet ûz dem lûtern grunde, daz ist blôziu bekantlicheit: kumet diu bloz ûf den market, sô wirt si aldâ gekleidet* (Sermon 94, DW IV.1 148.66-67)
[163] *Wan bekente ich iht, daz enwære niht ein unbekantnisse noch enwære niht ledic und blôz.* (Sermon 103, DW IV.1 478.41-42)
[164] *wære ich juncvrouwe âne hindernisse aller bilde als gewærlîche, als ich was, dô ich niht enwas.* (Sermon 2, DW I 26.2-3)
[165] *enpfenclicheit* (Sermon 2, DW I 27.5). We hear the same of the higher intellect, "This power is a virgin … This power takes God entirely bare in his essential being" (*Disiu kraft ist ein juncvrouwe ... Disiu kraft nimet got blôz zemâle in sînem istigen wesene*; Sermon 13, DW I 220.9-222.1).

We may also think about stripping away as a process of increasing abstraction, whereby differentiating aspects of things drop away and progressively more common and universal forms are abstracted (cf. Sermon 71, DW III; Sermon XII, LW IV)[166]. The terminus of this increasing abstraction is the removal of all such qualities, which of course, crosses over into unfamiliar territory since it is difficult to imagine any 'thing' that is so common as to be everything and is in fact utterly one. Eckhart explains the process this way, "the immaterial powers ascend by abstracting. However, abstraction stops in being, beyond which is God as the cause of being."[167] Abstraction strips away, as he says, "understanding and reason peel away everything and take hold of what is neither 'here' nor 'now.' In this extent, it touches angelic nature"[168]

This process of progressive stripping away should be understood in light of the discussion of Robert Forman's account of mysticism as progressively stripping away modes of thinking and being. Eckhart describes the progression like this, "Everything

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[166] One might even argue that the details of the language itself pull the listener in the right direction. "Just as Eckhart seeks in his theology to stress that we must always transcend the particular, it is a striking feature of his vocabulary that he moves strongly in the direction of the abstract." He uses "abstract nouns (often of his own composition) which generally end in –heit and which derive from more specific nouns" … Adjectives that "often end in –keit" "another group of words end in –ung and, according to Quint, generally 'designate the mystical act of cognitive union' … As Quint points out, these words are more often than not German translations of Latin words ending in -tas or –tis" (Davies 1991, 189). Also, as an example of Eckhart making abstract words from Sermon 83, "You should wholly sink from your youness (dîner dînesheit) and dissolve into his hisness (sîne sînesheit)" (Davies 1991, 190). Eckhart's wordplay works similarly elsewhere. Note that *einunge* (oneness) in the *einöde* (desert) where both contain *ein* (one). Likewise, in Latin, *solitudinibus* is the desert, making the reference to the solitary/unitary psychological state that much easier. The most explicit form of this is in the *Nobleman*, where Eckhart says, "ein mit einem, ein von einem, ein in einem und einem ein êwiclîche" = "one with one, one of one, one in one, and in one one forever" (DW V 119; Tobin 1994, 50).

[167] *potentiae immateriales abstractione ascendunt. Stat autem abstractio in esse, supra quod deus est, utpote causa esse.* (Sermon XXII, LW IV 197.3-4)

[168] *verstantnisse und vernünfticheit die schelnt alzemâle abe und nement, dâ noch hie noch nû enist; in dér wîte rüeret si engelische natûre.* (Sermon 21, DW I 365.1-3)

attached to the soul should be completely peeled off. The nobler the powers are, the more they peel off. Some powers are so high above the body and so separate from it that they peel away and separate completely."[169] The higher the powers of the soul, the more they strip away. This is prosaic. Lower faculties like sense perception take the world as it is. Higher faculties abstract and strip away what is coarse and individual to arrive at what is universal. Thus, "as the intellect dissolves things into being, it must surpass being too."[170] However, we enter unfamiliar territory when he refers to powers that are "so high above the body and so separate from it that they peel away and separate completely." He surely has the spark in mind, the part of the soul that is divine. It separates "completely" insofar as it is divine and is above all such distinction, division and separation. Further, separating completely implies a flight into the One. As he explains elsewhere, Christ "must transcend the powers of the soul, which are so many and spread so widely, even those that are in thought, although thought works wonders as it is in itself. One should transcend this thought for God to speak in the powers that are undivided."[171] Clearly, this passage dwells almost entirely in the unfamiliar extreme of the metaphor. Finally, we have an example of where Eckhart joins the idea of abstraction with the metaphor of expanding capacity in speaking of the light of intellect, "This light separates things from corporeality and temporality. This light is also so wide

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[169] *Waꝛ ze der sêle gehœret, daꝛ sol abegelœset sîn alzemâle. Dar nâch die krefte edeler sint, dar nâch lœsent sie mêr abe. Etlîche krefte sint sô hôch obe dem lîchamen und sô versundert, daꝛ sie alzemâle abeschelent und scheident.* (Sermon 7, DW I 120.1-4)
[170] *Item cum intellectus resolvat ad esse, oportet et hoc transire.* (Sermon XXIV,2, LW IV 226.3-4)
[171] *Die krefte der sêle, der alsô vil ist und sich alsô wîte teilent, die sol er übergân dannoch, dâ sie sint in den gedenken, swie doch der gedank wunder würket, dâ er in im selber ist. Disen gedank sol man übergân, sol got sprechen in die krefte, die niht geteilet ensint.* (Sermon 72, DW III 240.5-9)

that it escapes width – it is wider than wide."[172] Here, Eckhart makes it unusally clear that to take an extreme beyond the most extreme conceivable, 'wider than wide,' is to transcend that concept.

The different forms of stripping away are inflections of one of Eckhart's most well known and powerful metaphors: detachment. To 'cut away and separate,' what the pieces of the word *abegescheidenheit* mean, refers to the shedding of all that is worldly. By detaching from one or two worldly things, we have merely made a mundane change, exchanging one thing for another without having to alter our way of thinking or being at all. However, as we should expect now, the nature of detachment changes when it includes *all* that is worldly. At this point, we give up all images, including our attachment to time and space themselves. After all, our knowledge would not be bare if we still 'knew' of such images (Sermon 103, DW IV.1). As it is for the intellect, so it is for the will, "For a person to possess true poverty, he must be as free of his created will as he was when he did not exist."[173] Likewise, "when everything is detached, abstracted away

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[172] *eȥ scheidet von den dingen lîplicheit und zîtlicheit. Diȥ lieht ist ouch sô wît, daȥ eȥ der wîte entwahset; eȥ ist wîter dan diu wîte.* (Sermon 73, DW III 261.1-2)

[173] *Wan, sol der mensche armuot haben gewærlîche, sô sol er sînes geschaffenen willen alsô ledic stân, als er tete, dô er niht enwas* (Sermon 52, DW II 491.7-9). Another instance of this idea of poverty is in Sermon 74. Though Sermon 52, *Beati Pauperes Spiritu*, is well known, the poverty metaphor is not one that Eckhart uses as often as some of the others discussed here. It is also one that he shared with many others who spiritualized poverty (not to mention the debate of Franciscan poverty that raged on during his lifetime). In addition, Eckhart links poverty directly with nakedness, "Being naked, poor, having nothing and being empty transforms nature. Emptyness makes water flow uphill and many other wonders of which we should not speak now." (*Blôȥ, arm, niht-hân, îtel-sîn wandelt die natûre; îtel machet waȥȥer ze berge ûfklimmen und vil anders wunders, dâ von man nû niht sprechen ensol*. *Book of Divine Consolation* §2, DW V 29.11-13). It is extraordinary that he mentions the miraculous in this passage, something he rarely does.

and peeled off, nothing at all remains but a solitary 'is'."[174] This removal of all worldly things means "I must be completely alienated from all that is mine,"[175] making what is mine foreign to me, just as multiplicity is foreign to God.

Ultimately, to detach from everything is to "go out of yourself and all things and all that you are in yourself."[176] This strips the soul of worldly things and all images that I have in myself, which ultimately means denuding the soul of self (cf. Sermons 2 and 76). Beyond stripping the powers of the soul, as discussed above, stripping away self is more comprehensive and clearly crosses over into the unfamiliar. In terms of detachment, Eckhart tells us that "detachment does not want to be anything at all"[177] and that "detachment is so close to nothingness that there is no thing so slight that it can be contained by detachment except God alone."[178]

Once we reach an extreme of stripping away, the metaphor reverses direction and we are told about "putting on" Christ and making God our own. We might say that the apophatic practice of stripping away all names of God yields to God being 'omninameable' instead (TP 54; *Comm. Ex.* n.35). The continuum of apophatic and cataphatic forms a kind of circle in this way, where the ends meet at the extremes and one can cross over from one to the other. As we have already seen many times,

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[174] *alleȝ abegescheiden und abegeȝogen und abegeschelt, daȝ dâ nihtes niht enblîbet dan ein einic ‚ist'* (Sermon 45, DW II 372.5-6). Eckhart also describes this in one place as "sacrifice" (DW I, Sermon 31). We might question why he did not think this particular idea was more useful.
[175] *muoȝ ich als gar entvremdet sîn allem dem, daȝ mîn ist* (Sermon 42, DW II 304.4-5)
[176] *ganc abe dîn selbes und aller dinge und alles, daȝ dû an dir selber bist, und nim dich nâch dem, daȝ dû in gote bist.* (Sermon 24, DW I 419.6-8)
[177] *enwil abegescheidenheit nihtes niht sîn* ("On Detachment", DW V 406.8-9)
[178] *ist abegescheidenheit dem nihte alsô nâhe, daȝ kein dinc sô kleinvüege enist, daȝ eȝ sich enthalten müge in abegescheidenheit dan got aleine.* ("On Detachment", DW V 404.3-5).

Eckhart's metaphors share this dynamic. Once we reach the extreme of the worldly and familiar, we cross over into the eternal and unfamiliar. When the clothing metaphor reaches its extreme in the nudity of the soul, the soul then "puts on" Christ (Sermon 24, DW I).

Equally unfamiliar is God's 'clothing' and the idea of God "in his dressing room."[179] What makes this idea difficult is that the 'clothing' that we must strip God of includes things like goodness and truth, ideas that are normally associated with God. Eckhart tells us, however, that "Goodness is a garment under which God is hidden."[180] Further, we do this through intellect, "Intellect pulls off the cloak [of goodness] from God and takes him bare, as he is stripped of goodness and being and all names."[181] Just as the soul is laid bare, so too must God be taken unclothed, "Goodness and justice are God's clothing, for they clothe him. So detach[182] God from of all his clothing and take Him naked in His dressing-room where he is uncovered and bare in Himself. Then you will abide in Him."[183]

Stripping the soul and stripping God are ostensibly different, but are in fact one, "If the soul were bared and stripped of all intermediaries, then God would be bared and stripped and would give himself entirely to her."[184] God must come in to the humble

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[179] *in dem kleithûse* (Sermon 40, DW II 274.5; cf. Sermon 11)
[180] *Güete ist ein kleit, dâ got under verborgen ist* (Sermon 9, DW I 153.5-6)
[181] *Vernünfticheit ziuhet gote daȥ vel der güete abe und nimet in blôȥ, dâ er entkleidet ist von güete und von wesene und von allen namen.* (Sermon 9, DW I 152.6-8; cf. Sermons 7, 13)
[182] See the notes on my translation in the appendix for more information on this passage.
[183] *Wan güete und gerehticheit ist ein kleit gotes, wan ez bekleidet in. Dar umbe sô scheidet gote allez daz abe, daz in kleidende ist, und nemet in blôz in dem kleithûse, dâ er entdecket und blôz in im ist. Alsô sît ir blîbende in im.* (Sermon 40, DW II 274.3-6)
[184] *Wære diu sêle alzemâle entblœȥet und entdecket von allem mittel, sô wære ir got entblœȥet und entdecket und gæbe sich ir alzemâle.* (Sermon 69, DW III 165.5-7)

soul, which means that it is bare of images and self. Here as well we reach "the essence of the soul, in which God may only descend in his nakedness."[185] Ultimately, this happens because the clothing that God wears is clothing that we give him. His clothing comprises part of our images. Thus, once we give up those images and lay the soul bare, so too is God laid bare (cf. Sermon 45).

6.3.3.3 Rest

If we consider the soul as a door attached to a hinge, the outer man (the door) continues to trace out a circle at each point of its length while the inner man (the hinge) remains motionlessness. The door is the radius of the circle. Since the door moves uniformly all points on the door trace out circles at different speeds. As we move from the outside of the door toward the inside, the speed at which each point traces a circle becomes slower and slower until finally, at the hinge, motion stops altogether. Eckhart gives us this metaphor for the inner and outer man in *On Detachment*. It shows that as we approach the innermost reaches of the soul, motion slows to a halt. In fact, the motion of the outer man is possible because of the hinge. The hinge anchors the door just as the eternal anchors the material as we saw in another metaphor. We might even say that the hinge traces a circle with zero radius so that it is a 'circle' of a single dimensionless point with no motion even though it is in motion. With all of Eckhart's metaphors of motion, we should bear in mind the Aristotelian conception of motion that informs the metaphors.

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[185] *cui solus Deus illabitur et ipse nudus.* (Sermon XXIV,2, LW IV 227.11-12)

Here again, there are two forms of this same metaphor that are in apparent tension with one another. I believe these two-sided metaphors account for some of the claims of inconsistency levied against Eckhart by some scholars. On the one hand, we have the hinge metaphor, which describes the interior life of the soul. In the interior life, peace and wisdom come with reaching the restful and motionless center. By contrast, the physical world is ordered in the opposite fashion. There, the earth is at the center and tends downward, which is away from the higher things. Fire is higher and it tends upward. At the highest level are the heavens themselves, which are the source of all things below. As with a rotating sphere with constant rotation, the outer shell moves more quickly than the points closer to the center (LW III, *Comm. Ioh.* n.247, p.247.7-8). Thus, we see the dual movement in this metaphor just as we have in the others. We begin with the lowest of things in the external world, the earth. We move upward in ascending toward the heavens, which have the greatest motion. In opposite fashion, the lowest of things in the interior world involve attachment to temporal things. As we move toward the center of the interior world, we reach a divine point of rest and repose in the soul insofar as it is divine.

Beginning with worldly cares and the motion that inheres in attachment to temporal things, Eckhart tells us that all things seek rest[186]. In its most prosaic form, we can think of this in terms of reaching a state of equilibrium. A stone falls and comes to rest on the ground, where it may lie for a thousand years in rest. Eckhart applies this

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[186] In this and similar metaphors, we should detect an echo of Origen's notion of *apokatastasis*, the return of all things to God.

principle to all levels of the cosmos. Even at the highest level, “The heavens are continually running around and in this running they seek rest.”[187] Indeed there is something divine about rest, pointing back to the dynamics of the hinge metaphor above. Further, unrest relates to the self, “All turmoil and unrest comes entirely from self-will, whether we recognize it or not”[188] Thus, Eckhart identifies self-will with attachment to external things[189].

Just as stones do not know of anything higher and cannot ‘desire’ to reach above their station, mankind has the potential for coming to know God and thereby seeking divine repose. As Eckhart says, “the soul will never rest until it becomes wholly one in God.”[190] This reveals much about the nature of the soul. After all, on Eckhart’s account, simple people do not know to desire God and may achieve a kind of lower level rest in the material world. To this, Eckhart tells us that the soul naturally seeks God and that the irascible part of the soul in particular has *synderesis*, which is the perpetual drive for God. Synderesis is our natural instinct to “stand against what is impure” and “be evermore lured to the good.”[191] Synderesis, for Eckhart, is the human form of perpetual

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[187] *Der himel loufet stæticlîche umbe und in dem loufe suochet er vride.* (Sermon 7, DW I 118.8-9)
[188] *Al gesturme und unvride kumet zemâle von eigenen willen, man merke eȝ oder enmerke eȝ niht.* (Counsels on Discernment §21, DW V 282.11-283.2). I am particularly endebted to Davies’ translation of this passage. Translating *unvride* as ‘unrest’ is very Eckhartian. The term *gesturme* here simply refers to motion with a negative connotation. Our internal ‘storminess’ and ‘unrest’ robs us of our freedom and makes us not-peaceful (*un-vride*). The motion is critical for Eckhart since this separates us from the divine repose that comes with dwelling in God.
[189] This is one of the points in the discussion where we arrive at a conclusion that smacks of Buddhism. That this should happen repeatedly does much to explain the fondness that many Buddhists have had for Eckhart in the past century.
[190] *geruowet diu sêle niemer, eȝ enwerde alleȝ ein in gote* (Sermon 21, DW I 369.10-11; cf. On the Nobleman)
[191] *ein widerbiȝ wider dem, daȝ niht lûter enist. ... eȝ iemermê locket dem guoten* (Sermon 20a, DW I 334.1-3; cf. Sermons 20b, 32)

striving for God that all things exhibit. This allows him to say that even in hell, the impulse to strive for God is never completely destroyed, “evil never totally destroys good, or extinguishes it or renders it dumb” (EE 120; *Prol. Par. Gen.* n.163). This is because the nature of the subject is not destroyed and synderesis lives in this eternal nature of its form. The powers of the soul manifest the practical activity of this striving in their desire for peace. To achieve this, Eckhart tells us that in order for the soul to achieve motionlessness, it “must rise above herself to the divine order.”[192]

Once the soul arrives at its center, the metaphor of birth becomes important. That metaphor is an extension of the creation of all things from their forms. Eckhart tells us that the production of a manifestation of a form occurs “in silence of the efficient cause and the final cause which both properly look to the external creature and both signify ‘boiling over’” (TP 172-3; *Comm. Wis.* n.283; cf. Sermon XLIX,3). Creation is *ebullitio*, ‘boiling over,’ for Eckhart, the manifestation of God’s principle as creation [193]. Where boiling is the form, boiling over is the manifestation of that form (TP 218; Sermo XXV,1; cf. *Comm. Ex.* n.16). In the vernacular sermons, he uses the metaphor of melting for this same idea, where melting inward [*smilzet în*] corresponds with boiling and melting outward [*ûʒsmilzet*] corresponds with boiling over (Sermon 18, DW I 301.6-302.1; cf. Sermon 19, DW I 314.4-5). Eckhart tells us that intellect “goes in and breaks through into the root, where the Son wells up and the Holy Spirit blossoms out,” [194]

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[192] *ûfheben über sich selben ze der götlîche ordenunge* (Sermon 31, DW II 123.2-3)
[193] The word ‘principle’ here is used instead of ‘form’ because this is how Eckhart speaks of it. Admittedly, it is not clear how he conceives of God’s principle manifesting in the world.
[194] *gât in und durchbrichet in die wurzeln, dâ der sun ûʒquillet und der heilige geist ûʒblüejende ist.* (Sermon 69, DW III 180.1-2). He also tells us that God “would have burst if he had not poured himself out

language that recalls boiling. What is important for us here is that the formal emanation occurs “in silence,” which is an inflection of the metaphor of motionlessness and repose. In general, begetting is motionless (TP 94; *Comm. Ex.* n.159). Thus, for the soul to reach God by way of the higher reason (*ratio superior*), higher reason must be “quiet and silent, where the Father speaks the Word ‘without noise.’”[195] Thus, begetting by way of the Father speaking the Word must also be silent. Noise and motion belong to temporal things and consequently are the province of inferior reason (Sermon XXIV,2, LW IV 228.6-7). Putting it all together, Eckhart tells us, “The Word lies hidden in the soul. You don’t know about it or hear it. Unless room is made for it in the ground of hearing, it will not be heard. All voices and all noises must cease for a pure stillness to be there, a still silence.”[196] Eckhart describes the lesser form of this in the human intellect’s own process of coming to understand something. We should notice that he uses very similar language for describing this, “When the intellect truly recognizes being, it descends on it straightaway and comes to rest on it, speaking its rational word about the thing it has there.”[197] These are specific examples of Eckhart’s general principle, “what is produced from something is universally its word” (*EE* 123; *Comm. Ioh.* n.4).

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completely,” a phrase that points to the idea of boiling over, adding color to the idea by also including necessity in the metaphor (*Er wære zerbrosten, enhæte er sich zemâle niht ûzgegozzen.* Sermon 99, DW IV.1 260.44).

[195] *quies et silentium, ubi pater loquitur verbum »sine strepitu«.* (Sermon XXIV,2; LW IV 228.5-6)

[196] *Daz wort liget in der sêle verborgenlîche, daz man ez niht enweiz noch niht enhœret, im enwerde denne gerûmet in dem grunde des hœrennes, ê enwirt ez niht gehœret; mêr: alle stimme und alle lûte die müezen abe und muoz ein lûter stilnisse dâ sîn, ein stilleswîgen* (Sermon 19, DW I 312.5-9)

[197] *Swenne diu vernunft bekennet ein wârheit eines wesens, zehant sô neiget si sich dar ûf und lât sich dâ in ein ruowe, und dâ sprichet si ir wort vernünfticlîche von dem vürwurfe den si dâ hât* (Sermon 104a, DW IV.1 592.298-593.302)

Eckhart also describes progress toward rest using the metaphor of how light changes over the course of a day. Eckhart attributes the idea to Augustine (Sermon 19). In the morning, the light of creation shines on things. As the soul begins its ascent to God, the light gets brighter (we might surmise that Eckhart wished to capture the additional excitement in this part of the process with increasing light). As evening draws in, the soul comes to rest in God. Eckhart describes the process,

> The natural light of the soul is the morning. When the soul breaks through itself into the highest and purest part in the light and thus strides into the angel's light, it is midmorning in that light. When the soul then strides up with the angel's light into the divine light, it is midday. When the soul remains in God's light in the stillness of pure repose, that is the evening: it is then hottest in the divine love.[198]

Notice that Eckhart involves the idea of heat in the increasing light to parallel the increase in desire the soul feels as it is inflamed with divine love.

As the soul comes to rest in God, Eckhart also describes this using the metaphor of 'dwelling' or 'abiding,' which has Scriptural roots as well as in Augustine, whom Eckhart mentions alongside it (TP 94; *Comm. Ex.* n.158). The implication is that whatever dwells is at home where it dwells, in rest and peace. God can find the soul in peace "if He finds us at home and the soul is not betrothed to the five senses."[199] If the

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[198] *Daȥ natiurlich lieht der sêle daȥ ist der morgen. Swenne diu sêle sich brichet in daȥ hœhste und in daȥ lûterste in dem liehte und alsô tritet in des engels lieht, in dem liehte ist eȥ mittenmorgen; und alsô tritet diu sêle ûf mit des engels liehte in götlich lieht, daȥ ist der mittac; und diu sêle blîbet in dem liehte gotes und in einer stille der lûtern ruowe, daȥ ist der abent; danne ist eȥ allerheiȥet in der götlîchen minne.* (Sermon 36b, DW II 199.1-200.2; cf. *On the Nobleman*, Sermons 19, 37)

[199] *ob er uns dâ heime vindet und niht diu sêle ûȥgegangen enist sponȥieren mit den vünf sinnen* (Sermon 34, DW II 164.1-2; cf. Sermon 31). My translation departs from Walshe and Quint, who rendered

soul is at 'home' in its ground, then God may come to rest in the soul (cf. Sermon 101). As Eckhart dsecribes it, "God is nowhere so properly God as in the soul. Something of God is in all creatures, but in the soul God is godly, for she is his resting place"[200]

What happens when the soul reaches this point of rest? As I argued in the section on joy, one must observe and experience the resulting delight. He builds a theological mechanic around this observation, telling us that joy increases as one desires worldly things less and that this process reaches its end in unlimited desire (thirst) for God who pours forth unimpeded joy. On this, we might notice two things. First, we can see that people who are content with less and desire less are generally happier for it. Second, we hear from meditative traditions that such desire manifests internally in the anxious motion of the mind. As Eckhart says, "Thinking has motion and runs about."[201] When that motion stops, "Wisdom comes into the mind when the soul rests from the turmoils of the passions and concern for worldly things, when all things are silent to it and it is silent to all" (TP 171; *Comm. Wis.* n.280). Thus, "in this [lack of passion], note the soul's rest."[202] So God and the soul are at home in the divine ground of the soul. The soul comes to rest here and abides in God just as God abides in the soul[203]. This is where God speaks his Word in the soul. Yet, that speaking is the divine

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sponʒieren as though it were modern German's *späzieren* (to walk or stroll), instead of Middle High German's *sponsieren*, meaning 'betrothal' or 'engagement.'

[200] *Niene enist got eigenlîche got als in der sêle. In allen crêatûren ist etwaʒ gotes, aber in der sêle ist got götlich, wan si ist sîn ruowestat.* (Sermon 73, DW III 267.7-8)

[201] *Cogitatio motum habet et discursum* (Sermon XXIV,2, LW IV 227.5-6)

[202] *in hoc nota quietem animae* (Sermon XXIV,2; LW IV 224.6)

[203] In one particularly unusual metaphor, Eckhart says that the soul is "thrust into peace" (*gestôʒen sîn in vride,* Sermon 7, DW I 118.1).

activity. Thus it is here that the metaphor crosses over and we begin to hear of activity instead.

6.3.4 Metaphors of activity

Eckhart's philosophy of action, leading the active life, is possible insofar as we participate in the Word's creative action. Our action is justified because it is not creaturely action. Here as well, we have two different forms of the metaphor of speaking. The first is the prosaic form of human speech, “Whatever is in me goes out from me. If I only think it, my word reveals it and yet remains within.”[204] Eckhart juxtaposes this with the other side of the metaphor, that of divine speech, “To the extent that I am near God, God speaks himself in me.”[205] Just as all things seek rest, we see an analogous situation with speech, “All creatures want to speak God in all their activity.”[206]

Eckhart often uses art and artisans as an example of production. Creation is a special kind of production, a production from nothing (*Prol. Par. Gen.* n.9; cf. *Comm. Wis.* n.25). Architects who build houses, Eckhart’s favorite example of production, use existing materials that are separate from the craftsman (*General Prologue*; cf. *Comm. Wis.* nn.27,36; *Comm. Ex.* n.157; *Comm. Ex.* n.28; *Comm. Ioh.* n.30). God does not do

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[204] *Swaȥ in mir ist, daȥ gât ûȥ mir; so ich eȥ joch gedenke, sô offenbaret eȥ mîn wort und blîbet doch inne.* (Sermon 53, DW II 530.1-2; cf. Sermon 38)
[205] *Als vil ich gote nâhe bin, als vil sprichet sich got in mich* (Sermon 53, DW II 530.4-5)
[206] *Alle crêatûren wellent got sprechen in allen irn werken* (Sermon 53, DW II 531.1)

this in creation as would Plato's demiurge or a craftsman, who uses materials that are outside of himself (*General Prologue*)[207].

The artist, instead, seeks to make what is like himself, "what I make, I make myself and with myself to myself and in myself and press my image entirely into it."[208] Eckhart describes this process of artistic production using language that points to God's act of creation. His language also describes detachment and the ascent of the soul, as if to imply that artistic creation, in its striving to make what is like itself, is like God's creation. For example, in describing a sculptor's chiseling away material to reveal what was already contained within, Eckhart calls this "clearing away [*expurgando*], cutting off [*excidendo*] and drawing forth [*educendo*]" (*Comm. Ioh.* n.575). Recall that 'cutting off' is the literal image in *abegescheidenheit*, detachment. Regarding this 'cutting off,' "If a master makes an image from a piece of wood or a stone, he does not place that image in the wood. Rather, he cuts away the shavings that have hidden and covered it up. He does not give anything to the wood. Instead, he takes away from it and removes the covering."[209] This is the same language that Eckhart uses for the uncovering and progressive removing of images that characterizes the return to God. So, art is a kind of analogy for our return to God. Our part in that process is 'creative' therefore in the sense of *production* where we use our own skill to tame passion and remove images. Once that is done, the divine can flow into us by grace.

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[207] Though Eckhart had secondhand access to other aspects of Plato's thought, he may have read portions of the *Timaeus* in translation.

[208] *daȥ ich mache, daȥ mache ich selber und mit mir selber und in mir selber und drücke mîn bilde zemâle dar în* (Sermon 109, DW IV.2 763.13-14)

[209] *sô ein meister bilde machet von einem holze oder von einem steine, er entreget daȥ bilde in daȥ holz niht, mêr er snîdet abe die spæne, die daȥ bilde verborgen und bedecket hâten; er engibet dem holze niht, sunder er benimet im und grebet ûȥ die decke* (*On the Nobleman*, DW V 113.18-21)

Eckhart describes the process of art striving for what is above itself, “The work that is ‘with,’ ‘outside’ and ‘above’ the artist must become his work ‘within,’ by informing him so that he can make a work of art, as it says in Luke chapter one: ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you’ (Lk. 1:35), that is, so that the ‘upon’ may become ‘within’” (EE 136; *Comm. Ioh.* n.41)[210]. This striving for what is above is sensibly applied to art because Eckhart understands art as more than mere copying. It seeks to render what is universal and therefore above particular things, “A master who makes an image of man does not make it like Conrad or Henry, for he would not portray man, he would portray Conrad or Henry.”[211] Thus, what art actually does as production ranks beneath creation. However, what art *strives* to do, is to reach higher than itself, just as nature does, “existence, both in nature and in art, is what everything thirsts and hungers for, seeks and desires. Art and nature labor to and for the end that an effect exist and possess existence” (TP 174; *Comm. Eccl.* n.44). We might hear echoes of Plotinus in Eckhart’s own account of art since both describe art as creation which reaches for divine unity.

We may readily comprehend the idea that things strive to make what is like themselves. Thus, what is in their nature and essence, they try and reproduce. With mankind, however, the situation has different potential. Since the soul has the capacity even for God, what likeness can such a man hope to produce artistically? Eckhart says, “a picture praises its master, who has imprinted upon it all the art he has in his heart

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[210] This also hints at a connection between possession by the Holy Spirit and the creation of art.
[211] *Der meister, der ein bilde machen wil nâch einem menschen, der enmachet ez̧ niht nâch Kuonrâte oder nâch Heinrich, sô enmeinete er niht dén menschen, er meinete Kuonrât oder Heinrich* (Sermon 77, DW III 342.5-6). Similarly, the form in the artist’s mind, Eckhart tells us, is “nobler in him than the material” (*diu ist in im edeler dan diu materie*, DW I 290.4-5) because it is a form and not a manifestation.

and made it completely like himself."[212] Speaking more generally, "As far as it can, every agent makes something like itself, and it makes the other itself, that is, makes the other from other into itself. It begins from the other, withdraws from it, and draws it to itself" (EE 146; *Comm. Ioh.* n.67). This same language is used when describing the way that fire burns and the way that God transforms the soul into God, "In the same way, when fire wants to bring wood to itself ... the hotter the wood becomes, the stiller and restful it becomes. The more it is like fire, the more peaceful it is until it becomes entirely fire."[213] Eckhart provides a hint of what man would create by comparing what man creates to what God creates. He tells us that while man has limited power to reproduce something just like himself, since God's power is unlimited, he produces an exact image of himself (Sermon 38). If even God strives to create what is like himself, then surely the perfected man who dwells in God would seek to do no less. The artist creates art as a manifestation of the exemplar in his mind, which is a kind of 'son' (EE 142; *Comm. Ioh.* n.57). This exemplar is "his living conception" (EE 124; *Comm. Ioh.* n.6). It stands to reason that the soul's ascent implies a similar ascent in the striving of his art. At the extreme, the artist would seek to beget God himself, as we will see shortly.

We might say in general that activity is the result of striving to create, "as far as possible, everything active produces what is like itself."[214] Everything tries to express, manifest and recreate itself in action. So long as creatures stay within themselves and

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[212] *ein bilde lobet sînen meister, der im îngedrücket hât alle die kunst, die er in sînem herzen hât und eȥ im sô gar glîch gemachet hât* (Sermon 19, DW I 318.6-8)
[213] *Ze glîcher wîse, als daȥ viur daȥ holz in sich ziehen wil ... ie daȥ holz denne heiȥer wirt, ie eȥ stiller wirt und geruowiger, und ie glîcher eȥ dem viure ist, ie vridelîcher eȥ ist, biȥ eȥ zemâle viur wirt* (Sermon 11, DW I 180.8-9,11-12)
[214] *omne agens agit sibi simile quantum potest.* (Sermon XL,3, DW IV 344.4)

preserve self-will, rather than allowing God's will to express itself, frustration naturally follows since things do not have the capacity for creation. The important distinction here is between creation and alteration/production. Creation is the giving of being. For Eckhart, this belongs solely to God. Lesser forms, however, can be achieved in alteration or production by artists, artisans and even animals, as when beavers build dams. Eckhart explains, "No creature can give life. If it was possible for a creature to give life, God could not bear it because he loves the soul so dearly. He wants to give it himself. If a creature gave it, it would be unworthy of the soul. It would consider it of as small a thing as a bug."[215] No creature qua creature can create. This tension helps to explain why the soul's *synderesis* manifests as an endless striving toward God. Only in God can this striving reach fulfillment. As Eckhart says, the highest power of the soul "always wants to beget like the father. If it were not hindered," it would give birth just as the Father does[216]. The principle metaphor and most powerful metaphor Eckhart uses for this process is birth, culminating in the birth of the Word in the soul, an idea that speaks directly to the status of the individual soul as divine.

6.3.4.1 The spark in the soul

Eckhart's notion of the 'spark' primarily builds upon three metaphors: light, fire, and seed. As only a part of the soul that begins for each of us as something covered up by

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[215] *Kein crêatûre vermöhte daȥ, daȥ si eȥ gæbe; wære eȥ mügelich, daȥ eȥ dehein crêatûre geben möhte, sô hæte got die sêle alsô zart, daȥ er eȥ niht gelîden enmöhte, sunder er wil eȥ selber geben. Gæbe eȥ ein crêatûre, daȥ wære der sêle unwert; si ahtete sîn als wênic als einer mücken.* (Sermon 59, DW II 630.9-631.3; cf. TP 151; *Comm. Wis.* n.31)

[216] *Alle zît wil si dem vater glîche gebern. Und enwürde si niht gehindert* (Sermon 106a, DW IV.2 694.87-88). Eckhart describes this in terms of the drive everything has to give birth to what is most like itself. To say that the soul is driven to give birth like the Father does is to say that the soul is one with the Father.

worldly concerns, the spark as light metaphor captures this quality of it being a mere 'flash' or light that is glimpsed through a 'chink.' In linking it with light Eckhart says, "The spark of the intellect, which is the head of the soul, is called the 'man' of the soul, and is as much as a spark of the divine nature, a divine light, a ray and an imprinted image of the divine nature."[217] Conveniently, Eckhart gives us a list of metaphors for the spark. As 'head' it is spatially the highest and thus the highest in being (*houbet* means both 'head' and 'apex'). As 'man' it goes with its head uncovered and is thus receptive to what is higher. As 'imprint' it takes the form of God who is the 'seal.' The light metaphor works particularly well for Eckhart because he sees light as immediately flooding whenever it is let in, but also (because it does not take 'root'), leaving just as quickly when it is impeded. Further, light can be blocked by the most mundane of things, which enables him to say that even the smallest worldly thing is big enough to hinder God from coming into the soul. His listeners would have also been keenly aware of the importance of sparks in starting fires for warmth and cooking, two essentials for daily life. This phenomenon is largely hidden from us and overlooked by us today due to our use of electricity and the strategies used for creating our artificial living spaces so that the effect effects of fire and electricity are hidden, often functioning without the irregularities and unevenness that are characteristic of natural things. In other words, fire meant more to the daily life of Eckhart's audience.

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[217] *Daȥ vünkelîn der vernünfticheit, daȥ ist daȥ houbet in der sêle, daȥ heiȥet der 'man' der sêle und ist als vil als ein vünkelîn götlîcher natûre, ein götlîch lieht, ein zein und ein îngedrücket bilde götlîcher natûre* (Sermon 37, DW II 211.1-3). Though I rendered *zein* as 'ray' for consistency with the image of light, the word can also mean 'sprout,' which is important for Eckhart as well.

Eckhart describes the way different people are "alive" to the divine light, in order of increasing awareness. He places "the flash of a sword" beneath "a great flash," which is yet beneath those who "receive a great light as if it is day, but still as if through a chink."[218] A spark, for Eckhart is the smallest flash of something higher in something lower, "all that is on earth lives from a spark of an angel."[219] Likewise, "from [an angel's] work there falls a shaving (just as a shaving falls from a piece of wood that one hews), a flash, where the angel touches heaven with its lowest part."[220] We see a similar image here, "I take the lowest angel in its pure nature: the smallest splinter or spark that ever fell from him would light the all the world with delight and joy."[221] This speaks to the incommensurability of different levels since he speaks of the smallest part of the least angel filling all the world beneath. The spark represents something of a jump discontinuity, a sudden inflow from higher to lower. This dynamic makes the soul's spark capable of something greater that is entirely out of proportion and beyond any scale or analogy because its spark is from the Godhead itself and enables the soul to achieve union with God (DW I, Sermon 20a). As Eckhart says, this power "takes God in

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[218] *ein blik von einem swerte... einen groȥen blik ... enpfâhent ein groȥ lieht, als ob eȥ tac sî, und doch gemachet als durch einen schranz* (Sermon 57, DW II 603.6-604.1,604.1,604.6-7)
[219] *ein vünkelîn des engels, dar inne lebet alleȥ daȥ, daȥ in ertrîche ist* (Sermon 42, DW II 303.6-7; in Sermon 38, DW II 240.4 we also hear that all things are "green, leafy and bright" [grüenet, loubet und liuhtet] from the spark of an angel)
[220] *von dem werke vellet ein spân – als dâ ein spân abevellet von einem balken, den man houwet –, ein blîchen, daȥ ist, dâ der engel mit sînem nidersten den himel berüeret* (Sermon 38, DW II 243.2-3; cf. DW III, Sermon 63 for nearly the same image). The image here is clearly one of a spark falling from the sky, but Eckhart does not call it a spark as we might expect. This is probably because this kind of spark is quite different than the spark of the soul, which is more like the smallest spark from which a fire grows.
[221] *Ich nime den nidersten engel in blôȥer natûre: daȥ allerminste spænlîn oder daȥ minste vünkelîn, daȥ ie von im geviel, daȥ hæte alle dise werlt erliuhtet mit wunnen und mit vröuden* (Sermon 65, DW III 100.1-3)

his oneness and in his desert. It takes God in his wilderness and in his own ground."[222] It is "a spark of intellect that never dies. In this spark, we place the image of the soul"[223].

The way a spark grows and raises the soul is described through the metaphor of fire. In these examples, Eckhart is not referring to the spark of the soul, though the dynamics are similar and should be associated since, as Eckhart says in this passage, we are changed into God in the same way, "Fire changes into itself whatever is joined to it and this takes on fire's nature. Wood does not change fire into itself, but rather fire changes wood into itself. So we will be changed into God."[224] We should remember here that fire's natural motion in the Aristotelian cosmos is upwards toward the heavens. One of the key details that we get from looking at the fire metaphor is how sparks are 'sons' of fire. Here again, just as "likeness … lures the soul into God,"[225] when a fire starts in wood, the spark "forgets and forsakes its father and mother, brother and sister on earth, and hurries to the heavenly father."[226] The fire 'forgets and denies' its family (recalling Lk. 14:26 among others) which are at the same level as the fire. Ultimately, this forsaking includes forsaking itself[227], which is necessary for it to rise above itself.

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[222] *nimet got in sîner einunge und in sîner einœde; si nimet got in sîner wüestunge und in sînem eigenen grunde.* (Sermon 10, DW I 171.14-15)

[223] *ein vünkelîn der redelicheit, daȥ niemer erlischet, und in diȥ vünkelîn setzet man daȥ bilde der sêle* (Sermon 76, DW III 315.6-7). For other passages on the spark with less detail about it, see Sermons 37 and 42.

[224] *Daȥ viur verwandelt in sich, swaȥ im zuogevüeget wirt und wirt sîn natûre. Daȥ holz daȥ verwandelt daȥ viur in sich niht, mêr: daȥ viur verwandelt daȥ holz in sich. Alsô werden wir in got verwandelt.* (Sermon 6, DW I 114.5-115.2)

[225] *daȥ glîchnisse ... ziuhet die sêle in got* (*Book of Divine Consolation* §2, DW V 31.5-6)

[226] *vergiȥȥet und verzîhet er vater und muoter, bruoder und swester ûf der erde und jaget ûf an dem himelschen vater* (*Book of Divine Consolation* §2, DW V 31.9-11)

[227] For another example of fire 'forgetting,' "When part of a log is thrown into fire, changing into a spark or kind of fire, soon deserts the wood itself from which, through which, and in which it has its whole being as a part of itself, deserts the log by which, through which, and in which it once had its whole being as an intimate part of itself. It flees backward and tends upward, having forgotten itself as it were, as much as it

We see the same dynamics in the soul. The soul must deny its earthly family and its worldly self to rise above itself and achieve union with God. The spark in the passage above is the first flash of something greater that has the capacity to elevate. So too is the spark in the soul something greater (though in a paradoxical fashion since it is one with God) and it enables the soul to rise above itself by forgetting itself. Further, fire 'wants' to change other things into fire, "if it could turn everything that is around it into fire, it would do it."[228]

Perhaps the origin of the idea of the spark in Eckhart's writing is found in the seed metaphor in Scripture. Eckhart thinks of the seed as a seed of a tree, which enables other metaphoric possibilities in speaking of trees, branches and verdant blossoming. Eckhart connects the idea of the seed to the spark, where speaks of "the soul, which has a droplet of understanding, a little spark, a twig."[229] Eckhart further explains, "The seed of God is in us. If it has a good, wise and industrious farmer, it will thrive much more … The seed of a pear tree grows into a pear tree, a nut seed into a nut tree, the seed of God into God."[230] The Holy Spirit raises this sprout up and causes it to blossom (DW I, Sermon 20a). By analogy, we know this seed will grow into God and not something merely similar because he elsewhere tells us, "Whenever a branch

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is extinguished while doing so" (*pars ligni proiecti in ignem conversa in scintilam seu speciem ignis mox ipsum lignum, a quo, per quod et in quo habebat totum suum esse, utpote pars ipsius, deserit et fugit rursus et quasi sui ipsius oblita sursum tendit, quamvis exstinguenda medio.* Sermon XXX,1, LW IV 276.9-12)

[228] *möhte eȥ alleȥ ze viure machen, daȥ bî im wære, eȥ tæte eȥ.* (Sermon 84, DW III.460.7)

[229] *der sêle, diu ein tröpfelîn hât vernünfticheit, ein vünkelîn, ein zwic.* (Sermon 9, DW I 151.1-2)

[230] *Sâme gotes ist in uns. Hæte er einen guoten, wîsen und vlîȥigen werkman, sô betrüejete er dester baȥ ... Birboumes sâme wehset ze birboume, nuȥboumes sâme in nuȥboum, sâme gotes in got.* (*On the Nobleman*, DW V 111.11-13)

grows from a tree, it carries both the name and the essence of the tree. What goes out is the same as what remains within, and what remains within is the same as what goes out. Therefore the branch is an expression of itself."[231] Further, the spark as the seed of a tree *wants* to grow just as fire wants to produce fire. Referring the idea to Origen, Eckhart says that since God himself "imprinted and bore it into us, it may indeed become covered and hidden, but it is never extinguished, nor will it go out. It blooms and sparkles, blazes and ceaselessly leans toward God."[232] Finally, the metaphors discussed for the spark all culminate in blossoming and fruition[233]. Eckhart consistently describes this in terms of 'greenness.'[234] What blossoms becomes green, of course. Greenness has another useful connotation, however: what is green is vibrant and *new*. Eckhart tells us that "All creatures 'green' in God."[235]

6.3.4.2 The birth of the Word in the soul

The rhetoric surrounding the birth of the Word in the soul may be the clearest point at which we can say that Eckhart's rhetoric evidences a new conception of the individual. As with his other ideas, the birth of the Word in the soul is not new with Eckhart. The tradition extends back at least to Origen and Hippolytus. Hippolytus says, "The mouth of the Father has begotten a pure Word; this Word appears a second time, born of the saints. Constantly producing saints, it is also itself reproduced by its saints" (Lubac

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[231] *wanneer een telch vut spruut ute enen boeme, soe voert hi beide name ende wesen des boemds. Dat daer ute gaet, dat es, dat daer in blijft, ende dat daer in blijft, dat es, dat daer ute gaet. Aldus es die telch een utedruc sijns selfs.* (Sermon 16a, DW I 259.14-21)

[232] *îngedrücket und îngeborn hât, mac er wol bedecket werden und verborgen und doch niemer vertilget noch in im verleschet; er blüejet und glenzet, liuhtet und brinnet und neiget sich âne underlâȝ ze gote.* (*On the Nobleman*, DW V 111.19-21)

[233] For examples, see Sermon 97

[234] cf. Sermon 106, DW IV.2 684.13, *grüenende*. For the connection between greenness and Hildegard of Bingen, see chapter one.

[235] *Alle crêatûren ‚grüenent' in gote.* (Sermon 72, DW III 247.5)

1982, 80). Similarly, Origen says, “from this seed of the word of God which is sown Christ is born in the heart of the hearers … the soul conceives from this seed of the word and the Word forms a fetus in it until it brings forth a spirit of the fear of God” (Barkley 1990, 230). Reiner Schürmann cites similar evidence with Origen and Maximus Confessor (Schürmann 2001, 25). He concludes that Eckhart takes the birth of the Word idea further than his predecessors because,

> not only does grace make the Son be born within us in his divinity, but the human being engenders the Son of God. This was the ‘active’ side of detachment. The preaching of the simultaneous and identical bearing forth of the Word, in the detached human being and in the bosom of the Father, cannot be entirely corroborated by patristic sources. … It is a matter of an originally patristic doctrine, boldly enlarged by the Aristotelian flavor. In this amalgamated form it is original to Meister Eckhart. (Schürmann 2001, 26)

Schürmann is right on target in linking Eckhart’s alteration with his notion of the active life for the detached person, though this does not solely result from his Aristotelianism. Finally, we also find the idea of God constantly begetting the Son in Eriugena’s *Periphyseon* (558B; Duclow 2006, 54). As with Eckhart’s series of Christmas sermons that we have (Sermons 101, 102, 103), the birth of the Word is routinely discussed around Christmas in the form of 1) the eternal birth of Christ, 2) the Incarnation, 3) the birth of the Word in the soul. Characteristically, Eckhart goes straight to the heart of the matter and focuses on the birth of the Word in the soul.

The two sides of the birth metaphor stand in strong contrast to one another. We have little difficulty understanding worldly birth. The offspring is clearly a product of what

gives birth, both with animals and even forms and manifestations. With imperfect worldly things that are in the process of becoming, “Alteration is concerned with becoming and is a handmaid or servant; along with motion it serves the generation that looks to existence” (TP 88; *Comm. Ex.* n.139). Since it still does not achieve being in God, striving for existence continues in worldly things that become other worldly things. Still, we notice in worldly things a dynamic that continues to be true for anything less than God, “Giving birth always involves plurality and disturbance” (EE 173; *Comm. Ioh.* n.130). Things that are changed in time experience pain and distress in the process. Thus, Eckhart can sensibly use the metaphor of lightning to describe it, “we find an analogy with lightning. Whatever it strikes, It turns toward itself.”[236] Since alteration and birth are painful, we may then understan**d** why Eckhart describes God as holding back from revealing himself to those who are not ready, “If God gave himself to the soul temporally, it would vex her. Now he gives himself to her in eternity, in a new now, greening without ceasing.”[237]

Again in tracing through this metaphor, we find ourselves ascending to God, considering things that are increasingly universal, before crossing over and reaching the crucial second side of the metaphor. Although many things can ascend, for example by being transformed into fire by burning, only the innermost part of the individual soul is

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[236] *wir vinden ein glîchnisse an dem blitzen. Swenne der blitze triffet, sô ersleht er, swaȝ dâ ist* (Sermon 103, DW IV.1 488.127-128). The image here is rather specific. Eckhart says shortly thereafter that the leaves on trees even turn toward a lightning strike, which is an unusual way of describing how it grabs the attention of things that are ostensibly unable to understand and are unaware of what is going on. The image is apt since he is describing the way that the lower powers pay attention when there is a flash of light from above. They cannot understand it, but they turn and attune themselves toward it.

[237] *Gæbe sich got der sêle zîtlîche, eȝ verdriuȝe sie. Nû gibet er sich ir in êwicheit in einem niuwen nû, grüenende âne underlâȝ.* (Sermon 106, DW IV.2 698.107-109)

capable of the highest form of birth: being transformed into God (DW II, Sermon 43). This capacity results in some of Eckhart's most shocking rhetoric. This birth of the Word in the soul results in our being born as only-begotten Sons, that is, as Christ (DW II, Sermon 30; DW I, Sermon 18). Lest there be any confusion about this identification, Eckhart makes it quite clear, "It would be of little value for me that 'the Word was made flesh' for man in Christ as a person distinct from me unless he was also made flesh in me personally so that I too might be God's son" (EE 167; *Comm. Ioh.* n.117)[238]. Further, in speaking of Christ's birth as part of a Christmas sermon, "what does it help me if this birth is always happening and yet it does not happen in me? All that matters is that it happens in me."[239] Likewise, "He gives birth to me, his Son, the same Son. I say more: he gives birth to me not only as his Son, but rather, he gives birth to me and me to him, and to me as his being and his nature."[240] And so, as we are all the Son of God as

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[238] *Parum enim mihi esset verbum caro factum pro homine in Christo, supposito illo a me distincto, nisi et in me personaliter, ut et ego essem filius dei.* (In Ioh. n.117, LW III 101.14-102.). Eckhart does qualify this to avoid some of the undesirable conclusions that the so-called Free Spirit heretics might draw, "For what I say here should be understood about a good, perfect person who 'walked and still walks God's way,' not about a carnal, inexperienced person who is entirely far from and knows nothing of this birth" (*Wan daȥ ich hie spriche, daȥ sol man verstân von einem guoten, volkommen menschen, der 'in dem wege gotes gewandelt hât und doch wandelt', niht von einem natiurlîchen, ungeüebeten menschen, wan der ist zemâle verre und unwiȥȥende ihtes von dirre geburt*; Sermon 101, DW IV.1 336.8-337.10). Similarly, but without it seeming as much like a caveat, he states, "Where God finds likeness to this [divine] order in the soul, he the Father bears his Son there" (*Wâ got vinder glîcheit dirre ordenunge in der sêle, dâ gebirt der vater sînen sun*; Sermon 31, DW II 120.4-5). If there is any touch of what is worldly, the birth cannot happen, "As long as you have sorrow in your heart over any thing, even over sin, your child is not born." (*Als lange dû leit in dînem herzen hâst umbe dehein dinc, eȥ sî joch umbe sünde, als lange enist dîn kint niht geborn*; Sermon 76, DW III 325.5-6). These passages should be sufficiently clear as to avoid any possibility of misinterpretation as allowing free license for sin.

[239] *daz disiu geburt iemer geschehe und aber in mir niht engeshihet, waz hilfet mich daz? Aber daz si in mir geschehe, dâ liget ez allez ane* (Sermon 101, DW IV.1:336.4-5). We might also recall, as Smith does, the relevance of Luke 17:22 which reads, "the Kingdom of God is within you" (Smith 1987, 102, cf. Smith 1995, 24). Interestingly, many new translations attempt to mollify this language by using "among" or "in your midst" instead of "within" or simply "in." Ilaria Ramelli concluded after studying the language in detail that the correct translation is "in," the most powerful option which establishes the most intimate relation (Ramelli 2009).

[240] *er geburt mich sînen sun und den selben sun. Ich spriche mêr: er gebirt mich niht aleine sînen sun, mêr: er gebirt mich sich und sich mich und mich sîn wesen und sîn natûre.* (Sermon 6, DW I 109.8-10)

Christ was, Eckhart tells us that we should understand "'Only-Begotten' in the sense of first of many" (EE 170; *Comm. Ioh.* n.123). The significance of this idea in the way it alters the idea of Christ and the Incarnation will be explored later. For now, we should notice that the capacity of the soul to undergo this is straightforwardly implied by the bare fact that the soul in its ground is divine. That simple point enables Eckhart to craft some of his wildest rhetoric. Since God is one and entirely indistinct and beyond all things, anything that God does is one and the same in God: creating the world, coming into the world as Christ, being eternal, and so on. Therefore, if we understand that the ground of the soul itself has the capacity for God, it 'touches' and becomes divine, thereby inheriting all of the things and powers that apply to God.

As if this were not enough, Eckhart finds a way of going rhetorically further by describing this birth as reciprocal, "I have eternally given birth to you and you to me."[241] Similarly, "God gives birth to himself out of himself into himself and gives birth again to himself into himself."[242] The birth can be described as reciprocal because the soul insofar as it is divine is amenable to being described as doing anything that God does. As Eckhart says, "As I speak the word of God, I am a co-worker [*mitewürker*] with God and grace is mixed with the creature,"[243] namely, the soul. As he explains elsewhere in greater detail, when the soul "comes home, she is united with him, and she is a co-worker. No creature works anything other than the Father, who works alone. The soul

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[241] *ich hayn mych dich inde dich mych eweclichen geboren* (Sermon 14, DW I 239.3)
[242] *got gebirt sich ûz im selben in sich selben und gebirt sich wider in sich*. (Sermon 43, DW II 320.4; cf. DW I, Sermon 22; DW IV.2, Sermon 106)
[243] *Als ich gotes wort spriche, sô bin ich ein mitewürker gotes und ist diu gnâde gemenget mit der crêatûre*. (Sermon 81; DW III 398.13-4)

should never stop until she works as powerfully as God. Then she works with the Father in all His works."[244] As Eckhart likes to do, he juxtaposes a statement that seems to exclude a possibility right beside another that claims that very possibility. Proximity helps to emphasize the tension. God works alone. And then we are told that the soul "works all His works with the Father." Finally, the next clause releases the tension by explaining that the soul works as one with God, just as we read elsewhere, "Whenever he is one with God, so he brings forth all creatures with God. He brings blessedness to all creatures insofar as he is one with God."[245] Compare this to another sermon where he says that if I am to know God without means, "God must truly become me and I must truly become God, so completely one that I work together with him, not in the sense that I work and he does something afterwards. Further, I work with what is mine. I work with him as truly as my soul works with my body."[246] Not only am I one with God, but my identity does not yield to God's. The individual soul does not dissolve into God like a drop of wine in the ocean[247]. Instead, Eckhart uses the language of ownership and property, saying that what is his is mine and that this ownership is not partial or incomplete. I work with him in a way that is just as much my own as the way my soul

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[244] *Als si nû danne alsô heim kumet und alsô mit im vereinet ist, sô ist si ein mitewurkerin. Kein crêatûren enwürket niht dan der vater, der würket aleine. Diu sêle sol niemer ûfgehœren, si enwerde des werkes als gewaltic als got. Sô würket si mit dem vater alliu sîniu werk* (Sermon 31, DW II 125.1-4; cf. DW I, Sermon 22, DW I, Sermon 6). Less frequently, Eckhart describes this working with God as truly living life, "For your works to live, God must touch you in the innermost part of the soul if they are to live. For there is your life and there alone you live" (*Und suln dîniu werk leben, sô muoȝ dich got inwendic anerüeren in dem innigesten der sêle, suln sie leben; wan dâ ist dîn leben, und dâ lebest dû aleine*; Sermon 39, DW II 259.6-260.1). Finally, our works "live" if "we act within God's kingdom" (Davies 1994, 250-1; Jostes 82, forthcoming in DW IV.2 as Sermon 117).

[245] *swenne er mit gote ein ist, sô ist er mit gote vürbringende alle crêatûren, und er ist sælicheit allen crêatûren bringende nâch dem, und er mit im ein ist.* (Sermon 40, DW II 278.8-9)

[246] *sô muoȝ got vil nâhe ich werden und ich vil nâhe got, alsô gar ein, daȝ ich mit im würke und niht alsô mit im würke, daȝ ich würke und er nâch schürge, mêr: ich würke dâ mite, daȝ mîn ist. Als eigenlîche würke ich mit im, als mîn sêle würket mit mînem lîbe.* (Sermon 70, DW III 194.14-195.4)

[247] Eckhart often points out the shortcomings of this popular metaphor for union.

works with my body. Perhaps the most extreme example of this rhetoric is found in Sermon 52, *Beati Pauperes Spiritu*,

> in God's being itself where God is above being and beyond distinction, there I myself was, there I willed myself and came to know myself in creating this man. Therefore, I am the cause of myself on account of my being, which is eternal, and not after my being born, which is temporal. And therefore I am unborn, and after the way of my being unborn so I may never be destroyed. According to the way of my being unborn, I am eternally existing, I am now and eternally will be. … In my birth, all things came to be born and I was the cause of myself and of all things; and had I wished, I would not be, nor would all things be[248]

Here, Eckhart gives us the most paradoxical conclusion of his creating with God: I create myself. This strains our notion of self. We imagine only with great difficulty what it might mean for us to have God in the innermost ground of the soul. Seeing all the various implications is most helpful since it helps us in the process of thinking through a particular idea. This is part of his rhetoric's ability to guide thought. Just as we do not desire what we do not know is desirable, we may not be savvy enough with a new idea

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[248] *in dem selben wesene gotes, dâ got ist obe wesene und ob underscheide, dâ was ich selbe, dâ wolte ich mich selben und bekante mich selben ze machenne disen menschen. Her umbe sô bin ich mîn selbes sache nâch mînem wesene, daȝ êwic ist, und niht nâch mînem gewerdenne, daȝ zîtlich ist. Und her umbe sô bin ich ungeborn, und nâch mîner ungebornen wîse sô enmac ich neimer ersterben. Nâch mîner ungebornen wîse sô bin ich êwiclîche gewesen und bin nû und sol êwiclîche blîben. ... In mîner geburt, dâ wurden alliu dinc geborn, und ich was sache mîn selbes und aller dinge; und hæte ich gewolt, ich enwære niht, noch alliu dinc enwæren niht* (Sermon 52, DW II 502.7-503.4,503.6-504.1)

to think it all the way through without someone helping us to see where all the implications are.

6.3.5 The paradox of humanity: the intersection of time and eternity

Man lives at the intersection of time and eternity, “The soul was created at the border between time and eternity, and she is touching both. With the highest power she touches eternity. With the lowest power she touches time.”[249] Though “all creatures are either body or spirit,”[250] Eckhart tells us, “man has two natures: body and spirit.”[251] The soul participates in both with, by Eckhart’ account, different faculties. The soul as spiritual “must pour out into the body.”[252] Thus we should expect, and indeed we see, Eckhart using both sides of his metaphors to speak about man. Eckhart makes this explicit, “although the inner man is seen with the outer man in the same place, they are yet more distant from each other than the highest heaven is from the center of the earth, just as heat and form are distant from the substance of fire.”[253] They are opposed like form and manifestation, universal and temporal. Still, they comprise the same individual soul.

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[249] *Diu sêle ist geschaffen als in einem orte zwischen zît und êwicheit, die si beide rüerende ist. Mit den obersten kreften rüeret si die êwicheit, aber mit den nidersten kreften rüeret si die zît* (Sermon 47, DW II 404.3-405.2). In one of the most unusual passages, Eckhart refers obliquely to Prometheus, “Now one may ask: What does our Lord mean when he says, ‘Where I am, my servant will be with me’? Perhaps he means that God wants to steal something from God that he wants to impart to the soul” (*Nû möhte man vrâgen: waȝ meinet unser herre, daȝ er sprichet: ‘dâ ich bin, dâ sol mîn dienære mit mir sîn’? Vil lîhte meinet er, daȝ got gote etwaȝ wolte versteln, daȝ er der sêle wolte gemeinen?* Sermon 98, DW IV.1 242.33-243.1).

[250] *alle crêatûren sint eintweder lîp oder geist* (*On the Nobleman*, DW V 109.9-10)

[251] *der mensche hât in im zweierhande natûre: lîp und geist* (*On the Nobleman*, DW V 109.7-8)

[252] *si muoȝ sich gieȝen ûf den lîchamen.* (Sermon 107, DW IV.2 722.15-723.1)

[253] *homo interior ab homine exteriori, quamvis simul videantur loco, plus tamen distant quam caelum ultimum a centro terrae. Sicut etiam est de calore et forma substantiali ignis.* (Sermon XXII, LW IV 193.3-5)

God and the soul are ostensibly incompatible as creator and created, “Light and darkness cannot coexist, nor can God and creature. If God goes in, the creature must go out at the same time.”[254] And so, Eckhart asks, “how can the soul undergo God being stamped onto her without dying? I say: everything that he gives her, he gives to her within himself.”[255] The soul is not ‘crushed’ and can endure it because God gives himself as himself and the soul endures it in God and not in herself.

For Eckhart, the soul as divine is above both knowledge and love. The rhetoric of love and knowledge apply to the soul insofar as it is created. Eckhart uses ‘compassion’ to describe the activity of detached love that is ordered by reason. Eckhart tells us that “beyond these two, knowledge and love, is compassion. God works compassion in the highest and purest acts that God can work.”[256] This happens in a mind that is well-ordered, meaning one that is governed by reason, “We therefore are compassionate like the Father, not from passion, not from impulse, but when we are compassionate from deliberate choice and the command of reason.”[257] Compassion therefore is a deliberate, willed choice.

We should notice that the confluence of the extremes where the ends meet has the effect of not allowing us to identify man only with one side. Since mankind inhabits

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[254] *wan lieht und vinsternisse enmügen niht mit einander bestân, noch got und crêatûre. Sol got îngân, sô muoz überin diu crêatûre ûz.* (Sermon 102, DW IV.1 413.44)
[255] *wie diu sêle erlîden müge, daz si niht enstîrbet, dâ sie got in sich drücket. Ich spriche: alle*z*, daz ir gibet, daz gibet er ir in im* (Sermon 47, DW II 408.3-5)
[256] *über disiu beidiu, bekantnisse und minne, ist barmherzicheit; dâ würket got barmherzicheit in dem hœhsten und in dem lutersten, daz got gewürken mac.* (Sermon 7, DW I 123.3-5)
[257] *Nos ergo sicut pater miseremur, quando non ex passione, non ex impetu, sed ex electione et imperio rationis miseremur* (Sermon XII, LW IV 128.10-11)

all points of the continuum, Eckhart does not simply cast aside certain parts of human existence as evil. Importantly, Eckhart sees even the lower faculties as susceptible to being attuned to become more receptive to God. This attunement amounts to their being ordered according to reason. Eckhart describes the well-ordered soul as being like an army, with higher reason in command (Sermon 31). Also like an army that has a common goal, the powers "all desire peace, and therefore they all help one other."[258] In ordering the soul according to reason, "the soul's six powers, both the higher and lower powers, must each have a golden ring, gilded with the gold of divine love."[259] This way of thinking enables Eckhart to identify problems like concupiscence as a problem of attunement and not one inherent in the power of desire (see *Comm. Ex.* nn.210, 214)[260]. This way of thinking allows Eckhart to raise embodied human existence in general. It cannot rise to the level of the divine since the lower powers cannot be made receptive like the highest power can, but nevertheless they can be well-ordered and facilitate a life that is governed by the highest. By consequence, God's will flows through the highest power and the lower powers are still moved (recall that even Christ and the saints are moved), but this does not result in suffering and distress.

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[258] *Sie wellent alle vride hân; dar umbe hilfet ieglîcher dem andern* (Sermon 31, DW II 122.6). This is a peculiar comparison since he pairs peace with an army. There is a certain lack of discord that follows from a fixed hierarchy, however, where each part serves a definite function and does not create strife by competing with the other parts. This seems to be the kind of *vride* (peace, tranquility, serenity) that Eckhart has in mind.

[259] *so mvsent die sehs crefte der selen, beide die obersten vnd die vndersten, ieglich haben ein gvldin vingerlin, vber gvldet mit dem golde gotlicher minnen* (Sermon 83, DW III 444.2-4). The six powers of the soul include the three lower powers of 1) making distinctions, 2) anger, 3) desire, and the three higher powers of 1) memory (Father), 2) intellect (Son), 3) will (Holy Spirit).

[260] Here, we should perhaps think of the Ancient Greek notion of *harmonia* and Aristotle's notion of *sophrosyne* in particular.

The crucial consequence of this for the development of the modern individual is that the valuation of the embodied individual as a whole is elevated and human life can then be thought of as valuable in its most prosaic forms. Once we look more closely at Eckhart's revaluation of natural knowledge, we will see that his rhetoric of the individual very much speaks to what was to come in the development of modern thought. Eckhart's account of detachment is perhaps the clearest sign of this. All that we do in external actions and have within us in our powers can be attuned to God and become well-ordered and receptive of the divine so long as we are detached. This single insight clears the way for the entirety of human interior and exterior life to be ennobled since detachment can coexist with any aspect of them. This is why the Free Spirit heresy was a threat during Eckhart's time. As individual life generally came to be seen worthwhile by dint of God's love and blessedness, does this not imply that even sin rises too? Not for Eckhart. Though he does say that *knowledge* of sin is valuable, sin is opposed to detachment. Sin is a mistake in desire, a result of lower powers that are not properly attuned and desire worldly things instead of higher goods (Sermon 63). Sin puts us at a distance from God through attachment to worldly things. Although this is obvious for those intimately familiar with his thought, much to Eckhart's frustration, the risk of superficial misinterpretation certainly existed.

6.3.6 Rhetoric of the individual

The paradox of being God and man is strengthened and even made more intense in Eckhart because he does not allow humanity to fall away into divinity. I have human nature in common with Christ, who divinized it by being both man and God. Being human therefore remains all the way to God and the soul remains all the way to the

Godhead. At the same time, being individual specifically involves denying what we normally consider to be self, “be careful not to take yourself in the slightest as you are this person or the next. Rather, take yourself according to free, undivided human nature.”[261] As we have seen, this principle results in rhetorical novelty and some of his most shocking rhetoric[262]. Others who wrote around Eckhart’s time, Thomas Aquinas for example, leave us with the distinct impression that the individual has certain set limits and that mystery is largely the province of the divine. Eckhart by contrast, uses very personal rhetoric even when describing the soul insofar as it is divine, “Intellect looks in and breaks through every nook of the Godhead and takes the Son in the heart of the Father and in the ground and places him in its ground.”[263] The description of looking around, taking something and placing it somewhere strongly implies personal agency and responsibility on the part of the one performing the actions. None of this description implies passivity.

The rhetoric turns on Eckhart’s contention that the soul is not limited to what is created, “I say that there is something above the soul’s created nature. Some priests do not understand that there is something that is so akin to God and so one with God.”[264] The difficulty that many probably had with this rhetoric is that it implies that the

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[261] *Dar umbe hüetet iuch, daȥ ir iuch iht nemet nâch dem, daȥ ir dirre mensche noch der iht sît, sunder nemet iuch nâch der vrîen, ungeteilten menschelîchen natûre.*(Sermon 46, DW II 382.3-4)
[262] Matthew Fox says that “he deliberately and consciously copies the style of Jesus’ sayings” (Fox 1991, 219). In other words, not only does Eckhart elevate the individual and this manifests in his rhetoric, he also intentionally mimicked Christ’s own rhetoric to make the elevation of the individual even clearer.
[263] *Vernünfticheit diu blicket în und durchbrichet alle die winkel der gotheit und nimet den sun in dem herzen des vaters und in dem grunde und setzet in in irn grunt.* (Sermon 69, DW III 178.3-179.2)
[264] *Ich spriche, daȥ etwaȥ ober der sêle geschaffener natûre ist. Und etlîche pfaffen die enverstânt des niht, daȥ etwaȥ sî, daȥ gote alsô sippe ist und alsô ein ist.* Q2(Sermon 29, DW II 88.5-7)

individual remains individual in becoming God, which seems to imply that the individual is God. It is understandable that someone could get this impression: "If I am to know God without an intermediary, then 'I' must become 'he' and 'he' must become 'I'. I say more: God must become 'I' and 'I' must become God, as completely one that this 'he' and this 'I' become and are one 'is' in the eternal is-ness act in one activity."[265] He qualifies this, however, saying that as soon as anything temporal enters, there can be no oneness. The difficulty that remains is trying to conceive of a soul that is at once temporal and created while also being divine and eternal. In other words, the difficulty in understanding Eckhart's notion of the individual is the *same* difficulty that people who heard about Christ in the first centuries had in trying to understand how he could be man and God.

This results in some of Eckhart's surprising exegeses. As Bruce Milem says of Eckhart's exegesis in Sermon 16b, "Eckhart quotes Matthew 11:27 and … completely reverses its usual sense. Whereas the verse seems to bar human beings from knowledge of God and reserve it for the Son alone, Eckhart treats it as showing the way to knowledge of God" (Milem 2002, 102n15). Since the self can become the Son, Eckhart can elegantly endorse the same passage with a very different meaning.

In each case, Eckhart's individual does not yield as it ascends. He tells us that "we will become knowledgeable with divine knowledge and will be ennobled and adorn our unknowing with supernatural knowledge."[266] That 'we' come to divine knowledge

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[265] *Sol aber ich also got bekennen ane mittel, so můs vil bi ich er werden vnd er ich werden. Me sprich ich: Got mȯ̊s vil bi ich werden vnd ich vil bi got, alse gar ein, das dis ‚er' vnd dis ‚ich' Ein 'ist' werdent vnd sint vnd in dér istikeit ewiklich éin werk wirkent* (Sermon 83, DW III 447.3-6)

[266] *Danne suln wir werden wiʒʒende mit dem götlîchen wiʒʒenne und danne wirt geadelt und geʒieret unser unwiʒʒen mit dem übernatiurlîchen wiʒʒenne.* (Sermon 102, DW IV.1 420.132-133)

tells us that even though God is beyond knowledge, God is not beyond the soul. As well, we hear that our 'putting on' Christ is done with the passive form of the verb, indicating that it happens passively within (Sermon LII, LW IV). This happens within because God is not something external. As Eckhart explains, "Since I am the same kind [as Christ] according to humanity, I am so united to his individual being that by grace I am one in his individual being and I am that individual being."[267]

The soul's ascent involves rising above what is temporal in whatever way the soul is not one, "if there were neither time nor place nor anything else, all would be one being."[268] Eckhart explains this more fully,

> If you take away the now of time, you are everywhere and you have all time. This or that being is not all things, for so long as I am this and that or have this and that, I am not all things and I do not have all things. Detach yourself from being this and that and having this and that, and you are all things and have all things. Further, you are neither here nor there, so you are everywhere. Further still, you are neither this nor that, so you are all things.[269]

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[267] *wan dâ ist diu selbe art bin nâch menscheit, sô bin ich alsô vereiniget dem persônlîchen wesene, daȥ ich von gnâden in dem persônlîchen wesene bin ein und ouch daȥ persônlich wesen.* (Sermon 67, DW III 135.9-11)

[268] *enwære zît noch stat noch anders niht, sô wære al<leȥ> éin wesen* (Sermon 44, DW II 3-4). Compare these statements to this as well, "He who is nowhere, who, I say, is not tied down by love of any place, homeland or household, is really everywhere. He who is not affected by any particular created being is thus in all things" (EE 165; *Comm. Ioh.* n.112). This touches on the more practical aspect of how love figures into being everywhere and being in all things.

[269] *Nim abe daȥ nû der zît, sô bist dû allenthalben und hâst alle zît. Diȥ wesen oder daȥ enist niht alliu dinc, wan, sô lange ich diȥ und daȥ bin oder diȥ und daȥ hân, sô enbin ich niht alliu dinc noch enhân niht alliu dinc. Scheit abe, daȥ dû noch diȥ noch daȥ sîst noch diȥ noch daȥ habest, sô bist dû alliu dinc und hâst alliu dinc; und alsô: bist dû noch hie noch dâ, sô bist dû allenthalben. Und alsô: bist dû noch diȥ noch daȥ, so bist dû alliu dinc.* (Sermon 77, DW III 336.1-6)

We simply can't think through this using our familiar mode of thought. As we ascend through the lower faculties to the higher ones, this kind of rhetoric is appropriate to reaching the extreme since the self itself is problematized, along with time and space and all familiar modes of thinking. Again, we should think of Robert Forman's progressive stripping away of conventional modes of thought. To make sense of the ordering of the soul that Eckhart speaks of, however, we must come to terms with such statements since they describe the work of the highest reason. The soul should be ordered, Eckhart tells us, so that what is superior is above and governs what is inferior, with each superior touching its inferior. The continuum of superior/inferior in the soul is just as it is in general, where the more universal is likewise the more superior. With this in mind, consider this statement, "What is outside time is always universal; what is without body and matter is everywhere" (EE 120; Prol. Par. Gen. n.162). The higher reason works with what is more universal. It is thus outside time by way of its abstractions which push toward what is most universal[270]. Thus, Eckhart naturally concludes that those who leave themselves and all worldly things "truly possess all things."[271] That is, if the soul abides in higher reason, in her ground with the spark, then she abides in God himself. Eckhart pushes even Scriptural passages in this direction, "Saint Philip said when our Lord spoke of his Father, 'Lord, show us your Father, and that will satisfy us' (John 14:8), as if he said that seeing him would have been enough

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[270] Note the similarity in this description to what we see in Plato himself. The ultimate goal with Plato was the contemplation of the Good, the most universal form that enabled all of the other forms to be what they were. Also like Plato, Eckhart moves up a sliding scale of being, where the most universal also has the most being.

[271] *eigen sint alliu dinc in der wârheit.* (Sermon 42, DW II 306.4-5)

for him. We would have far greater satisfaction in nearness to him."[272] In other words, the Scriptural metaphor of 'seeing' for 'knowing' is not strong enough for Eckhart because it indicates something temporary. He prefers the more permanent 'dwelling' or 'abiding' which makes the soul at home in God.

The dynamic at work here is as follows, "Fellowship with the body prevents the soul from understanding as clearly as the angels can. However, to the extent that we understand without material things, we are angelic."[273] In addition, Eckhart tells us that "a limit has been set [for the highest angels] beyond which they cannot go. The soul can indeed go beyond it."[274] The angels are wholly spiritual and immaterial, as is reason which trades only in universals[275]. But the soul can go beyond this, reaching beyond the grasp of the angels by moving into her ground, which Eckhart speaks of as he does the Godhead, "Know now that all our perfection and all our bliss lie in man going through and going beyond all createdness and all temporality and all being and going into the groundless ground."[276] Here again, Eckhart tells us that the 'individual' goes beyond everything and goes into the ground. This implies that the individual soul remains an individual throughout, even after shedding the worldly self, "if I were empty and had a

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[272] *Dar umbe sant Philippus, dô unser herre hâte gesaget von sînem vater: 'herre, wîse uns dînen vater, und uns genüeget', als ob er spræche, daȝ im genüegete an dem sehenne. Michel grœȝer genüegunge suln wir haben an der bîwonunge.* (Sermon 58, DW II 614.6-615.2)
[273] *Diu gemeinschaft des lîbes irret, daȝ doi sêle niht als lûter verstân mac als der engel; aber, als vil als man bekennet âne materielîchiu dinc, als vil ist man engelisch.* (Sermon 23, DW I 408.1-409.1)
[274] *Doch ist in zil gesetzet; dar über enmügen sie niht. Diu sêle mac wol vürbaȝ.* (Sermon 1, DW I 13.5-6)
[275] Eckhart has this in mind when describing the four levels of being (*Comm. Ioh.* n.83). He places angelic intellect above human intellect because human intellect is still attached to materiality.
[276] *Nû wiȝȝet: alliu unser volkomenheit und alliu unser sælicheit liget dar ane, daȝ der mensche durchgange und übergange alle geschaffenheit und alle zîtlicheit und alleȝ wesen und gange in den grunt, der gruntlôs ist.* (Sermon 42, DW II 309.3-5)

fiery inner love and likeness, I would draw God entirely into me."[277] Though paradoxical, it is coherent since the soul is both temporal and divine, both God and man. We might therefore expect rhetoric that parallels Christ since the soul has similar status. Indeed this is what we find, Eckhart quotes John 14:11, which says, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me" and comments "So then, God is in the soul and the soul is in God."[278] The Scriptural passage features Christ as the speaker. Eckhart applies this to the soul, with the subtle implication that the soul is like Christ. So we may not be surprised to see statements like this, "if you want to know God, then you should not only be like the Son - you should be the Son himself."[279]

Lest we think that Eckhart completely identifies the soul with Christ (and one could be forgiven having that impression since most of his rhetoric appears to emphasize just this sort of thing), at one point Eckhart does address the difference,

> There is no difference between the soul and our Lord Jesus Christ, except that the soul has a coarser being. For his being is by the eternal person. To the extent that the soul renounces coarseness – let her renounce it completely! – so then is she completely the same. Then all that one can say about our Lord Jesus Christ, one can say about the soul.[280]

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[277] *wære ich îtel und hæte ein inviuric minne und glîcheit, ich züge got alzemâle in mich* (Sermon 31, DW II 124.4)
[278] *Alsô ist got in der se, und diu sêle ist in gote.* (Sermon 59, DW II 635.2-3).
[279] *wellet ir got bekennen, sô sult ir niht aleine glîch sîn dem sune, sunder ir sult der sun selber sîn.* (Sermon 16b, DW I 273.5-6)
[280] *Diu sêle enhât niht underscheides von unserm herren Iêsu Kristô, wan daȝ diu sêle hât ein gröber wesen; wan sîn wesen ist an der êwigen persône. Wan als vil als si ir gropheit abeleget – und möhte si eȝ alzemâle abegelegen –, sô wære si alzemâle daȝ selbe; und alleȝ, daȝ man gesprechen mac von unserm herren Iêsu Kristô, daȝ möhte man sprechen von der sêle.* (Sermon 59, DW II 632.3-7)

The soul's temporal aspect prevents her from being Christ without qualification (i.e., without an "insofar as"). Eckhart essentially says here that if the soul could divest herself of herself insofar as she is worldly, then she would be Christ. Elsewhere, Eckhart explains this dynamic, "As the inner man loses the distinctive existence that he has according to the kind of living thing he is, he becomes one ground in the [divine] ground. So too must the outer man be robbed of his own support and entirely take hold of the support of the eternal personal being."[281] So while we are told to be dead to the body and to deny all worldly things, the soul remains embodied in part and thus the "insofar as she is worldly" portion continues. Of course, it is not hard to imagine Eckhart responding that God would have had no reason to create the soul if it was simply God.

Thus we hear of Paul's being taken up to the third heaven, "He was enraptured insofar as he was a spirit. He remained insofar as he was a soul."[282] For Eckhart, the soul remains a part of the world even when it is enraptured. With respect to this vision of God (the beatific vision, for which there was so much controversy during Eckhart's lifetime and shortly afterward for Pope John XXII), Eckhart says, "Does the spirit have no vision of God in the eternal life? Yes and no. Insofar as it is born, it does not look up

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[281] *Alsô als der inner mensche nâch geistes art entvellet sînes eingens wesens, dâ er in dem grunde éin grunt ist, alsô müeste ouch der der ûzer mensche beroubet werden eigens understantnisses und alzemâle behalten understantnisse des êwigen persônlîchen wesens* (Sermon 67, DW III 134.17-135.3)

[282] *Er was enzücket nâch der geistlicheit, er bleip nâch der sêlicheit* (Sermon 23, DW I 405.9-10). The phrase does not translate easily, even into modern German. One is tempted to say "He was enrapt according to his spirit-ness, he remained according to his soul-ness," or "according to his being a soul," which is similar to Quint's rendering, "Er ward verzückt nach seinem Geist-Sein, er blieb nach seinem Seele-Sein." Nevertheless, Paul "remained insofar as he was a soul," which makes the desired point.

and see God. But insofar as it is born, it has a vision of God."[283] Eckhart responds with an "insofar as" qualification which refers to the soul's life here and now.

Eckhart focuses upon and presses upon the rhetorical detail of the individual remaining individual. As he says in one passage, "When the will is united that it becomes one single one, the Father bears from heaven his only-begotten Son in himself in me. Why in himself in me? Since I am one with him, he cannot leave me out. In that act, the Holy Spirit receives his being and his becoming from me the same as he does from God."[284] Eckhart leaves little space for confusion about whether or not the individual persists in this dynamic. There are several potentially radical aspects of this: the individual soul can reach God Himself; this can be done in this life (with the insofar as qualification); the individual remains individual throughout. As we saw before with Sermon 52, Eckhart brings together all of these implications there where he says I am the cause of myself. Bruce Milem talks about the important shifts in meaning of 'I' in this passage (Milem 2002, 43). However, this would allow Eckhart to wiggle out of the implication that the same individual soul is intended throughout, which as we have seen is not what he wants to do. Eckhart often insists via chiasmus and reformulating the same phrase in various ways that the appearance of such personal pronouns is no

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[283] *enhât der geist kein anesehen in dem êwigen lebene an got? Jâ und nein. Dâ er geborn ist, dâ enhât er kein ûfsehen noch kein anesehen an got. Aber dâ er geborn wirt, dâ hât er anesehen gotes* (Sermon 39, DW II 265.3-6). Here, *ûfsehen* could mean either to 'look up' or experience a 'furor,' a strong emotional surge. As Eckhart is talking about bliss and also about vision, it is not clear which connotation is most desirable, though looking up is perhaps better since it implies a directing of attention toward higher things, which makes 'looking up' a metaphor for spiritual ascent.

[284] *Swenne der wille alsô vereinet wirt, daȥ eȥ wirt ein einic ein, sô gebirt der vater von himelrîche sînen eingebornen sun in sich in mich. War umbe in sich in mich? Dâ bin ich ein mit im, er enmac mich ûȥgesliezȥen niht, und in dem werke dâ enpfæhet der heilige geist sîn wesen und sîn werden von mir als von gote.* (Sermon 25, DW II 11.1-4)

accident, “he gives birth to me not only as his Son, but rather, he gives birth to me and me to him, and to me as his being and his nature. In the innermost wellspring, I gush forth in the Holy Spirit.”[285] If Eckhart intended the meaning of the pronouns to be different, then his rhetorical strategy seems to push in the opposite direction by emphasizing their uniformity and stamping out any possibility of accident through repetition. Indeed, we might come to a very different conclusion: Eckhart uses ‘soul’ and ‘I’ interchangeably in his rhetoric to refer to the individual soul, even when the soul is considered insofar as it is divine. As McGinn rightly recognizes, we never know if Eckhart is referring to God, the soul or both, which “is exactly what Eckhart had in mind” (McGinn 2001, 49).

6.4 Concluding thoughts

Through a close examination of Eckhart’s rhetoric, we have brought into focus his place in the metaphysical changes that inform intellectual history. By understanding the need for his rhetoric, we can see more clearly that he preached an essentially traditional and orthodox mysticism: the content is orthodox, but the rhetoric is novel. Eckhart framed his theology in response to changing cultural needs.

An arc was traced through philosophical history so as to focus on the changes to the notion of the individual, which I have argued is the most useful aspect to highlight in understanding the rhetorical exigencies of Eckhart’s time that drove him to adopt the strategies he did. Simply stated, we cannot fully understand Eckhart’s enjoining his audience to transform their way of thinking and being if we stubbornly remain in our own

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[285] *er gebirt mich niht aleine sînen sun, mêr: er gebirt mich sich und sich mich und mich sîn wesen und sîn natûre. In dem innersten quelle dâ quille ich ûȝ in dem heiligen geist* (Sermon 6, DW I 109.9-11)

fixed way of philosophical thinking, particularly with our assumptions of what an individual is and can be. If we think of concepts and philosophical distinctions as the most fundamental layer of thought, then Eckhart looks less orthodox than he actually was. If we recognize Eckhart's rhetoric as genuinely substantive, this enables us to avoid the pitfalls inherent in attempts to systematize his theology. As we too often push rhetoric aside in favor of concept-driven philosophical thinking, Hans Blumenberg provided a number of tools which eased the transition away from this thinking and helped to think of Eckhart's rhetoric as being authentically substantive in its own right. Blumenberg also pushes us to think in terms of the evolution of undercurrents that inform intellectual history and the metaphors which are evidence of those changes.

The path pursued in chapters three and four continued the movement established by looking at Blumenberg in chapter two, moving us closer and closer to Eckhart's own mode of thought. Just as we see in Eckhart's own rhetoric, this progression carried us from traditional philosophical thinking toward a more pragmatic way of thinking about rhetoric and theology. Doing so also guided us toward Eckhart's use of paradox, an element that I argued in chapter four is central to interpreting his thought. Lakoff and Johnson helped to show us how metaphors structure our daily life and thought. Recruiting William James and Erazim Kohàk alongside Blumenberg (though without assenting entirely to the ideas of any one of them) served to further emphasize the pragmatic nature of Eckhart's rhetoric, which is entirely in the service of an ineffable, nonconceptual and ultimately experiential end.

At this point, I added an argument of my own to the contemporary dialogue on mysticism with what I call connoisseurship. Our ability to sympathetically identify with

others who think and live similarly runs deeper than any given conceptual description can capture, which makes it an extension of Blumenberg's emphasis on nonconceptuality and the discussion of immediate experience in Kohàk. By chapters five and six, the pieces were in place to properly consider the role of novelty in Eckhart's thought and how Eckhart took familiar material and made it unfamiliar for particular rhetorical ends. With connoisseurship and an analysis of Eckhart's rhetoric underway, an argument was made at this point for an experiential basis for Eckhart's theology.

We looked at patterns in Eckhart's use of metaphors, observing how he was consistent in his use of particular images and also how those images fit together. As we have seen in this chapter, each of his metaphors ultimately serve to describe the movement of the soul back to God, couched in the rhetoric of an individual that was appropriate to his particular historical circumstance. That is, to transcend the individual and move toward its annihilation, one must speak of the individual in ways that are consonant with the way people think of themselves as individuals. This particular rhetorical exigency informed Eckhart's choice of metaphors and his manner of speaking about the individual. Such rhetoric needed to be all the more extreme since his aim was so difficult: effecting a fundamental metaphysical reorientation that hinged upon our conception of ourselves as individual and also as paradoxically partaking in the divine in its entirety. His path back to God sounded and still sounds radical – intentionally so – but the shock that this radicality creates was simply a central device in Eckhart's ministry.

CHAPTER 7

THE METAPHORICAL GROUNDWORK FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN THOUGHT

We will consider two main areas of Eckhart's thought that lay the groundwork for the development of the modern worldview. First, as we saw in chapter one especially with the nominalists, the compression of the hierarchy of beings enables a reconceptualization of what man is and how people can work creatively. Though Eckhart's thought is tightly intertwined with the medieval view of the cosmos, the seeds are planted for the compression of the hierarchy with respect to the individual even if the hierarchy itself remains intact. Second, the practical focus of Eckhart's theology fits well with the more pragmatic and individualistic modern approach to religion. This will conclude our study and prepare us for reflection in the epilogue on the relevance of Eckhart's thought to the contemporary world.

7.1 Compression of the hierarchy

In a move that points directly to the collapsing of hierarchical levels, Eckhart says,

> The thought came to me last night that God's highness depends on my lowliness; by my lowering myself, God will be raised. … What's more, I thought last night

> that God should be brought down, not in all but in me. I liked this 'God brought down' so much that I wrote it in my book.[286]

Readers of Blumenberg might also think of Galileo's similar attempt to raise the earth to be a star, even if it effectively brought the stars down to earth[287]. This 'bringing down' of God corresponds to the leveling of the celestial hierarchy *within the individual*[288]. Eckhart's metaphor of the sphere collapsing into a circle and bringing the pole and center together applies here, with the qualification that the pole falls instead of the center rising. Eckhart explains further, "What was above is now within. You should go inside yourself, from yourself and within yourself so that he comes to be in you. Not that we take from what is above us, but that we should take into us, and from us into us."[289] Though we see Eckhart use a full-fledged medieval cosmos with regard to the rest of the created world, the soul contains in itself all levels of being. The hierarchy thereby becomes a continuum of progress for the individual soul within the individual soul.

Another metaphor for collapsing the hierarchy is that of breaking the shell, "the foot of the highest sits on the head of the lowest. All creatures do not touch God

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[286] *jch dachte zo nachte, godes hoicheit lege an miner nederheit; dar ich mych nederde, dair wirt got erhoeget. … mer ich gedachte zo nachte, dat got inthoeget solde werden, neit ey alle me ey in, ind sprycht also vyle as inthoeget got, dat myr also wayle behagede, dat ich it in myn boich schryff.* (Sermon 14, DW I 237.3-5,6-8)

[287] We might also think Cicero's comment that Socrates brought philosophy down from the heavens.

[288] This is how Eckhart understands the old theological claim that, "it is as true that man became God as it is true that God became man" (*Wan als daȝ wâr ist, daȝ got mensche worden ist, als wâr ist daȝ, daȝ der mensche got worden ist*, Sermon 46, DW II 380.5-381.1). This claim always had overtones of man's divinization and his being raised up to God or God being brought down to man. Eckhart simply presses this point and brings all its implications into the light of day with his more fully developed notion of the individual soul and its 'spark.'

[289] *dat ouen was, dat wart in. du salt geinneget werden inde van dich seluer in dich seleur, dat hey in dir sy. Neit, dat wire it nemen van deme, dat bouen ons sy; wir solent in ons nemen inde solent neimen van ons in ons seleur* (Sermon 14, DW I 237.9-12)

according to their createdness. Their createdness is what must be broken for the good to come out. The shell must be split in two for the kernel to come out. This all means a growing out."[290] In this case, the hierarchy is present, but must be broken through like the shell of a nut so that we may get to the kernel. Most creatures cannot rise above their station because they lack the higher intellect and its ability to lift the creature up above itself to what is more universal. Thus, as we saw before, "If a piece of wood knew God and apprehended how near to it he is, as the highest angel knows it, then the piece of wood would be as blessed as the highest angel."[291] And this is why, "even the lowliest creature in God possesses his great sovereignty."[292] Since Eckhart departed from Aquinas and others in his theory of analogy and insists that the transcendentals belong to God alone, this enables him to assert that created things insofar as they manifest being, truth, justice and the like are divine. Thus, his theory of analogy contains an implicit compression of the hierarchy – with the crucial 'insofar as' qualification.

We see this as well in his insistence that these things happen 'without intermediaries.' Eckhart tells us that all beings have their transcendental qualities (being, truth, unity and goodness) directly from God without an intermediary, only they

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[290] *diu oberste hât irn vuoȝ gesast ûf dernidersten scheitele. Alle crêatûren enrüerent got niht nâch der geschaffenheit, und daȝ geschaffen ist, daȝ muoȝ gebrochen sîn, sol daȝ guot her ûȝ komen. Diu schal muoȝ enzwei sîn, sol der kerne her ûȝ komen. Eȝ meinet alleȝ ein entwahsen.* (Sermon 13, DW I 212.2-6)

[291] *Weste daȝ holz got und bekente, wie nâhe er im ist, als eȝ der hœhste engel weiȝ, eȝ wære als sælic als der hœhste engel.* (Sermon 68, DW III 142.4-5)

[292] *grôȝe rîcheit hât diu minste crêatûre in got* (Sermon 52, DW II 493.4). As Walshe notes, *rîcheit* has many meanings, including wealth, sovereignty, power, and so on (Walshe 2010 425n8). This is perhaps why we see quite different translations of this passage in Davies and Colledge. All of them amount to the same thing, though. Even the lowest creature has God's greatness within it. I opted for a rendering that including the connotation of rank and highness, while making clear that it is from God and within God that the creature has it.

do not know it (*Prologue to the Book of Propositions*). God is 'brought down' to man but he is also brought down to the entire material world, with the caveat that only man has the capacity to become aware of this and see God in all things. This, ultimately, paves the way for valorizing natural knowledge and man's role in creating it with God.

7.2 Eckhart's cosmos

Eckhart lived in a distinctly medieval cosmos. This increases the contrast between what is and is not recognizably medieval in his thought. If his cosmology and conception of approximate knowledge was more broadly modern, we might simply conclude that he is more modern than medieval. Instead, however, what we see is a medieval or perhaps even ancient cosmology with rational individuals who straddle the line between ephemeral and eternal in a decidedly different way than they did in the ancient world. We might even be forgiven for wondering if the changing notion of the individual spurred more wholesale changes in worldview that were recognizably modern.

Eckhart saw a clear hierarchy of elements, descending from the heavens, to fire, air, water and earth. The earth is at the center and the cosmos consists of concentric spheres, with each of the outer spheres moving progressively faster and corresponding to the higher elements (see Sermon 81). Causes work from superior to inferior, with superior things being unaffected by the exchange (*Comm. Ioh.* n.91). Effects are present virtually in their causes, but not formally, which implies that the sun is not hot because heat is in it virtually but not formally (*Comm. Ex.* n.123)[293]. Consequently,

[293] For example, the ideas of things are virtually present in the mind of God. God is not a manifestation of those things, so the ideas are not formally present in him. Heat is ontologically below the ontological station of the sun. The sun is not hot because the idea of heat is in it *virtually*. Hot things are informed by the idea of heat and thus have heat *formally*.

lower things possess what they possess from their superiors (*Comm. Ex.* n.262). By extension, God possess all things virtually, but not formally, which means that God is not good because he is above goodness (Sermon 83). Thus to call God 'good' would demean him (Sermon 9)[294]. God precontains all things virtually and in unity, a dynamic that applies to all levels. Higher things contain many lower things virtually without disrupting their unity. The universe with all its parts proceeds from God as a unity without disturbing his unity (*Commentary on Genesis* n.3). This is why all of the transcendentals, including being, are prior to things rather than adding something to them (*General Prologue*).

All things desire to return to God and therefore tend upward in their natural motion, which is metaphorically described as 'desire'. Higher elements lift lower things up, and so the moon can cause the tides by causing water to flow uphill, contrary to its nature, because the moon is higher than water (*Book of Divine Consolation* §2). Eckhart explores the extreme of this and says, "If a man could and knew how to make a cup completely empty and keep it empty of all things that can fill it, even of air, then without doubt the cup would give up and forget all its nature, and its barren emptiness would lift it up to heaven."[295] The metaphors here of 'forgoing' and 'forgetting' are used in service of his general point that being empty of created things lifts the soul to God (*Book of Divine Consolation* §2, DW V 30.8-9). Thus, the dynamics of the physical world are the

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[294] We have no words for what God is, so we speak of God through the "veil of goodness" (*velamen veri*), "veil of truth" (*velamen boni*) and the "veil of being itself" (*velamen ipsius esse*) (Sermon XI,2, LW IV 114.4-6).

[295] *Möhte und künde der mensche einen becher zemâle îtel gemachen und îtel behalten von allem dem, daȝ vüllen mac, ouch luftes, âne zwîvel der becher verzige und vergæȝe aller sîner nature, und îtelkeit trüege in ûf biȝ an den himel.* (*Book of Divine Consolation* §2, DW V 30.5-8)

same as the dynamics of the soul. That is, the soul lives in a consistent world, where the physics of material things is not divorced from the dynamics of spiritual things. This straightforwardly follows from the fact that Eckhart's cosmos represents a sliding scale of being like Plato's divided line in the *Republic*. Natural and supernatural are utterly different for Eckhart, but they are not utterly *separate*. Nowhere is this more clearly the case than in the soul, which is both spiritual and corporeal in all ways.

7.3 Natural knowledge and curiosity

Since Eckhart advocates the life of action and insists that we never cease to be moved by earthly things, does this also make curiosity about the natural world and the pursuit of natural knowledge[296] a viable option? It does, but only in a qualified sense. Since being is the perfection of things, metaphysics investigates created things as well insofar as they have being (*General Prologue*). As God is present in all things in whole, the metaphysician still justifiably investigates even material things without losing sight of the highest. Eckhart directly addresses the question of natural knowledge in a sermon:

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[296] Since natural knowledge was not something Eckhart focused much on, we must infer from various fragments what he might have thought. His take on it appears to be largely traditional. For instance, "the known object begets itself or its species and gives birth in the knowing power. The begotten species is one common offspring in the object known and in the knowing power, as Augustine says" (EE 163; *Comm. Ioh.* n.109). Thus, we have something similar at least to Aquinas' *adaequatio intellectus ad rem*, the match of the intellect to the thing (DW I, sermon 3). For example, Eckhart refers to "a kind of equivalence of thing and intellect" (*quaedam adaequatio rei et intellectus*) with regard to 'the true' (*Verum*) (*Comm. Ioh.* n.562, LW III 490.1). Indeed, for Eckhart, to know a common object is to have an *image* of it. As we will see, although Eckhart insists upon the need for the soul to be purified of images (e.g., Sermon 2), to live at all is to be necessarily involved with images of this kind, which provide a certain motion in the mind. This motion does not need to be a hindrance to the soul, however, so long as it is done with detachment. Eckhart advocates philosophical speculation that is useful for advancing one spiritually. It is important for us to notice that the pursuit of worldly learning and scientific curiosity is not excluded by Eckhart so long as it is done with detachment. In fact, such learning may even be in the service of spiritual advancement so long as it is *useful*. It is perhaps telling that Eckhart did not follow in the footsteps of Albertus Magnus in this regard and do his own investigation of the natural world. Nevertheless, Eckhart leaves the door for such things wide open.

> Can there not be creaturely knowledge in me that does not hinder me in any way, just as God knows all things without hindrance, just as the saints do as well? This is a useful question. Now pay attention to this explanation! The saints see a single image in God and know all things in this image ... [God] has no need to turn from one thing to another as we need to do. In this life, if we could see and know all things in a single image in one glance in a mirror before us, then neither actions nor knowledge would hinder us. However, since we must turn from one to another, we cannot think of one without hinderance to the other.[297]

There can be natural knowledge without hindrance, but only insofar as we see all things in a single image which is the divine oneness in all things[298]. Ultimately, this is not entirely clear. It seems that we can pursue knowledge of individual things so long as we see them in a single image, that is, seeing them as God sees them. However, it seems that we cannot pursue such knowledge without turning from one thing to another and

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[297] *In mir enmac enkeine wîs sîn crêatiurlîches wiȥȥennes, daȥ niht enhindere, also als got alliu dinc weiȥ âne hindernisse, also als die sæligen tuont. Diȥ ist ein nütze vrâge. Nû market diȥ underscheit! Die sæligen sehent ane in gote ein bilde und in dem bilde bekennent sie alliu dinc; … Er enbedarf sich niht kêren von einem ûf daȥ ander, als wir müeȥen. Wære eȥ also in disem lebene, daȥ wir einen Spiegel vor uns hæten alle zît, in dem wir in einem ougenblicke alliu dinc sæhen und bekenten in einem bilde, sô enwære uns würken noch wiȥȥen kein hindernisse. Mêr: wan wir uns kêren müeȥen von einem ûf daȥ ander, dar umbe enmac eȥ niht an uns in einem gesîn âne hindernisse des andern* (Sermon 102, DW IV.1 417.99-418.105-7)

[298] My reading of this is informed by Eckhart's explanation of Mt. 25:21 in Sermon 64. Eckhart interprets this passage as moving from multiplicity to a unity which is over all the multiplicitous things, but still contains them. "Now I take a passage, spoken by our Lord: 'Go in, faithful servant, I will put you above all my 'good.'' This is understood in three ways. The first way: 'I will put you up above all my 'good,'' as "all my 'good'' is spread out in creatures: over the fragmentation, I will put you in oneness. The second way: as it is all united into one, I will put you over the union in oneness, as all good is in oneness. The third way: I will put you in the nature of oneness, where all 'uniting' is taken away.' *(nun nim ich ain wörtlin, sprach vnser her: 'gang in, getrüwer chnecht, ich sol dich seczen boben all mein gůt'. das ist zeuerstande[n] in dryer hand wise. Das erste: 'ich sol dich seczen enboben all mein gůt', als 'al mein gůt gespraitet ist in die creaturen: ỽber die zertailung sol ich dich seczen in ain. ze dem andern mal: als es alls versament ist in ain, ỽber die versamnunge sol ich dich seczen in aineke<i>t, da alles gůt ist in einikait. ze dem drytten mal sol ich dich seczen in die art der eini<kait>, da der nam ab ist, ‚al versament'*; Sermon 64, DW III 87.7-89.1)

thus descending into multiplicity. As he explains in the sermon, this is because the soul must flow with the powers for them to work at all, but this can bring the soul down. The soul must remove this encumbrance by divine unknowing, which Eckhart describes ironically as knowing, which is a transformed knowing (this, of course, problematizes the idea of 'knowing'). As usual, Eckhart tells us that something is impossible (a soul that knows without being hindered) only to immediately contrast it with the opposite claim (that the soul can have unhindered knowing if it is transformed by divine unknowing). As always, Eckhart's ultimate concern remains with the individual soul's ascent to God. The question of natural knowledge is a peripheral concern, addressed in this sermon only with regard to whether or not it is a hindrance, not with regard to whether it is valuable in itself. Taking this passage alongside what he says in *On Detachment*, it seems fair to conclude that the pursuit of natural knowledge is not a hindrance for a person, provided that he or she remains detached.

Eckhart's practical concern provides another clue as to his take on the pursuit of natural knowledge. As Matthew Fox concludes, "Eckhart's *via negativa*, unlike so many since his time, has nothing of anti-intellectualism to it whatsoever. You can know things – as much as there is to know – and still be free of your knowledge" (Fox 1991, 284). By 'free,' he means *detached*. As Eckhart makes abundantly clear in *On Detachment*, any external work is not valuable in itself, but only insofar as we have the proper interior disposition of detachment. When Eckhart compares hindrances to words written on a wax tablet, "If I want to write on a wax tablet, no matter how noble the things written on

it are, they prevent me from writing on it,"[299] only our attachment to things is a hindrance, not our interaction with them or knowledge of them. In fact, this conclusion seems reasonable for Eckhart, given his regard for his fellow Dominican (and perhaps also his former teacher) Albert the Great.

Thus, when Eckhart interprets the Scriptural passage "I will set you over all my goods," he interprets this as God putting us in the source of blessedness in God himself and also "over everything that can be put into words and over everything that can be understood."[300] If we are higher than all things, then we rightly govern all things, which means to provide order to them, just as superior things order their inferiors. Not only does this sanction natural knowledge since we are above all that anyone can understand, but it also implies that all such knowledge is within, if we consider man insofar as he is divine.

We have another hint from Eckhart that natural knowledge is valuable, though not for its own sake. Belief prepares us for knowledge by rushing ahead. As with Plato, this primes us for knowledge and motivates us to get the requisite experience. Knoweldge similarly sets the stage for the creation of habit. Eckhart tells us that one master expresses disgust at the idea that anything that we hear or see should take up space that could be filled by God. In response to this, he says that being involved with the senses is "a good preparation, and it will certainly help"[301] to awaken [*erwecket*] the

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[299] *Wil ich schrîben an eine wehsîn taveln, sô enmac kein dinc sô edel gesîn, daȝ an der taveln geschriben stat, eȝ enirre mich, daȝ ich niht dar ane geschrîben enmac* (*On Detachment*, DW V 425.6-8)
[300] *über alles, daȝ man geworten mac … und über alleȝ, daȝ man verstân mac* (Sermon 65, DW III 101.5-7)
[301] *ein guotiu warnunge* (Sermon 36a, DW II 192.2-3)

soul so that the "image of knowledge is naturally imprinted on her."[302] Here, Eckhart explicitly speaks against the idea that we should only be concerned with divine things and give no attention to natural knowledge. By contrast, he says, natural knowledge acquaints us with the form of knowledge and thus prepares us for divine knowledge. At all points, even though Eckhart maintains a tight orbit around God and is perpetually focused on the divine, he does not disavow natural knowledge or in any way forbid pursuing it, especially if it is done with detachment.

7.4 Eckhart's practical theology

Eckhart's theology is rooted in embodied life. This is why he is called a *Lebemeister* as well as a *Lesemeister*. By juxtaposing the most practical aspects and consequences of his thought together, we see that Christianity itself, including its dogma, practices and theology, was eminently practical for Eckhart. We will enter into this topic by looking at Eckhart's notion of living without a why and how it implies a practically-focused theology. Next, we will see how other elements of his rhetoric contribute to this. The end result will be a vision of Christianity that has a decidedly different flavor from what we often encounter today, and indeed, what people in Eckhart's day were likely accustomed to as well. This will set the stage for the closing comments about the relevance of Eckhart's thought today.

In Eckhart's cosmos, all things have a 'why,' a reason for their existence and direction of their existence, as in Aristotelian teleology. As Eckhart expresses the idea,

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[302] *daȝ bilde der kunst ist ir natiurlîche îngedrücket* [lit. 'pressed into' like a stamp into wax] (Sermon 36a, DW III 192.5)

> All things in time have a why. If you ask someone: 'why do you eat?' – 'so that I have strength'; 'why do you sleep?' – 'for the same reason'; And so it is with all things in time. But if you ask a good man, 'why do you love God?' – 'I don't know. For God'; 'why do you love truth?' – 'for truth'; 'why do you love justice?' – 'for justice'; 'why do you love goodness?' – 'for goodness'; 'why do you live?' – 'truly, I don't know! I like living!'[303]

When we speak of life, we refer to being itself, which ultimately belongs only to God. For those things that belong to God alone, we should not be surprised that they do not have a why because "A master says: 'All things have a why, but God does not have a why.'"[304] If everything lives with a why except God and Eckhart recommends that we live without a why, he is recommending that we live as God does, "God and hence the divine man does not act for the sake of a why or wherefore" (TP 207, Sermon IV,1; cf.

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[303] *Alliu dinc, diu in der zît sint, diu hânt ein warumbe. Als der einen menschen vrâgete: ‚war umbe iʒʒest du?' - ‚dar umbe, daʒ ich kraft habe'; ‚war umbe slæfest du?' - ‚umbe daʒ selbe'; und alsus sint alliu dinc, diu dâ sint in der zît. Aber ein guot mensche, der den vrâgete: ‚war umbe minnest dû got?' - ‚ich enweiʒ, umbe got'; ‚war umbe minnest dû die wârheit?' - ‚umbe die wârheit'; ‚war umbe minnest du die gerehticheit?' - ‚umbe die gerehticheit'; ‚war umbe minnest dû die güete?' - ‚umbe die güete'; ‚war umbe lebest dû?' - ‚triuwen, ich enweiʒ! Ich lebe gern!* (Sermon 26, DW II 27.3-10; cf. Sermons 5b, 27, 28, 29, 39, *Comm. Ex.* n.247)

[304] *Ein meister sprichet: alliu dinc hânt ein warumbe, aber got enhât kein warumbe* (Sermon 59, DW II 625.7-626.1). Frank Tobin tells us that this may be one of the cases where Eckhart refers to "a master" when he really means himself (TP 310n3). However, as John Connolly describes the history of the idea of living without a why, he mentions Beatrijs of Nazareth, who used the term and whose work was used by Hadewijch of Brabant and Marguerite Porete, who also used the idea (Connolly 2014, 207). Though it would be extraordinary if Eckhart was referring to any of these figures by saying "a master says," he probably was referring only to himself with this phrase, as he did on occasion. Given his connection with the Beguines in his area as part of the *cura monialem*, he would have probably been at least aware of others who used the same idea. The best reason we have for thinking Eckhart knew Porete in particular was that he stayed in the house of the chief inquisitor for Porete's trial in 1311, only one year after she was burned at the stake. Porete, of course, was probably not his source for the idea (if indeed it is not his own) since Eckhart had been using the idea at least since his earliest work in 1294, the *Counsels on Discernment*. The most we can conclude is that Eckhart's rhetoric would have left open the possibility that he was not just referring to himself by saying, "a master says."

Sermons 41, 102). Thus, while Eckhart has a largely Aristotelian teleological conception of the natural world, if man has an 'end' then his end is God, for "Our Lord created man for this unity with himself."[305] Thus, at best, Eckhart is only ironically teleological with man since his end is not an end. It is instead the erasure of all ends.

Among potential ends are ethical perfection in the virtues, love and knowledge. Eckhart asks why love is not mentioned among the commandments. He answers that love is the goal of the commandments and not something to be commanded (*Comm. Ex.* nn.94, 96). He further explains that arts always instruct us about means, not about ends (*Comm. Ex.* n.95). They are *useful* as means, but ultimately the intended end lies outside of them. This must be the case for Eckhart because love is involuntary, "We love something so far as we find God in it. Even if I had sworn to do it, I could love nothing other than goodness."[306]

As with the ethical precepts, so too with love and knowledge. Eckhart says that we must surpass our senses, "Move forward, noble soul, put on your walking shoes, which are knowledge and love. Advance thereby above your powers and above your own knowledge … and spring into the heart of God."[307] This metaphor complements the guiding metaphor of the sermon of 'sitting' which is associated with divine repose.

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[305] *Ze dirre einunge hât unser here den menschen gescaffen* (Sermon 58, DW II 616.3-4). Here we should see the contrast between this end and the end of man identified as the result of Aristotle's 'function' (*ergon*) argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

[306] *Wir enminnen niht mê dan als vil, als wir got vinden in dem, daȝ wir minnen. Und hæte ich eȝ gesworn, ich enkünde niht geminnen wan güete.* (Sermon 41, DW II 286.7-8)

[307] *Nû schrît, edeliu sêle, ziuch ane dîne schritschuohe, daȝ ist verstantnisse und minne. Dâ mite schrît über diu werk diner krefte und über dîn eigen verstantnisse … und sprinc in daȝ herze gotes.* (Sermon 90a, DW IV.1 68.156-163)

Movement, as with Aristotle, gets us there but is distinct from the end, which is repose. Of course, if love and knowledge are means, then so too are external works and devotional practices, for we have them "so as to catch a man and hold him back from foreign and ungodly things."[308] He even calls such practices "most useful" shortly thereafter as correctives[309]. This is because, on its own, "no work is good or holy or blessed."[310] Eckhart understands his approach as practical and focused on the utility of anything that can further our progress toward God, "We must indeed love the things that further our motion toward God ... If I had the desire to cross the sea and if I wanted a ship, it would be solely because I wanted to cross the sea. As soon as I had crossed the sea, I would no longer need the ship."[311] Buddhists are likely to see a strong parallel between Eckhart's ship and the Parable of the Raft, which carries the same message. If I have no more need of the 'ship' once I have crossed, am I wrong in inferring that the 'ship' includes external works, virtue, dogma and even the Church itself?

Eckhart even advises us to give up practices that are not productive since they are not good in themselves. He gives the example of someone who knows only corporeal discipline and takes up a vow of prayer. If such a person moves closer to God without it, "let him be boldly free of it."[312] The message is clear: if something else works

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[308] *daȥ der mensche dâ mite werde gevangen und enthalten von vremden und ungötlîchen dingen.* (Sermon 104a, DW IV.1 603.460-2)
[309] *nützest* (Sermon 104a DW IV.1 604.469; Sermon 104b has *nützlîchest*)
[310] *nie kein werk guot noch heilic noch sælic nie enwart* (Sermon 105a, DW IV.1 640.53-54)
[311] *Wir müeȥen diu dinc wol liep haben, diu uns ze gote vürdent; ... Hân ich die liebe, daȥ ich über mer wil, und hæte ich gerne ein schif, eȥ wære aleine, daȥ ich gerne über mer wære und als ich über mer kume, sô enbedarf ich des schiffes niht.* (Sermon 57, DW II 602.3-6)
[312] (104A) *sô sî küenlîche ledic* (Sermon 104, DW IV.1 607.532; this phrase does not appear in 104B, but a similar sense does)

better, do that instead. If only the end matters, then the prescription will be for what is most useful. In a more extreme form, we read, “Whenever a man finds himself well-ordered to true inwardness, he may boldly let go of all externality and such disciplines, even of those where he is bound by vow, from which neither pope nor bishop can release him.”[313] In light of this, consider the following statement, “All the gifts that he ever gave in heaven and on earth, he gave all so that he could give one gift: himself.”[314] This may not seem shocking until we realize that the ‘gifts’ include Scripture, the mosaic law, the Church and so on. This accords with Eckhart’s general principle: everything that God does is meant to bring us back to God. As he says, “He needs our blessedness so much that he lures us to him by any means, whether pleasant or unpleasant. God forbid that he ever permit anything that does not lure us to him.”[315] All that happens is ultimately for our own good. This principle’s foundation is likewise in utility.

At all times, Eckhart is concerned with divine oneness. All other rhetoric, ideas, dogma, Scripture, virtues, physics and cosmology have this and only this one end: to illustrate and push people usefully toward divine unity. With virtue, for example, Eckhart calls our perfections “the remedies and aids of the imperfection” and says that they

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[313] (104A) *Swenne sich aber der mensche vindet wol geordent ze wârer innerkeit, sô lâȝ küenlîche abe alle ûȝwendicheit, und wæren eȝ joch solche üebunge, ze den dû dich mit gelübede verbunden hætest, diu dir weder bâbest noch bischof abnemen enmöhten. /* (104B) *Swenne aber der mensche welle, daȝ er in einer wâren geordenten innerkeit vunden welle werden, sô sol er allen unmuoȝ von im legen der ûȝwendicheit, und wæren eȝ ouch solche üebunge, mit den dû dich mit gelübede verbunden hætest, diu dir ouch weder bâbest noch bischof abegenemen enmöhten.* (DW IV.1, Sermon 104, DW IV.1 604.477-605.485)

[314] *sunder alle die gâbe, die er ie gegap in him und ûf erden, die gap er alle dar umbe, daȝ er éine gâbe geben möhte: daȝ was er selber* (Counsels on Discernment §21, DW V 278.16-279.1)

[315] *im ist also nôt nâch unser sælicheit daȝ er uns in sich locket mit allem dem und er uns in sich mac bringen, eȝ sî gemach oder ungemach. Trutz gote, daȝ er des iemer über uns verhenge, dâ mite er uns in sich niht enlocke.* (Sermon 73, DW III 269.2-4)

would be “altogether useless if they were in and posited in God” (TP 57, *Comm. Ex.* n.44). Our virtues and perfections are therefore merely *useful* for remedying imperfections, which amounts to removing hindrances to our ascent to God. In fact, Eckhart’s account of virtue is close to Plotinus’ notion of virtue as a likeness to the divine which enables one to avoid being hindered by the material world. He continues, “how can perfections be where they do not perfect and are of no advantage, but rather corrupt and make multiple?” (TP 57, *Comm. Ex.* n.44). A few sections later, he tells us, “only those things that are defective and are not able to be self-sustaining are multiplied and numbered” (TP 59, *Comm. Ex.* n.51). Here, it seems that dogma generally may be included. If dogma is something ‘true,’ then we must consider statements like this, “the term ‘one’ adds nothing beyond existence, not even conceptually, but only according to negation. This is not so in the case of ‘true’ and ‘good’” (TP 167, *Comm. Wis.* n.148). What is true, therefore, is beneath God in multiplicity, “The True is begotten and not begetting, having its principle from another” (TP 188, *Comm. Ioh.* n.564). Eckhart has a high regard for truth, to be sure, but truth is beneath divine oneness, “truth is also something added.”[316] Eckhart values things beneath divine oneness in terms of practical utility in effecting our return to God since they are all secondary to God’s oneness.

Though this might sound outrageous so far (we are talking about Eckhart after all), let us now consider what he says about Christ. Surely, if anything in Christian dogma is too sacred to be spoken of in practical terms, it would be the Incarnation.

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[316] *wârheit ist ouch zuogeleget* (Sermon 23, DW I 401.5; cf. *Comm. Ex.* n.58)

Speaking of Christ's birth in a Christmas sermon, Eckhart says, "what does it help me if this birth is always happening and yet it does not happen in me? All that matters is that it happens in me."[317] Eckhart's statement that Christ's historical birth does not 'help' (*hilfet*) me unless it takes place in me derives from a concern for practical utility[318]. If all of creation centers around man and God does everything to effect our return to him, then even Christ's birth, which might otherwise seem to be so lofty and above us, ultimately must be seen in terms of practical utility.

Of course, this passage about the Incarnation is not an outlier. In the Latin works, Eckhart says, "It would be of little value for me that 'the Word was made flesh' for man in Christ as a person distinct from me unless he was also made flesh in me personally so that I too might be God's son."[319] Similarly, when speaking of Mary's grace, which is associated with the Immaculate Conception, Eckhart says, "What does it help me if Mary is 'full of grace' if I am not also 'full of grace'? What does it help me if the Father gives birth to his Son if I do not also give birth to him?"[320] At this point, it seems fair to conclude that nothing is off limits for Eckhart.

We also see this in Eckhart's discussion of Augustine's comments on finding much of Christianity in the books of the Platonists (those whom we generally call Neoplatonists). We may infer that Eckhart has a similarly high regard for the

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[317] *daz disiu geburt iemer geschehe und aber in mir niht engeshihet, waz hilfet mich daz? Aber daz si in mir geschehe, dâ liget ez allez ane* (Sermon 101, DW IV.1:336.4-5).
[318] DW IV.1 336.5
[319] *Parum enim mihi esset verbum caro factum pro homine in Christo, supposito illo a me distincto, nisi et in me personaliter, ut et ego essem filius dei.* (LW III 101.14-102.; *In Ioh.* n.117)
[320] *Waȥ hülfe mich, daȥ Marîa 'gnâden vol' wære, ich enwære denne ouch 'gnâden vol'? Und waȥ hülfe mich, daȥ der vater sînen sun gebære, ich engebære in denne ouch?* (Sermon 75, DW III 300.7-301.1-2)

Neoplatonists and Plato in particular since Eckhart calls him “the great priest.”[321] As Eckhart describes, Augustine tells us that he read much of the first chapter of the gospel of John in Plato (*Comm. Ioh.* n.2)[322]. This may be surprising to those not familiar with Augustine since it impinges upon the question of the uniqueness of Christianity’s message. Augustine mentioned a number of passages from John that he did not find in the Platonists’ writings. Of course, Eckhart takes this further,

> But there is still good reason to say (always presupposing the historical truth of the text) that everything that is said here [in the gospel of John], the whole verse, is contained in and taught by the properties of the things of nature, morality and art. The word universally and naturally becomes flesh in every work of nature and art and it dwells in things that are made or in which word becomes flesh. (EE 171; *Comm. Ioh.* n.124)

Eckhart tells us that he is aware of going beyond Augustine, which is unusual. Although Eckhart cites Augustine more than any other author, he mostly leans upon Augustine and cites him approvingly. Here, however, he extends Augustine significantly on the question of the ‘Word made flesh.’ If the gospel of John “is contained in and taught by the properties of the things of nature, morality and art,” then the historicity of Christianity and its claims to uniqueness begin to fade. Eckhart must have recognized this since he saw fit to include the cautionary statement “always presupposing the historical truth of the text.” For Eckhart, if God and his teaching are eternal and if God himself is infused

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[321] *der grôȥe pfaffe* (Sermon 28, DW I 67.1)

[322] Eckhart mentions Plato by name in this context althoguh Augustine refers to the books of the Platonists. Of course the “Neoplatonists” thought of themselves as Platonists, so the ambiguity is not entirely misleading.

in whole in the smallest part of all things, then we have access to God and his teaching everywhere in all things, not just in one set of historical circumstances or one set of books.

Eckhart knew he was doing something different and potentially radical. Thus, as with Augustine's appeal to Scripture to protect himself in saying that we become what we love, Eckhart refers us to the gospel of Luke where he tells the story of a woman went to Christ and said, "Blessed is the body that bore you and blessed are the breasts that you nursed," to which Christ responded that this was right, "but rather, blessed is the man who hears my word and keeps it."[323] Eckhart says, "If *I* had said to you, and if they were my own words, that a person who hears the word of God and keeps it is more blessed more blessed than Mary … I will say it again: if *I* had said it – people might be surprised. But Christ himself said it."[324]

In his vernacular sermons, Eckhart's dismissive tone reveals much about his attitude toward particular historical truths which might seem to be so sacred as to be untouchable and thus *above* us. Eckhart quotes 'a master' who says, "God became man and thereby We can rejoice that Christ, our brother, has gone of his own power over all the choirs of angels and sits at the right hand of the Father."[325] To this, Eckhart responds, "This master speaks well. But truly, I would not make too much of it. What

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[323] *sælic ist der lîp, der dich truoc, und sælic sint die brüeste, die dû gesogen hâst … Aber noch sæliger ist der mensche, der mîn wort hœret und eȝ beheltet* (Luke 11:27-28; Sermon 49, DW II 427.3-6)
[324] *Hæte ích dich gesprochen und wære eȝ mîn eigen wort, daȝ der mensche sæliger wære, der daȝ wort gotes hœret und eȝ beheltet, dan Marîâ … ich sprich aber: und hæte ích dich gesprochen, die liute möhte eȝ wundern. Nû hât eȝ Kristus selber gesprochen.* (Sermon 49, DW II 428.3-6).
[325] *Des mügen wir uns wol vröuwen, daȝ Kristus, unser brooder, ist gevarn von eigener kraft über alle kœre der engel und sitzet ze der rehten hant der vaters.* (Sermon 5b, DW I 86.1-3)

would it help me if I had a brother who was a rich man while I was a poor man? What would it help me if I had a brother who was a wise man while I was a fool?"[326] Eckhart says, "I would not make too much of it," but it is difficult to imagine more subtle, subversive rhetoric against historical significance. He seems instead to be saying, 'It isn't important at all that Christ ascended unless it also happens in us.' In the same sermon, Eckhart says of the passage, "'God sent his only-begotten Son into the world.' You should not understand this with respect to the exterior world, that he ate and drank with us. You should understand it with respect to the interior world."[327] Eckhart does not *deny* the historicity, of course, but his rhetoric consistently downplays historical significance and thus brings such sacrality 'down' to the individual soul. Though any one of these statements can shock and usefully provoke thought and movement toward God, taken all together, something more general emerges. Eckhart downplays *everything* external, including the historical Incarnation, in favor of inner growth toward God, "That this birth happens spiritually in Our Lady was more delightful to God than him being born to her bodily. That this birth happens still today, this day in the god-loving soul is more delightful to God than his creation of heaven and earth."[328] Since this

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[326] *Dirre meister hât wol gesprochen; aber wælîche, ich gæbe niht vil dar umbe. Waȥ hülfe mich, hæte ich einer bruoder, der dâ wære ein richer man und wære ich dâ bî ein armer man? Waȥ hülfe mich, hæte ich einen bruoder , der dâ wære ein wîser man, und wære ich dâ bî ein tore?* (Sermon 5b, DW I 86.3-7). I followed Fox's already fluid and effective rendering of the phrase "I would not make too much of it." Colledge and Walshe do not quite capture the blithe tone of it.

[327] *'got hât gesant sînen einbornen sun in die werlt'; daȥ sult ir niht verstân vür die ûȥwendige werlt, als er mit uns aȥ und trank: ir sult eȥ verstân vür die inner werlt.* (Sermon 5b, DW I 90.3-5)

[328] *Dô disiu geburt geschach geistlîche in unser vrouwen daȥ was gote lustlîcher, dan dô er lîplîche von ir geborn wart. Dô disiu geburt geshihet noch hiute dises tages in einer gotminnender sêle, daȥ ist gote lustlîcher, dan dô er himel und erde geschuof.* (Sermon 106a, DW IV.2 686.34-40; 106b has *loblîcher*, 'more praiseworthy,' instead of *lustlîcher*)

birth is eternal, the birth in the individual soul cannot be different than the Incarnation itself which happened in time,

> Now notice here where this birth happens. 'Where is he born?' Again I say as I have often said, this eternal birth happens in the soul in every sense that it happens in eternity, no more or less, for it is one birth. This birth happens in the essence and in the ground of the soul.[329]

The 'where' of Christ's birth is everywhere. Further, "each blessed soul is nobler than the mortal life of our Lord Jesus Christ."[330] Thus, the value of such a birth in the individual soul is *greater* than Christ's historical life. Of course, if we step back and realize that this birth is nothing less than God himself, then the statement seems more sensible. The value of the birth of the Word in the individual soul can only be greater than Christ's mortal life if God himself is born in the soul and the soul herself continues to be an individual soul throughout, though not in the way that we normally think of someone as an individual. If the birth is merely analogous to the Incarnation, then surely its significance is less than Christ's mortal life since that life enabled the Word to be brought to earth for the salvation of all. If the individual soul ceases to be individual in this birth, then the birth does not happen in the individual and such a statement reduces to an assimilation of the soul into eternity, like a drop of water in a cask of wine. In other

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[329] *Nû merket hie von dirre geburt, wâ si geschehe. 'Wâ ist, der geborn ist?' Ich spriche aber, als ich mâ gesprochen hân, daȝ disiu êwige geburt geschihet in der sêle in aller der wîse, als si geschihet in der êwicheit, noch minner noch mê, wan eȝ ist éiniu geburt. Und disiu geburt geschihet in dem wesene und in dem grunde der sêle.* (Sermon 102, DW IV.1 407.2-6)

[330] *ieglichiu sæligiu sêle ist edeler dan der tœtlîche lîp unsers herren Jêsû Kristî.* (Sermon 87, DW IV.1 27.64-65)

words, Eckhart's notion of what an individual is enables and shapes his most shocking pronouncements.

Eckhart's comments about Christ are ostentatious, clearly advertising most of their significance to Eckhart's audience. Less obvious is the *lack* of personality in his conception of God. The more we read from Eckhart on what God is and does, the more he looks like a necessary force rather than a divine personality. For example, "all the prayers and good works that man can work in time move God's detachment as little as if no prayer or good work had ever happened anywhere in time."[331] This statement does much to remove the possibility of emotion and vicissitude from God, often thought to be essential elements of human personality. Of course, we might notice at this point that personality conceived of in this way necessarily implies imperfection. Without such emotional whimsy and the possibility of being blown here and there by the emotion that builds as a product of a chain of events, such an indiviudal would appear coldly measured and governed entirely by reason. This, of course, fits well with Eckhart's conception of the well-ordered soul. He would object to such an individual being called 'cold' since excitation and movement necessarily remain possibilities as a consequence of our being human. Nevertheless, those are human qualities that result from the soul's interaction with a body, not qualities that are rightly superimposed upon God.

Eckhart consistently depicts God as moving necessarily, not by what we might want to call 'free will.' We must note however that Eckhart thinks about free will very differently than we typically do. For Eckhart, a will is free if it is one with God, that is, if

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[331] *allez daz gebet und guotiu werk, diu der mensche in der zît mac gewürken, daz gotes abegescheidenheit also wênic dâ von beweget wirt, als ob niendert gebet noch guotez werk in der zît beschæhe* (*On Detachment*, DW V 414.2-4)

one's personal will has been entirely annihilated along with all worldly concern as part of the annihilation of self. As he says, "As long as the will remains untouched by all creatures and all creation, then it is free."[332] Described more fully, this means,

> God does not *force* the will. He rather places it in freedom so that it wills nothing other than God himself in such a way that it wishes nothing other than what God himself is and what freedom itself is. The spirit can will nothing other than what God wills. This is not its bondage but its proper freedom. Now some people say, 'If I have God and God's love, I can indeed do anything I want.' They understand these words incorrectly. So long as you will anything against God and his commandment, you do not have God's love[333]

Therefore, a will that is corrupted by attachment to worldly things is not free and is subject to their vicissitudes[334]. Only by removing our created will and self do we return to a state of innate freedom whereupon our will becomes God's will. This enables Eckhart to conclude that "any activity and work that are free are properly divine" (TP 69, *Comm. Ex.* n.75). Thus, with this understanding of free will, God by definition has free will. We might therefore rightly conclude that Eckhart's God, along with his conception

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[332] *Die wile der wille stât unberüeret von allen crêatûren und von aller geschaffenheit, sô ist der wille vrî*. (Sermon 5b, DW I 94.2-3)

[333] *Got entbetwinget den willen niht, er setzet in in vrîheit, also daȥ er niht anders enwil, dan daȥ got selber ist und daȥ diu vriheit selber ist. Und der geist enmac niht anders wellen, dan daȥ got wil, und daȥ enist niht sîn unvrîheit, eȥ ist sîn eigen vrîheit. Nû sprechent etlîche menschen: ‚hân ich got und gotes mine, sô mac ich wol tuon alleȥ, daȥ ich wil'. Diȥ wort verstânt sie unrehte. Die wile dû dehein dinc vermaht, daȥ wider got ist und wider sîniu gebot, sô enhâst dû gotes mine niht;* (Sermon 29, DW II 78.2-79.3)

[334] This statement also constitutes Eckhart's response to the Free Spirit heresy of his time.

of the beatific vision, the one who experiences the birth of the Word, and life in heaven, has free will – it just looks very different than our usual conception of it.

Eckhart makes the necessity with which God acts very clear, "God must perform all of his works from necessity."[335] Already we see that the way God proceeds will be unfamiliar to us. Further, God knows and loves only himself and he knows and loves nothing outside of himself (*Summary of the Prologues*). If God only works in himself and knows in himself, then God does not know or love imperfections, including all kinds of sin. Indeed, this is the case, "God knows nothing but himself … Therefore God does not see us when we sin. And so God knows us only in so far as we exist in him: that is, insofar as we are without sin."[336] Eckhart also tells us, "he loves nothing in us except insofar as he finds us in him."[337] Again, this points to an unusual notion of personality. We typically think of the possession of our virtues and faults, including the propensity to sin, as being a sine qua non of what makes us who we are. Though Eckhart recognizes that these faults belong to the soul (naturally, since they cannot be God's), this is part of what must be shed in returning to God. In other words, our sins and faults are personal since they are ours but they are not essential to what makes us individual. For Eckhart, we may drop such flaws (and other hallmarks of what we think of as personality) without ceasing to be individual.

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[335] *Von nôt muoȝ got würken alleȝ sîniu werk* (Sermon 43, DW II 319.5-6)
[336] *Got der erkennet ouch nutz usser im … sicht unns got nitt, so wir sind in sunden. dorum also vil wir sygend in im, also vil bekennet unns got, daȝ ist so vil wir on sund sygen.* (Sermon 5a, DW I 78.6-9)
[337] *er niht in uns minnet wan als vil, als er uns in im vindet* (Sermon 41, DW II 286.6; cf. *Book of Divine Consolation* §3)

Just as God's personality may seem foreign to us, so too does Christ's. Eckhart tells us that God assumed humanity in Christ, "but not the defects that are personal sins and belong to the soul" (EE 161, *Comm. Ioh.* n.102). Thus, as God "assumed bare human nature and not any particular man. Therefore, if you would be the same Christ and God, then go out from all that the eternal Word did not assume."[338] In other words, even though this notion of personality is unfamiliar, we attain it by emptying ourselves of self. Once this happens, "When I let go of self, he must from necessity will for me everything that he wills for himself."[339]

Eckhart tells us that this process is compulsory for God, which must be metaphorical since the ideas of compulsion and oneness are not otherwise compatible. To have compulsion, we must have two things, one which compels the other. If an individual is entirely detached, God must flow in, "detachment compels God to love me."[340] This straighforwardly follows from Eckhart's dynamic of desire where I must desire what I recognize as good. By making myself like God, God recognizes himself in me and loves me as himself. This is not exactly 'necessity' in the sense of 'compulsion,' yet it lends itself to some interesting and perhaps useful possibilities for rhetoric. For example, Eckhart says that "God can no more withdraw himself from the soul than he can escape himself."[341] This is why "If God's love for us were taken away, this would

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[338] *er menschlîche natûre blôz und keinen menschen an sich nam. Dar umbe, wilt dû der selbe Krist sîn und got sîn, sô ganc alles des abe, daz daz êwige wort an sich niht ennam* (Sermon 24, DW I 420.4-7)
[339] *Dâ ich mich ane lâze, dâ muoz er mir von nôt wellen alle, daz er im selben wil* (*Counsels on Discernment* §1, DW V 187.7-9)
[340] *sô twinget abegescheidenheit got, daz er mich minne.* (*On Detachment*, DW V 402.5)
[341] *sich got der sêle niht benehman enmac, als wênic als er sînes selbes verzîhen mac* (DW IV.1 132.69; cf. *Counsels on Discernment* §1)

take away his being and his divinity, for his being flows from his loving us."[342] Of course, his divinity depends on loving us because his love for us *is* his being. Likewise, God "cannot refuse the man of humility and great desire. Wherever I cannot force God to do all things that I will, it is from a lack of humility or desire in me."[343] We first encounter such rhetoric with our conventional ideas about what it means to impose our will on something. The metaphor draws us in with its ostensible radicality, only to lead us down a useful pathway of thought.

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[342] *Der gote daȝ benæme, daȝ er uns minnet, der benæme im sîn wesen und sîne gotheit, wan sîn wesen swebet dar ane, daȝ er mich minnet.* (Sermon 41, DW II 287.3-4)
[343] *und er envermac des niht, daȝ er dem menschen iht versage, der dêmüetic und grôȝer gerunge ist. Und swâ ich got niht entwinge, daȝ er tuot alleȝ, daȝ ich wil, dâ gebristet mir eintweder dêmuot oder gerunge.* (Sermon 100, DW IV.1 273.22-23; cf. Sermons 15, 48)

EPILOGUE: THE RELEVANCE OF ECKHART TODAY

For us today, the fact that nothing is off limits for Eckhart is endearing. Further, modern Westerners often look askance at claims to know particular religious truths based on authority and the need to set aside our mechanistic worldview for faith in miraculous events. Eckhart appeals to many today because he downplays what such people have difficulty believing and focuses instead on what you can see for yourself by turning inward. Let us begin with half a quote from Huston Smith:

> How many men and women today feel themselves driven to atheism because the only version of theism they have encountered is too anthropomorphic, too person- (and therefore in the end too self-) centered, too moralistic-because-dualistic to fit the shape the God-vacuum assumes in their mystically inclined souls? (EE xv-xvi)

Eckhart's depiction of Christianity is not anthropomorphic, dualistic or moralistic. He does not emphasize blind faith or the historical significance of Christ. In fact, he does not emphasize the exclusive access to truth in Christianity at all. Eckhart's God is not jealous, whimsical or angry – in fact he is scarcely personal. These details constitute barriers for many people who stand on the outside looking in, unable to believe in them. Eckhart has a lot to offer such people. As Cyprian Smith says, what Eckhart says to us "is very different from what we are used to. If we are attracted by it and gravitate towards it, that is surely because it is something we need, something we are short of, like a missing vitamin in our diet" (Smith 1987, 14). Though a study in Eckhart's

metaphors can only hint at it, Eckhart's rhetoric simply 'works' for many people, just as some music resonates with us.

Instead of taking an authority's word for what truth is, Eckhart simply tells us to look inside, clear away all the dross of attachment to the material world (which we often suspect is corrupting and problematic anyway), and then God *must* come in and you will see for yourself. You will then be one of those who is familiar with inner things and has tasted the wine in the cellar to say firsthand that it is good[1]. In other words, Eckhart does not prescribe blind faith or unquestioning acceptance. Instead, he tells us that faith is *useful* in the same way that having confidence in a teacher is, with the understanding that we will later come to experience it and know the truth ourselves[2]. Faith motivates one to move in the right direction without knowing for certain that it is the right direction. This, I believe, is how Eckhart might respond to E.M. Cioran's quip, "What advantage would having faith be to me, since I understand Meister Eckhart just as well without it?" (Cioran 1983, 65 as cited by Milem 2002, 177). Eckhart's message extends far beyond Christianity. This does not mean, however, that the recognizably Christian elements are, as Schopenhauer implied, merely burdensome excrescences (Davies 1991, 19).

Cyprian Smith has the right response to Schopenhauer on this. He says that Eckhart wanted to remind us that the Church and its sacraments are instruments, merely means to an end, "Theology, liturgy, church hierarchy and pastoral works –

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[1] "those who have never been familiar with inward things do not know what God is. Like a man who has wine in his cellar but has never tasted it, he does not know that it is good." (*dem menschen, der von inwendigen dingen nie gewon enist, der enweiȥniht, waȥ got ist. Als ein man, hât er wîn in sînem keller und enhæte er sîn niht getrunken noch versuochet, sô enweiȥ er niht, daȥ er guot ist.* Sermon 10, DW I 164.5-8).

[2] This is the closest idea to faith that we see in Buddhism as well.

these are ultimately only means and instruments; they are not God himself" (Smith 1987, 128). Eckhart would have appreciated this, I think. If they are seen as anything more than instruments, then we mistake the way for the end and deify the instruments. Eckhart says that those who take God in only one way, "They take the way instead of God."[3] Smith summarizes the point, "He is no iconoclast or revolutionary in the sense of wanting to overthrow the existing church order; but he wants us to regard that order for what it truly is: a framework within which to seek union with the transcendent God." (Smith 1987, 128)

For some, to take Eckhart's approach, specifically Christian images and ideas carry value and usher people in the right direction. For others, they do not. As Cyprian Smith observes, "there have to be projections in the beginning; without them the spiritual life cannot get started. At first one notion of God is distorted by our personal needs and emotions; it takes time for all that to be refined and purified" (Smith 1987, 32). He continues, "Atheism and rationalism strip away the projection and leave us with nothing. That leads to nihilism and despair. [Eckhart] strips away the projections in such a manner as to unveil the truth behind them that is life-giving" (Smith 1987, 35). Even for those who cannot begin with projections or perhaps even *especially* for those who have no other starting place, Eckhart shows them a path forward, which is enough to spur movement and allow them to begin. In this way, the modern age is unusually open and well suited to mysticism, which may explain its growing popularity despite its difficulty.

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[3] *Sy niement wys und nit got.* (Sermon 5a, DW I 82.6)

A related problem to skepticism about faith and authority is the emphasis on the historical figure of Christ. As we saw, Eckhart sharply puts down the idea that Christ, including the Immaculate Conception and the Incarnation, has significance simply because it happened. Eckhart does not doubt that it happened. However, that historical fact alone is of little consequence for his theology. The significance of Christ for Eckhart is found in the divinization of humanity. And if humanity is divine, then my humanity is Christ's humanity, which is God in his entirety. The inflation of the individual in this way may represent something of an ironic return to the archetypal. As the individual rises to divinity, its accidents are shed and it becomes *archetypal*.

For Eckhart, God is necessarily one and unique, which is not an exclusive doctrine that prefers one particular conception of God over all others. Instead, Eckhart argues that one conception of God *is all there can be* according to reason, "It is impossible to have two indistinct things, for the indistinct and the One are the same … God is indistinct and indistinction itself. Therefore, it is impossible for many gods to exist. … if two gods are put forth, there will not be two gods: either none of them or one of them will be God."[4] Eckhart's God is not one that requires belief. A God with specific characteristics requires belief. Such belief amounts to belief in the rightness of those characteristics. Undifferentiated oneness is not something that you can be wrong about. Any possible notion of truth will only be coherent in multiplicity. Again, following Robert Forman's description of mysticism's progression, if you strip away enough layers, you strip away the possibility of truth itself. What is left is not a 'what' at all – though Eckhart

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[4] i*mpossibile est duo vel indistincta. Indistinctum enim et unum idem … deus indistinctus est et indistinctum. Igitur impossibile est esse plures deos. … si ponantur duo dii, non erunt duo dii, sed aut nullus eorum deus aut unicus erit deus* (*Comm. Wis.* n.146, LW II 484.6-8,10-11)

might call it a ‘something’ or declare that God is ‘omninameable’ while at the same time embracing apophatic negation. The negation of negation is not a *claim.* It is not the sort of thing that one can be wrong about. Consequently, belief does not apply.

The idea of the Incarnation was made possible by a reconceptualization of the individual. In the years following Christ’s life, the idea of a God-man was opposed since, according to the Platonic notion of the individual as ephemeral and in transitory, how could a man be both universal and particular, God and man? Eckhart amplifies this in a new form by bringing God in his entirety to the smallest part of the world (since everything has its being from God without intermediary and being belongs solely to God) and insisting that each individual soul shares its humanity, which is divine, with Christ. His tight orbit around God is in dialectical motion whereby he emphasizes this element, leaves it briefly to talk about the familiar, mundane versions of his metaphors, only to plunge again into the divinity of the soul and joyously splash about.

Where Eckhart is most useful in our current environment is in his emphasis on living ‘without a why.’ People today have problems deriving meaning and significance from a world of lifeless efficient causes. Meaning derives from either aesthetics or purpose[5]. Blumenberg observed that a world where meaning is presupposed in all things makes each thing open to an investigation of its ‘why’ (CCR 54)[6]. Further, if we

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[5] With aesthetic meaning, we should think of Plato’s account of Beauty in the Phaedrus and Symposium. With meaning that derives from purpose, we should think of Aristotle’s teleology.

[6] Blumenberg comes close to equating meaning with teleology here since he says that a world full of meaning would imply that everything had a purpose. That is, nothing would be meaningless. We should distinguish, however, between the *understanding* that things have meaning and the *feeling* that things have meaning. To say that things are rationally meaningful is to imply that things have reasons for being, which is teleological. By contrast, to say that things *feel* meaningful refers, it seems to me, to the *motion*

lose certainty at the most basic level of what an individual thing even is, any meaning or significance based on those things becomes suspect as well. In other words, our current understanding of the physical world demands skepticism all the way down. Eckhart's insistence on living without a why short circuits this problem. The problem of meaning evanesces with the self[7]. To live without a why is also to not *need* a why[8]. Ironically, this restores meaning by eliminating the need for it. If nothing is sacred, then that opens up the possibility for *everything* to become sacred.

A similar situation arises with the natural and supernatural. We too often associate the supernatural with the miraculous. This puts it in direct opposition to the modern worldview. As Kohàk observes, "Nature appears dead to us in great part because we have grown accustomed to thinking of God as 'super-natural,' absent from nature and not to be found therein" (Kohàk 1984, 182). Eckhart's intensification of meaning by insisting on God being present in all things breaks this boundary. This is perhaps another useful shade of meaning in Eckhart's metaphor of 'boiling over.' Smith tells us that "Ideally there should be no distinction in our lives between the sacred and the profane at all. …. we want the holy to overflow all boundaries and engulf everything" (Smith 1995, 107). The opposites meet and enable the possibility of everything taking on meaning as we shed what we mistakenly believe to be good in worldly things.

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with which one lives in the service of a particular intention. Though intentions may have proper Aristotelian ends such as when I intend to build something, the most pleasant kind of intentionality comes from engaging in an activity for its own sake – in other words, living without a why.

[7] We see the same dynamic with the parable of the Poison Arrow in Buddhism. Ultimately, eschewing unnecessary questions results in one seeing firsthand that they are unnecessary. The solution of the problems is found in the dissolution of the problems.

[8] Bruce Milem noticed a similar possibility as well, though he did not mention living without a why in this context, "Detachment serves as an image of God by challenging the worth and necessity of creation considered simply by itself. This challenge, paradoxically, may for some restore to the world the value that it initially took away, since it sees the world as an expression of mysterious creativity" (Milem 2002, 111).

Nihilism, a vacuum of meaning, is the other possibility that is regrettably common today as it is often accepted with resignation, for lack of anything else being believable. It is here that Eckhart's thought is most useful in showing us how to revive meaning without necessarily throwing out our way of understanding the physical world.

Eckhart is a bridge between East and West, a bridge between the exclusivism and dogmatism of lay Christianity before the 'death of God' and the direction that religion is going in the future. Figures like Eckhart will be increasingly important for us as we collectively think through and select out the features and practices of religions are fit to be living, breathing options for people today. And now let us allow Huston Smith to complete the other half of his thought by giving him the last word:

> As the theism they see seems childish and sentimental, some in this camp accept materialism as the only way to live without lying, while others gravitate to Zen or Vedanta or Sufism where their drive for total self-transcendence … is recognized and welcomed at the door. No task is more important for the Church than to let such persons know that behind its outer doors that are always open stands another that is closed – closed though accessible to those who knock. … Meister Eckhart will be among those waiting to welcome those who enter. (EE xvi)

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APPENDIX A

TRANSLATIONS OF ECKHART'S WORKS

The following translations were made using the critical editions of Eckhart's works. I selected the works based on their special relevance to my project's focus. Each piece highlights one or more important aspects of Eckhart's rhetoric and demonstrates his unusual rhetoric with respect to the notion of the individual. In each case, I benefitted from the notes in the critical edition and the translations available in English, French and German.

I made very few changes to excellent work of Josef Quint and others on the text in the critical edition. Whenever I made minor interpretative changes to the text, they derived from the notes in the critical edition, as I described in the footnotes. Most noticeably, I substituted the character 'ȝ' instead of 'z' when appropriate. This is because the 'z' in Middle High German represents two very different phonemes. The 'z' (beginning words and after consonants) was likely pronounced like the modern German 'z' (i.e., as an Anglophone might say 'tz'), while the 'ȝ' (after vowels) was pronounced like the modern German lisped 's' or 'ß'. This is in contrast to the Middle High German 's', which was probably pronounced somewhere between the modern German voiceless 's' and 'sch'. In Middle High German, beginning around 1250 (right around the time of Eckhart's birth), we see increasing confusion between the 'ȝ' and 's' sounds, as evidenced by rhymes and variations in spellings (Walshe 1974, 11). In general, I find

that reading the original with ‘ʒ’ helps since it makes pronunciation clearer and thus brings the medieval text closer to modern German than is otherwise apparent.

DW III Sermon 64

Die sele die wirt ain mit gotte vnd nit veraint
The soul is one with God and not united

Die sele die wirt ain mit gotte vnd nit veraint

[Die geschrift spricht:] die sele die wirt ain mit gotte vnd nit veraint. des nement ain glichnüsß. füllet man ain vass wassers, so ist das wasser im vas veraint vnd nit ain, wann da[s] wasser ist, da[s] ist nit holcz, vnd da holcz ist, da ist nit wasser. nu nement das holcz vnd wefent das enmitten in das wasser, so ist doch das holcz nit wan veraint vnd nit ain. also ist es vmb die sele nit; die wirt ain mit gotte vnd nit veraint; won wa got ist, da ist die sele, vnd wa die sel ist, da ist got.

Die geschrift sprichet: 'Moyses sache got von antlüte'. das wider sprechent die maister vnd sprechen<t> also: wo zway antlüte erschinent, da sicht man gotes nit; wann got ist ain vnd nit zway; wann wer got sicht, der sich<t> nit won ain.

nun nim ich ain wort, das ich sprach in dem ersten sermon: 'got ist mynne, vnd der in der mynne ist, der ist in got, vnd er ist in ime'. der also in minne ist, ze dem sprich ich ain wörtlin, das sprichet sanctus *matheus:* 'gang in, getrüwer chnecht, in die fröd deins herren'. nun nim ich ain wörtlin, sprach vnser her: 'gang in, getrüwer chnecht, ich sol dich seczen boben all mein gůt'. das ist

Die sele die wirt ain mit gotte vnd nit veraint
The soul is one with God and not united

The soul is one with God and not united. Think of this by way of a parable: as one fills a vessel with water, so the water in the vessel is united to the vessel but not one with it. For where the water is, the wood is not. And where the wood is, the water is not. Now take the wood and throw it in the middle of the water. Still, the wood is only united with it and not one with it. It is not like this with the soul. The soul becomes one with God and not united. For where God is, there the soul is. And where the soul is, there God is.

Scripture says: “Moses saw God face to face” (Ex. 33:11). The masters speak against this and say: where two faces appear, one does not see God. For God is one and not two. For whoever sees God, sees nothing apart from one.

Now I will take the passage I spoke of in the first sermon[1]: “God is love, and he who is in love is in God, and He is in him” (1 John 4:16). To he who is in love, I would mention a little passage that Saint Matthew said: “Go in, faithful servant, into the joy of your Lord” (Matt. 25:21). Now I take a passage, spoken by our Lord: “Go in, faithful servant, I will put you above all my ‘good.’”[2] This is

[1] Sermon 63

[2] In characteristic fashion, Eckhart cobbles together pieces of the original and makes important changes. Matthew 25:21 in the Vulgate reads, “Ait illi dominus eius: Euge serve bone, et fidelis: quia super pauca fuisti fidelis, super multa te constituam; intra in gaudium domini tui.” This means, “And his Lord said to him: Well done, good and faithful servant. Because you have been faithful over a few things, I will make

zeuerstande[n] in dryer hand wise. Das erste: 'ich sol dich seczen enboben all mein gůt', als 'al mein gůt gespraitet ist in die creaturen: v̈ber die zertailung sol ich dich seczen in ain. ze dem andern mal: als es alls versament ist in ain, v̈ber die versamnunge sol ich dich seczen in aineke<i>t, da alles gůt ist in einikait. ze dem drytten mal sol ich dich seczen in die art der eini<kait>, da der nam ab ist, ‚al versament'; da ist got der sele, als er darvmb got sy, das er der sele sy; wan wäre das, das got it seines wesens oder seiner istikait, da mit er im selber ist, behübe das got vor der sele als groß als gegen ainem hare, er möcht nit got sein; als gar ain wirt die sele mit got. ich nim ain wörtlin aus dem ewangelio, das vnser herr sprach: 'ich bitte dich, vater, als ich vnd du ain sint, das sy werdent also mit vns'. ich nim ain ander wörtlin auch aus dem ewangelio, da vnser herr sprach: 'da ich pin, da sol auch mein diener sein'. also gar wirt die sele ain istikait, die got ist, vnd nit minder; vnd das ist als war, als got got ist.

lieben chind, ich bitt üch, das ir mercken<t> ainen sin! des bitt ich üch durch got, vnd bitte üch, das ir es tůgent durch myn willen vnd disen sin wol behaltent. Alle, die also sind in ainichait, als ich e sprach, won die ăne bildunge sind, so dürffens nit wänen, das in bildung wäger wär, <dan> das sü si<n> nit ausgangen von ainichait; wann wer das täte, das wär vnrecht, vnd man möchti sprechen, es wär checzerey; wan wissent, das da in der ainichait ist weder

understood in three ways. The first way: “I will put you up above all my ‘good,’” as “all my ‘good’” is spread out in creatures: over the fragmentation, I will put you in oneness[3]. The second way: as it is all united into one, I will put you over the union in oneness, as all good is in oneness. The third way: I will put you in the nature of oneness, where all 'uniting' is taken away. There, God is the soul's, as if he is God so that he may be the soul's. So completely does the soul become one with God that if God were to hold back from the soul as much as a single hair of his being or his is-ness where He is in Himself, he would not be God. Consider a passage from Scripture, where our Lord says: “I ask you, Father, just as you and I are one, that they might also become one with us” (John 17:21). Take another passage from Scripture, where our Lord says: “where I am, my servant should be there too” (John 12:26). The soul becomes so completely one is-ness, which is God and nothing less. This is entirely true, as God is God.

Dear children, I implore you to understand this one meaning! I ask this through God and I ask you to become fit for this and closely preserve this meaning for my sake. As I said before, though all who are in oneness are without images, they must not imagine that they would be better off in images than in not going out from oneness. For whoever would do this would be wrong. One may even say it was heresy. You should know that in oneness is neither Conrad nor Henry. I

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you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.” Eckhart changes ‘many things’ to ‘all my good’, which could be singular (referring to what is good) or plural (referring to many goods, that is, many things) and may refer to God's goodness, contra Walshe’s translation as ‘goods’. This is in line with DW III 88n1 which includes commentary on this and many manuscript versions which consistently use the singular in quotes.

[3] Here, ‘ain’ is rendered as ‘oneness’ for clarity since Eckhart’s ‘ain’ (one) is set in contrast to ‘zertailung’ (fragmentation, division).

chůnrat noch heinrich. ich wil üch sagen, wie ich der läute gedenck: ich fleiß mich des, das ich mein selbs vnd aller menschen vergesse, vnd füge mich für sy in ainichait.

das wir in ainichait beleiben, das helf vns got. Amen.

will tell you how I think of people: I flow myself out to them so that I forget myself and all men, and for them I give myself over into oneness.

God help us to stay in oneness. Amen.

DW I Sermon 2

Intravit Iesus in quoddam castellum
Jesus went up into a little castle

Intravit Iesus in quoddam castellum et mulier quaedam, Martha nomine, excepit illum in domum suam. Lucae II.

Ich hân ein wörtlîn gesprochen des êrsten in dem latîne, daz stât geschriben in dem êwangeliô und sprichet alzô ze tiutsche; 'unser herre Jêsus Kristus der gienc ûf in ein bürgelîn und wart enpfangen von einer juncvrouwen, diu ein wîp was'.

Eyâ, nû merket mit vlîze diz wort: ez muoz von nôt sîn, daz si ein juncvrouwe was, der mensche, von der Jêsus wart enpfangen. Juncvrouwe ist alsô vil gesprochen als ein mensche, der von allen vremden bilden ledic ist, alsô ledic, als er was, dô er niht enwas. Sehet, nû möhte man vrâgen, wie der mensche, der geborn ist und vor gegangen ist in vernünftic leben, wie er alsô ledic müge sîn aller bilde, als dô er niht enwas, und er weiz doch vil, daz sint allez bilde; wie mac er denne ledic sîn? Nû merket daz underscheit, daz wil ich iu bewîsen. Wære ich alsô vernünftic, daz alliu bilde vernünfticlîche in mir stüenden, diu alle menschen ie enpfiengen und diu in gote selber sint wære ich der âne eigenschaft, daz ich enkeinez mit eigenschaft hæte begriffen in tuonne noch in lâzenne, mit vor noch mit nâch, mêr: daz ich in disem gegenwertigen nû vrî und ledic stüende nâch dem liebesten willen gotes und den

Intravit Iesus in quoddam castellum et mulier quaedam, Martha nomine, excepit illum in domum suam. (Lk. 10 :38)
Jesus went up into a little castle

I have spoken a few words first in Latin that are written in the gospel and mean this in German: “Our lord Jesus Christ went up into a little castle and was received[4] by a virgin, who was a wife.”

Ah yes, now listen carefully to these words: it must be from necessity that the person who received Jesus was a virgin. A person is rightly spoken of as a virgin if he is free of all foreign images, as free as he was when he was not. See, now one may ask, how a person who is born and proceeds in a rational life can also be free of all his images, as when he was not. He knows many things, after all, which are all images. How then can he be free? Now take note of this explanation which will make you understand: were I so rational that all rational images were in me that all people had ever received and all those that were in God himself, and if I were without attachment, having not grasped[5] with attachment in doing or leaving anything undone, without looking to past or future, then I would stand free and unhindered in this present moment in God's dearest will in uninterrupted doing. In truth, I would be a virgin, truly

[4] *enpfangen* - receive/conceive. This dual meaning is important for Eckhart in this sermon. The Latin 'excepit' has the same connotations, meaning both 'receive' and also 'draw out'.
[5] In Middle High German, ‘begriffen’ as a verb means ‘to grasp’ while as a noun it means ‘concepts’ (i.e., things that are grasped). Thus, Eckhart’s audience would have heard both the pair ‘attachment/grasped and also ‘attachment/concepts’, which works nicely for his purposes.

ze tuonne âne underlâz, in der wârheit sô wære ich juncvrouwe âne hindernisse aller bilde als gewærlîche, als ich was, dô ich niht enwas.

Ich spriche aber: daz der mensche ist juncvrouwe, daz enbenimet im nihtes niht von allen den werken, diu er ie getete; das stât er megetlich und vrî âne alle hindernisse der obersten wârheit, als Jêsus ledic und vrî ist und megetlich in im selber. Als die meister sprechent, daz glîch und glîch aleine ein sache ist der einunge, her umbe sô muoz der mensche maget sîn, juncvrouwe, diu den megetlîchen Jêsum enpfâhen sol.

Nû merket und sehet mit vlîze! Daz nû der mensche iemer mê juncvrouwe wære, sô enkæme keine vruht von im. Sol er vruhtbære werden, sô muoz daz von nôt sîn, daz er ein wîp sî. Wîp ist daz edelste wort, daz man der sêle zuo gesprechen mac, und ist vil edeler dan juncvrouwe. Daz der mensche got enpfæhet in im, daz ist guot, und in der enpfenclicheit ist er maget. Daz aber got vruhtbærlich in im werde, daz ist bezzer; wan vruhtbærkeit der gâbe daz ist aleine dankbærkeit der gâbe, und dâ ist der geist ein wîp in der widerbernden dankbærkeit, dâ er gote widergebirt Jêsum in daz veterlîche herze.

Vil guoter gâben werdent enpfangen in der juncvröuwelicheit und enwerdent niht wider îngeborn in der wîplîchen vruhtbærkeit mit dankbærem lobe in got. Die gâbe verderbent und wedent alle ze

unimpeded by all images, as I was when I was not.

Yet I say: that a man is a virgin takes nothing from him. It takes nothing from all his works and all he ever did. He remains virginal and free without any hindrance to the highest truth, as the unhindered and free Jesus is maidenly in himself. As the masters say, oneness is through likeness and likeness alone. In this way so must a man be a maid, a virgin, who shall receive the maidenly Jesus.

Now mark well what I say and look carefully![6] For now if a man always remained a virgin, then no fruit would come from him. For him to become fruitful, from necessity he must be a wife. “Wife” is the noblest word that one can say of a soul, much nobler than “virgin.” For a man to receive[7] God in himself, that is good, and in the receptivity he is a virgin. That again God becomes fruitful in him, that is better. The only gratitude for a gift is to be fruitful with it. And there is the spirit of the wife in giving birth again in gratitude. There she gives birth to Jesus back into God, into his fatherly heart.

Many great gifts are received in virginity and are not again born back into God in return in wifely fruitfulness with grateful praise. The gifts all spoil and come to nothing, so that man becomes

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[6] As *vlîze* can mean ‘zeal’ or ‘assiduous,’ there is a connotation of energy that isn't quite captured by saying ‘look carefully!’ We don't normally say ‘look with energy!’

[7] Edmund Colledge (EE 178) has “conceives” and “conceiving” here for *enpfæhet* and *enpfenclicheit*. Since *enpfæhet* can mean “receive” or “conceive,” this isn't necessarily wrong, but here Eckhart is still talking about the limitation of the virgin in her receiving. The conceiving is giving birth to the Son back to God, which is the province of the wife. This conception is what Eckhart refers to in the next sentence. Saying that a man ‘conceives God’ and then saying that God becomes fruitful in him is better (which means that he conceives God) would be strange. This would be like saying that “man conceives God, but it is better if man conceives God.” Note that Bruce Milem and Reiner Schürmann both chose “receive” here.

nihte, daz der mensche niemer sæliger noch bezzer dar abe wirt. Dâ enist im sîn juncvröuwelicheit ze nihte nütze, wan er niht ein wîp enist zuo der juncvröuwelicheit mit ganzer vruhtbærkeit. Dar an lît der schade. Dar umbe hân ich gesprochen: 'Jêsus gienc ûf in ein bürgelîn und wart enpfangen von einer juncvrouwen, diu ein wîp was'. Daz muoz von nôt sîn, als ich iu bewiset hân.

Elîche liute die bringent des jâres lützel mê dan eine vruht. Aber ander êlîche liute die meine ich nû ze disem mâle: alle die mit eigenshaft gebunden sint an gebete, an vastenne, an wachenne und aller hande ûzerlîcher üebunge und kestigunge. Ein ieglîchiu eigenschaft eines ieglîchen werkes, daz die vrîheit benimet, in disem gegenwertigen nû gote ze wartenne und dem aleine ze volgenne in dem liehte, mit dem er dich anwîsende wære ze tuonne und ze lâzenne in einem ieglîchen nû vrî und niuwe, als ob dû anders niht enhabest noch enwellest noch enjünnest: ein ieglîchiu eigenschaft oder vürgesetzet werk, daz dir dise vrîheit benimet alle zît niuwe, daz heize ich nû ein jâr; wan dîn sêle bringet dekeine vruht, si enhabe daz werk getân, daz dû mit eigenschaft besezzen hâst, noch dû engetriuwest gote noch dir selber, dû enhabest dîn werk volbrâht, daz dû mit eigenschaft begriffen hâst; anders sô enhâst dû dekeinen vride. Dar umbe sô enbringest dû ouch dekeine vruht, dû enhabest dîn werk getân. Daz setze ich vür ein jâr, und diu vruht ist nochdenne kleine, wan si ûz eigenschaft gegangen ist nâch dem werke und niht von vriheit. Dise heize ich êlîche liute, wan sie an eigenschaft gebunden stânt. Dise bringent lützel vrühte, und diu selbe ist nochdenne kleine, als ich gesprochen hân.

Ein juncvrouwe, diu ein wîp ist, diu ist vrî und ungebunden âne eigenschaft, diu

neither blessed nor better through them. His virginity is useless to him, for he is not a wife as well in his virginity with all fruitfulness. Therein lies the loss. I have said on that account: “Jesus went up into a little castle and was received by a virgin, who was a wife.” That must be from necessity, as I have made known to you.

Married people bring forth little more than one fruit in a year. But now I mean other married people: all of those who are bound with attachment to prayer, fasting, vigils and all kinds of exterior exercises and mortification. Any attachment to any works takes away the freedom to attend to God in this present now and follow Him alone in the light in which he shows you what to do and what to leave undone, renewed and free in every present moment, as if you did not possess, nor desire, nor even could do anything else. Every attachment or premeditated work that deprives you of this freedom in each new moment, I now call a 'year.' For your soul brings forth no fruit if it has not done that work that possessed you with attachment, having neither trust in God nor in yourself unless you accomplished the work that you have grasped with attachment. Otherwise, you have no peace. Therefore you do not bring forth any fruit until you have done your work. I reckon that as a year, and your fruit is small indeed, for it comes from attachment to the work and not from freedom. I call these married people, for they remain bound to attachment. They bring forth little fruit, and what they do bring forth is indeed small, as I have said.

A virgin who is a wife is free and unbound, without attachment. She is

ist gote und ir selber alle zît glîch nâhe. Diu bringet vil vrühte und die sint grôz, minner noch mêr dan got selber ist. Dise vruht und dise geburt machet disiu juncvrouwe, diu ein wîp ist, geborn und bringet alle tage hundert mâl oder tûsent mâl vruht joch âne zal gebernde und vruhtbære werdende ûz dem aller edelsten grunde; noch baz gesprochen: jâ, ûz dem selben grunde, dâ der vater ûz gebernde ist sîn êwic wort, dar ûz wirt si vruhtbære mitgebernde. Wan Jêsus, daz lieht und der schîn des veterlîchen herzen - als sant Paulus sprichet, daz er ist ein êre und ein schîn des veterlîchen herzen, und er durchliuhtet mit gewalte daz veterlîche herze - dirre Jêsus ist mit ir vereinet und si mit im, und si liuhtet und schînet mit im als ein einic ein und als ein lûter klâr lieht in dem veterlîchen herzen.

Ich hân ouch mê gesprochen, daz ein kraft in der sêle ist, diu berüeret niht zît noch vleisch; si vliuzet ûz dem geiste und blîbet in dem geiste und ist zemâle geistlich. In dirre kraft ist got alzemâle grüenende und blüejende in aller der vröude und in aller der êre, daz er in im selber ist. Dâ ist alsô herzenlîchiu vröude und alsô unbegrifelîchiu grôze vröude, daz dâ nieman volle abe gesprechen kan. Wan der êwige vater gebirt sînen êwigen sun in dirre kraft âne underlâz, alsô daz disiu kraft mitgebernde ist den sun des vaters und sich selber den selben sun in der einiger kraft des vaters. Hæte ein mensche ein ganzez künicriche oder allez daz guot von ertrîche und lieze daz lûterlîche durch got und würde der ermesten menschen einer, der ûf ertrîche iener lebet, und gæbe im denne got alsô vil ze lîdenne, als er ie menschen gegap,

equally near God and herself at all times. She brings forth many fruits, and these are great, neither less nor more than God himself is. This virgin who is a wife makes this fruit and this birth, giving birth and bringing forth every day one hundred or one thousand fruits, even without number, by giving birth and bearing fruit out of the noblest ground. Or to say it even better: yes, out of that same ground the Father is giving birth to His eternal Word and from there she fruitfully gives birth with him. For Jesus, the light and likeness of the fatherly heart - as St. Paul said, he is the glory and likeness of the fatherly heart and he powerfully shines through the fatherly heart – this Jesus is united with her and she with him. She radiates and shines with him as one single one [*ein einic ein*[8]] and as a pure and clear light in the fatherly heart.

I have also said more: there is a power in the soul which touches neither time nor flesh. It flows out of the spirit and remains in the spirit and is wholly spiritual. In this power God is all at once verdant and blossoming in all the joy and in all the glory that He is in Himself. That is a joy so heartfelt, a joy so incomprehensible, an abundance of which no one can speak. For the eternal father gives birth to his Son in this power ceaselessly. Also, this power is giving birth to the Son along with the Father and to itself in this one power of the Father. If a man had an entire kingdom or all the goods of the earth and let it go purely through God and became one of the poorest men who ever lived on earth, and God gave him as much to suffer as he ever gave a man, and he endured all this unto his death and God gave him a single glance for him

[8] *ein einic ein* - difficult to render in English since ‘a,’ ‘single’ and ‘one’ neither sound alike nor look alike. Eckhart’s expression probably stood out to his listeners, so my rendering “one single one” may sound a little odd so as to stand out in the same way - at least it stands out in a way “a single one” does not.

und lite er allez diz unz an sînen tôt und gæbe im denne got einen blik ze einem mâle ze schouwenne, wie er in dirre kraft ist: sîn vröude würde alsô grôz, daz alles diss lîdens und armüetes wære nochdenne ze kleine. Jâ, engæbe im joch got her nâch niemer mê himelrîches, er hæte nochdenne alze grôzen lôn enpfangen umbe allez, daz er ie geleit; wan got ist in dirre kraft als in dem êwigen nû. Wære der geist alle zît mit gote vereinet in dirre kraft, der mensche enmöhte niht alten; wan daz nû, dâ got den êrsten menschen inne machete, und daz nû, dâ der leste mensche inne sol vergân, und daz nû, dâ ich inne spriche, diu sint glîch in gote und enist niht dan ein nû. Nû sehet, dirre mensche wonet in einem liehte mit gote; dar umbe enist in im noch lîden noch volgen sunder ein glîchiu êwicheit. Disem menschen ist in der wârheit wunder abe genomen, und alliu dinc stânt weselîche in im. Dar umbe enpfæhet er niht niuwes von künftigen dingen noch von keinem zuovalle, wan er wonet in einem nû alle zît niuwe âne underlâz. Alsolîchiu götlîchiu hêrschaft ist in dirre kraft.

Noch ein kraft ist, diu ist ouch unlîplich; si vliuzet ûz dem geiste und blîbet in dem geiste und ist zemâle geistlich. In dirre kraft ist got âne underlaz glimmende und brinnende mit aller sîner rîcheit, mit aller sîner süezicheit und mit aller sîner wunne. Wærlîche, in dirre kraft ist alsô grôziu vröude und alsô grôziu, unmæzigiu wunne, daz neiman vollen dar abe gesprechen noch geoffenbâren kan. Ich spriche aber: wære ein einic menche, der hie inne schouwete vernünfticlîche in der wârheit einen ougenblik die wunne und die vröude, diu dar inne ist: allez daz er gelîden möhte und daz got von im geliten wolte hân, daz wære im allez kleine und joch nihtes niht; ich spriche

to see of how He is in this power: his joy would be so great that all this suffering and poverty would then be too little. Yes, if God then never more gave him the kingdom of heaven, he would have already received so great a reward for that he ever suffered, for God is in this power as He is in the eternal now. If the spirit were united with God for all time in this power, the man could not grow old. God made the first man in this now, and in this now the last man will pass away. I say, in this now, they are alike in God and there is not more than one now. Now see, the man lived in one light with God. On that account there is not in him either suffering or the succession of time, but an eternal likeness. From this man all wonder has truly been taken away. All things stand in him in their essences. Therefore he receives nothing new from things to come nor from anything that happens, for he lives anew for all time in the single now without ceasing. Such is the divine sovereignty in this power.

There is another power that is also incorporeal. It flows out of the spirit and remains in the spirit and is entirely spiritual. In this power God is ceaselessly gleaming and burning with all his riches, with all his sweetness and with all his delight. Truly, in this power is so great a joy and such an immeasurably great delight that no one can fully reveal it or speak of it. Yet I say: if there were a single man to rationally look herein and glimpse in truth for a single moment the delight and joy that is in there, all that he may suffer and all that God would have had him to suffer would be too little for him and indeed nothing. I say yet more: it would be at once a joy and a resting place for him.

noch mê: ez wære im alzemâle ein vröude und ein gemach.

Wilt dû rehte wizzen, ob dîn lîden dîn sî oder gotes, daz solt dû her an merken: lîdest dû umbe dîn selbes willen, in welher wîse daz ist, daz lîden tuot dir wê und ist dir swære ze tragenne. Lîdest dû aber umbe got und got aleine, daz lîden entuot dir niht wê und ist dir ouch niht swære, wan got treit den last. Mit guoter wârheit! Wære ein mensche, der lîden wolte durch got und lûterlîche got aleine, und viele allez daz lîden ûf in zemâle, daz alle menschen ie geliten und daz al diu welt hât gemeinlich, daz entæte im niht wê noch enwære im ouch niht swære, wan got der trüege den last. Der mir einen zentener leite ûf mînen hals und in denne ein ander trüege ûf mînem halse, als liep leite ich hundert ûf als einen, wan ez enwære mir niht swære noch entæte mir ouch niht wê. Kürzlîche gesprochen: swaz der mensche lîdet durch got und got aleine, daz machet im got lîhte und süeze, als ich sprach in dem beginne, dâ mite wir unser predige begunden: 'Jêsus gienc ûf in ein bürglîn end wart enpfangen von einer juncvrouwen, diu ein wîp was'. War umbe? Daz muoste sîn von nôt, daz si ein juncvrouwe was und ouch ein wîp. Nû hân ich iu geseit, daz Jêsus enpfangen wart; ich enhân iu aber niht geseit, waz daz bürglîn sî, alsô als ich nû dar abe sprechen wil.

Ich hân underwîlen gesprochen, ez sî ein kraft in dem geiste, diu sîaleine vrî. Underwîlen hân ich gesprochen, ez sî ein huote des geistes; underwîlen hân ich gesprochen, ez sî ein lieht des geistes; underwîlen hân ich gesprochen, ez sî ein

If you would rightly know whether your suffering is yours or God's, then you should listen closely to this: if you would suffer for yourself, in whatever way it is, that suffering causes you pain and is a burden for you to carry. But if you suffer for God and God alone, that suffering does not do you harm and is not a burden for you to carry, for God carries the burden. In good truth! If there were a man who wanted to suffer through God and purely through God alone[9], and more if all at once the suffering that all men had ever suffered and that all the world bears, that does not do him harm and is not a burden for him to carry, for God carries the burden. If someone placed a hundredweight on my neck and another carried it, then it would be as pleasant to carry a hundred of them as one. For it would not be a burden to me nor would it do me harm. Said briefly: whatever a man suffers through God and God alone, God makes it light and sweet for him, as I said in the beginning when our sermon began: "Jesus went up into a little castle and was received by a virgin, who was a wife." Why? It must necessarily be that she was a virgin and also a wife. Now I have told you that Jesus was received, but I have not told you what this little castle is. I want to talk about this now.

I have sometimes said that there is a power in the spirit that alone is free. I have sometimes said that it is a guardian of the spirit. I have sometimes said that it is a light of the spirit. I have sometimes said that it is a spark. Yet I say now: it is

[9] Colledge has “If there were a man who wanted to suffer for the love of God and purely for God alone”. The addition of “for the love of” instead of “through” (for *durch*) does not seem to be implied by the manuscripts. Here, it seems, Milem’s translation is clearer than both Colledge’s and Schürmann’s.

vünkelîn. Ich spriche aber nû: ez enist weder diz noch daz; nochdenne ist ez ein waz, daz ist hœher boben diz und daz dan der himel ob der erde. Dar umbe nenne ich ez nû in einer edelerr wîse dan ich ez ie genante, und ez lougent der edelkeit und der wîse und ist dar enboben. Ez ist von allen namen vrî und von allen formen blôz, ledic und vrî zemâle, als got ledic und vrî ist in im selber. Ez ist sô gar ein und einvaltic, als got ein und einvaltic ist, daz man mit dekeiner wîse dar zuo geluogen mac. Diu selbe kraft, dar abe ich gesprochen hân, dâ got inne ist blüejende und grüenende mit aller sîner gotheit und der geist in gote, in dirre selber kraft ist der vater gebernde sînen eingebornen sun als gewærlîche als in im selber, wan er wærlîche lebet in dirre kraft, und der geist gebirt mit dem vater den selben eingebornen sun und sich selber den selben sun und ist der selbe sun in disem liehte und ist diu wârheit. Möhtet ir gemerken mit mînem herzen, ir verstüendet wol, waz ich spriche, wan ez ist wâr und diu wârheit sprichet ez selbe.

Sehet, nû merket! Alsô ein und einvaltic ist diz bürgelîn boben alle wîse, dâ von ich iu sage und daz ich meine, in der sêle, daz disiu edele kraft, von der ich gesprochen hân, niht des wirdic ist, daz si

neither this nor that[10]. And still, it is a 'something'[11] that it is higher above this and that than heaven is above earth. Therefore I name it now in a nobler mode than I have ever named it, since it denies nobility and denies all modes and is above them. It is free of all names and naked of all forms, at once unhindered and free, as God is unhindered and free in himself. It is so completely one and simple, as God is one and simple, that one with modes cannot peer into it. In this same power that I have spoken of, God is blossoming and verdant with all his godhead and spirit in God. In this same power the Father is giving birth to his only-begotten Son as truly as in himself, for he truly lives in this power. And the spirit gives birth with the Father to the same only-begotten Son and to himself, the same Son and is the same Son in the light and is the truth. If you could look upon this with my heart, you would understand well what I say, for it is true and the truth itself speaks it.

Now see and listen well! So one and simple is this little castle above all modes[12], I say to you and I mean, in the soul, that this noble power that I have spoken of is not even worthy to peer for

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[10] *weder diz noch daz* - 'weder … noch' = 'neither … nor'. 'diz und daz' (as we see repeated again in this form a few lines later) is clearly the German version of Eckhart's 'hoc et hoc' in Latin, meaning 'this and that.' He uses that particular locution when referring to all the things of this world, all the things we call 'this' and 'that'.

[11] *ein waz* - Milem, Colledge and Schürmann all have this as "a something." It is a peculiar construction that recalls the modern German 'etwas' or 'was' which can both mean 'something' (and indeed, some manuscripts have 'etwa' or 'etwaz'). Elsewhere, Eckhart makes much of a long tradition of giving weight to the 'erat' in John 1:1 'In principium erat verbum.' We are told (as is traditional) that 'erat' is the most perfect and substantial form of 'esse' and, as such, it is appropriate for God. Perhaps here as well we are to hear that the spark is 'a was' (i.e., past of 'to be') since 'was' sounded the same as 'waz' when spoken.

[12] *wîse* - way, mode. Though 'mode' is a bit awkward in his first use of it at DW II 39.6 its use as a technical term makes the rest of that otherwise strange sentence in DW II 40.1 much more sensible. The idea is that the godhead cannot be seen in any mode. Previous translations have tried different approaches: Colledge (way, fashion), Milem (way) and Schümann (fashion, mode).

iemer ze einem einigen mâle einen ougenblik geluoge in diz bürgelîn und ouch diu ander kraft, dâ ich von sprach, dâ got ist inne glimmende und brinnende mit aller sîner rîcheit und mit aller sîner wunne, diu engetar ouch niemer mê dar în geluogen; sô rehte ein und einvaltic ist diz bürgelîn, und sô enboben alle wîse und alle krefte ist diz einic ein, daz im neimer kraft noch wîse zuo geluogen mac noch got selber. Mit guoter wârheit und alsô wærlîche, als daz got lebet! Got selber luoget dâ niemer în einen ougenblik und geluogete noch nie dar în, als verre als er sich habende ist nâch wîse und ûf eigenschaft sîner persônen. Diz ist guot ze merkenne, wan diz einic ein ist sunder wîse und sunder eigenschaft. Und dar umbe: sol got iemer dar în geluogen, ez muoz in kosten alle sîne götlîche namen und sîne persônlîche eigenschaft; daz muoz er alzmâle hie vor lâzen, sol er iemer mê dar în geluogen. Sunder als er ist einvaltic ein, âne alle wîse und eigenschaft: dâ enist er vater noch sun noch heiliger geist in disem sinne und ist doch ein waz, daz enist noch diz noch daz.

Sehet, alsus als er ein ist und einvaltic, alsô kumet er in daz ein, daz ich dâ heize ein bürgelîn in der sêle, und anders kumet er enkeine wîse dar în; sunder alsô kumet er dar în und ist dâ inne. Mit dem teile ist diu sêle gote glîch und anders niht. Daz ich iu geseit hân, daz ist wâr; des setze ich iu die wârheit ze einem gezîugen und mîne sêle ze einem pfande.

Daz wir alsus sîn ein bürgelîn, in dem Jêsus ûfgange und werde enpfangen und

one single moment for one glance within the little castle and the other power that I have spoken of. There God is gleaming and burning with all his richness and with all his delight. It never dares to peer within, so truly one and simple is this little castle. And so far above all modes and all powers is this single one that God himself can in no mode and in no power peer into it. In good truth and so truly as God lives! God himself never peers into it for a single moment and has never peered in, insofar as he possesses himself according to a mode and out of the attachment to his persons. This is good to notice, for this single one is without modes and without attachment. And therefore: should God ever peer into it, it must cost all of his divine names and attachment to his persons[13]. He must leave them all at once, if he should ever peer inside. Insofar as[14] he is a simple one, without all modes and attachment: there he is neither Father nor Son nor Holy Ghost in this sense and is nevertheless a something that is neither this nor that.

You see, as he is one and simple, so he comes into that one that I call a little castle in the soul. Otherwise he does not comes into it in any way. Only in this way does he come in and is he inwardly there. With this part, the soul is like God and otherwise not. What I have said to you is true. I lay the truth before you as a testimony with my soul as a pledge.

That we may be in a little castle, which Jesus may go up into and be received

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[13] *persônlîche eigenschaft* - I think Eckhart meant for this to sound odd. It has the ring of “personal” as in “my own, what I am attached to” and also as “personly” as in “relating to the persons of the Trinity.” I am tempted to render it “personly attachment” or “person-ly attachment” to emphasize the unusual form.
[14] Note that ‘sunder als’ (only/separately as) and ‘als verre’ (as far) can be rendered ‘insofar as,’ perhaps being German forms of Eckhart's “inquantum” principle that was so important to his defense.

êwiclîche in uns blîbe in der wîse, als ich gesprochen hân, des helfe uns got. Âmen.	and eternally abide in the way as I have spoken, may God help us in this. Amen.

LW IV Sermon XXIV,2

Domus mea domus orationis est
My house is a house of prayer

Domus mea domus orationis est, Luc. 19	*Domus mea domus orationis est* (Luke 19:46) *My house is a house of prayer*
Ordina sic: domus orationis est domus mea.	Rearrange the words like this: a house of prayer is my house.
Domus est carentia passionum. Nota primo quam longe passio naturaliter est sub anima, ut in Sermone 'Estote misericordes' supra, et quam verecundum est sequenter subdi passioni. Secundo in hoc nota quietem animae; et est ratio, quia verbum, in quo et per quod et per cuius illapsum in anima pater operatur, est secundum Augustinum »sine strepitu«, Sap. 18: 'dum medium silentium teneret omnia', scilicet entia, viventia, intelligentia. Unde in aedificatione templi sonus mallei non est auditus, Reg. 6.	'House' means to lack passion. First note just how far passion is naturally below the soul, as said in the sermon above, “Be compassionate,” and so how shameful it is to be subject to passion. Second, in this [lack of passion], note the soul's rest. It is reasonable, because the Word, in which and through which and by means of which the father works by flowing[16] into the soul, is, “without noise[17],” according to Augustine, “while silence enveloped everything,” that is to say, all beings, living things, and understandings (Wisdom 18:14-15). Hence, in building the temple, the sound of the hammer was not heard (1 Kings 6:7).
Orationis. Nota: cum audimus aut legimus, deus nobis loquitur; cum oramus, deo loquimur. Nota: doctores volunt inferiores angelos loqui superioribus, non autem illuminare; sed si proprie inspicimus, omnis loquens est in illo ordine superior et primus. Patet igitur, quanta requiritur elevatio animae et altitudo, quae deo vult loqui. Iuxta <quod dic> quomodo haec, scilicet elevatio, fit humilitate solum. In proiectione enim sphaerae in planum polus et centrum idem. Dic quomodo orandum 'spiritu et mente' secundum apostolum, ut te cum	‘Of prayer’. Take note: when we hear and read, God speaks to us. When we pray, we speak to God. Take note: the theologians say that the lower angels want to speak to the higher angels, but they do not illuminate them. But if we properly consider it, all who speak are of that higher and primary order. Therefore, it is clear how much the soul must be elevated if it wants to speak to God. According to [what was said of] how this is, namely elevation, it comes only to the low and humble. When projecting a sphere onto a plane, the pole and the

[16] *illapsus* - flowed (fallen/slipped) into.
[17] *strepitu* - sound, noise, crash, din

omnis mundi praesentis defectu proicias ante pedes dei, secundo cum matris dei et omnium sanctorum meritis et luce offeras deo, tertio quomodo in ipso verbo, in illa puritate, patri praesentes et repreaesentes; nam in illo solo placent omnia, Lucae: 'in te complacuit mihi'.

center are the same. Say how to pray "in spirit and mind" (1 Cor 14:15) following the apostle, as you, with the weakness of the whole world, cast before the feet of God, and secondly, you offer to God the merit and light of the mother of God and all the saints, and thirdly, in the way of the Word itself, in that purity, present to and representing the Father, for in that alone are all things pleasing. Luke: “in you I am very pleased.”[18]

Nota: omnis exitus dissimilitudo quaedam et consequenter displicentia quaedam est et impuritas. Ioh. 4: 'in spiritu', scilicet sancto, 'et veritate', id est filio, 'oportet orare'. 'Nam et pater tales quaerit'. Ibidem nota: 'quaerit' dicit. Quod autem quis quaerit, est altius, saltem ratione et apprehensione. Debet igitur anima <se> exuere omnibus, ut nuda nudum quaerat deum, nihil aliud in ipso.

Note: every going away [from God] is some unlikeness and consequently some discord and impurity. John 4:24: “in the spirit,” namely the Holy Spirit, “and truth,” it is the Son [in whom[19]] “one must to pray.” “For the Father also seeks.” In the same note, he says, “He seeks.” What is sought is higher, at least in reason and apprehension. The soul must then get rid of all things, seeking God in his bare nakedness with nothing else in him.

Secundo principaliter notandum, quomodo secundum Damascenum oratio est »intellectus in deum ascensus«. Igitur intellectus <deum> in se non attingit, nisi ascendat. Ascensus autem ad superius est. Transcendere igitur oportet non solum imaginabilia, sed etiam intelligibilia. Item cum intellectus resolvat ad esse, oportet et hoc transire. Esse namque non est causa esse, sicut nec ignis est causa ignis, sed aliquid longe altius, in quod oportet ascendere.

The second principal thing to note, following the Damascene, is in what way prayer is “the ascent of the intellect to God.” And so, it does not touch God except by ascending. It ascends moreover to what is higher. Therefore, it is necessary to transcend not only what can be made an image[20], but also what can be understood. Likewise, as the intellect dissolves[21] things into being, it must surpass being too. For indeed, being is not the cause of being, just as fire is not the cause of fire, but something far higher is, into which it is necessary to ascend.

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[18] cf. Sermon 10

[19] [in whom] since it is ‘in truth’ we must pray.

[20] If we render ‘imaginabilia’ as ‘imaginable,’ the sentence is not entirely clear or sensible.

[21] Davies’ “refer” is unclear for resolvat. ‘Resolve’ is possible, though ‘resolvat’ carries connotations of loosening. So, the intellect resolves things into their essences, abstracting to get at being itself. Yet it also loosens and relaxes the apparent concreteness of sensible things, which enables an understanding that is beyond particular things, which is true to the sense of the passage.

Praeterea intellectus accipit deum sub veste veritatis, et ideo oportet ascendere. Unde ait: »in deum«. Nam et ipsum deum sub hoc nomine, immo sub omni nomine debet transire anima.

Furthermore, the intellect receives God unadorned as he truly is. For that reason, the intellect must ascend as he says “in God.” Even still, the soul must pass beyond God himself under this name, for the soul must surpass all names.

Item tertio: cum intellectus iuxta nomen suum intra procedat et ab extra, e converso voluntati, et secundum naturam suam abstrahat ab omni foras additio, eius ascensus est introitus in primam radicem puritatis omnium, quae est in verbo. Nota ergo: »ascensus intellectus«. Sap. 1 dicitur quod spiritus sanctus 'aufert se a cogitationibus, quae sunt sine intellectu'. Cogitatio motum habet et discursum. Item cogitatio sine intellectu imaginaria est et condiciones corporis habet, scilicet figuras et huiusmodi, »Ascensus intellectus«, quia in substantia anima habitat proprie deus. Haec autem altior est intellectu. Maximum est esse capacem dei et capere deum: 'Israel, quam magna est domus dei' etc.

In the third place, just as when the intellect by its name proceeds from outward to inward, out of the conversion[22] of the will, and following its nature it abstracts from all outside things as well, its ascension is the entrance into the principal root of all purity, which is in the Word. Note therefore: “ascent of the intellect.” Wisdom 1:5 says that the Holy Spirit ‘withholds itself from thoughts that are without understanding.’ Thinking has motion[23] and runs about. Likewise, thinking without understanding is thinking in images[24] and has the nature of corporeal things, namely shapes and such. [It says] the “ascent of the intellect” because, properly, God dwells in the substance of the soul. This, therefore, is higher than the intellect. The highest is to have the capacity for God and to take on God: “Israel, how great is the house of God” etc.

Domus mea. Nota primo quod domus dei est ipsa essentia animae, cui solus Deus illabitur et ipse nudus. Hic pertracta quomodo animae illabitur potentiis intellectualibus depuratis prius <passionibus> sensitivarum. Secundum Avicennam vero aliter. Dic quomodo.

My house. First note that the house of God is in itself the essence of the soul, in which God may only descend in his nakedness. Note here too how God is enticed to descend into and penetrate the soul once it is first purified of the sensible passions. And next, Avicenna certainty believed otherwise. Tell them how.

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[22] *converso* – ‘I turn around,’ as in religious ‘conversion.’ Davies has ‘contrary to’ does not wholly fit the context and may not adequately capture Eckhart’s meaning.
[23] Richard of St. Victor speaks of thought as having motion (LW IV.227n5).
[24] Again, Eckhart’s ‘imaginaria’ seems to refer directly to the way that created things are images (cf. Sermon 2).

Secundo nota quomodo ratio superior est domus dei. Propterea abinde eiciuntur 'ementes et vendentes'. Primo, quia opus virtutis, et caritatis maxime, oculum non habet ad mercedem. Secundo, quia ibi est quies et silentium, ubi pater loquitur verbum »sine strepitu«. Temporalia enim, quae sunt cum motu, pertinent ad rationem inferiorem.

Second, note in what way the superior reason is the house of God. That is why he cast out the 'buyers and sellers.'[25] First, because the work of virtue and greatest love do not concern what is mercantile. Second, because there it is quiet and silent, where the Father speaks the word "without noise." Temporal things, truly, which are with motion, pertain to inferior reason[26].

Tertio nota quomodo intellectus magis capit deum, verius et nobilius quam totus mundus corporeus, et tamen capiendo aliquid eius vivit et subsistit omnis creatura, quia immo ipsi assimilari quaerit omnis creatura. Sed expone specialiter de caelo.

Third, note the way in which the intellect has the capacity[27] for God in a greater extent, more truly and more nobly than all the corporeal world, and yet, in God's receiving the other, He dwells in and remains in all creatures, for indeed all creatures seek to become like him. Explain that this is especially true of heaven.

Quarto nota quomodo Plato ponit animam immortalem, quia capax est sapientiae. Quanto magis, quia capax dei. Unde omnis potentia cognitiva de familia intellectus est impassibilis[15] et sic secundum se et ex se immortalis.

Fourth note the way in which Plato argues for the immortality of the soul since it has the capacity for wisdom. How much greater the soul is than even that, for it can take on God. And so all cognitive power from the intellective family is beyond passion and thus is after itself and from itself immortal.

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[15] Reiner Schürmann links this term, *impassibilitas* to the Stoic *apatheia* (Schürmann, Wandering Joy: Meister Eckhart's Mystical Philosophy 2001, 76).

[25] cf. Sermon 1

[26] For the idea that motion is inferior, see LW IV 227.5-6.

[27] Marked departure from Davies' translation here of 'capit' as 'grasps' (Davies 257). Note that 'capit' here parallels 'capax' two lines later in an important way. Man has the capacity for, grasps and receives God and vice versa. Note also the related words 'accipit,' 'capere' and 'capacem' above.

DW I Sermon 24

Induimini dominum Iesum Christum
Put on the Lord Jesus Christ

Induimini dominum Iesum Christum	*Induimini dominum Iesum Christum* (Rom. 13:14) Put on the Lord Jesus Christ
Sant Paulus sprichet: 'întuot iu', inniget iu 'Kristum'.	Saint Paul said: "Put on" - internalize - "Christ".
In dem, daz sich der mensche entuot, sô întuot er Kristum, got, sælicheit und heilicheit. Und sagete ein buobe vremdiu dinc, man gloubete ez im, und Paulus gelobet, grôziu dinc, und ir engloubet ez im kûme. Er gelobet dir, entuost dû dich, got und sælicheit und heilicheit. Ez ist wunderlich: und ist, daz sich der mensche entuon sol, in dem daz er sich entuot, sô întuot er Kristum und heilicheit und sælicheit und ist sêre grôz. Der prophête wundert sich an zwein dingen. Daz eine: waz got mit sternem, mit dem mânen und mit der sunnen tuo. Daz ander wunder ist von der sêle, daz got sô grôziu dinc mit ir und durch sie getân hât und tuot, wan er tuot, swaz er mac, durch sie; er tuot vil und grôziu dinc durch sie und ist zemâle unledic mit ir, und daz ist von ir grôzheit, in der si gemachet ist. Wie grôz si gemachet sî, daz merket! Ich mache einen buochstaben nâch der glîchnisse, die der buochstabe in mir hât in mîner sêle, und niht nâch mîner sêle. Alsô ist ez von gote. Got hât alliu dinc gemeinlîche	When one takes off himself, he puts on Christ, God, blessedness and holiness. When a boy tells of strange[28] things, one believes him, yet when Paul promises great things, you do not hardly believe it. He promises you - if you take off yourself - God, blessedness and holiness. It is wondrous[29]: if a man should take off himself, then in his taking off himself, he puts on Christ, holiness, and blessedness and he becomes very great. The prophet wondered about two things. The first: what God did with the stars, the moon and the sun. The other wonder is about the soul, that God has done and does such great things with it and for its sake and because he does whatever he can for it. He does many great things for its sake and is entirely occupied[30] with it, and that is from its greatness, in which it is made. How great it is made - notice that! I make a letter of the alphabet according to the likeness that the letter has in me, in my soul. It is likewise with God. God has made all things generally

[28] The connotation of 'unfamiliar' in the word 'vremdiu' may be important since unfamiliar things inspire wonder, as with Eckhart's 'novel and unusual' rhetoric.
[29] The repetition of words relating to 'wonder' is important for the philosophical overtones of *aporia*: all philosophy begins in wonder. Eckhart would have read this in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 982b12, though the idea was originally expressed in Plato's *Theaetetus* 155.
[30] The word 'unledic' means 'occupied' (Colledge) or 'busied' (Walshe), though it may be significant that 'ledic' means 'free' and is a significant word for Eckhart. Thus, 'unledic' is 'not free' or 'un-free'.

gemachet nâch dem bilde, daz er aller dinge in im hât, und niht nâch im. Etlich hât er sunderlîche gemachet nâch etwaz, daz sich ûz im haltende ist, als güete, wîsheit und daz man von gote saget. Aber die sêle hât er niht aleine gemachet nâch dem bilde, daz in im ist, noch nâch dem, daz sich ûz im heltet, als man von im saget; mêr: er hât sie gemachet nâch im selbe, jâ, nâch allem dem, daz er ist, nâch natûre, nâch wesene und nâch sînem ûzvliezenden inneblîbenden werke und nâch dem grunde, dâ er in im selber blîbende ist, dâ er gebernde ist sînem eingebornen sun, dâ von der heilige geist ûzblüejende ist: nâch disem ûzvliezenden inneblîbenden werke sô hât got die sêle geschaffen.

according to the image that he has in Himself of all things and not according to Himself. He has made some things differently according to something[31] which emanates out of Himself, such as goodness, wisdom and what one says of God. Yet he has neither made the soul according to an image that is in Him alone, nor according to that which emanates out of Him, as one says of Him. What's more: He has made it according to Himself - yes - according to all that He is, according to nature, according to being, and according to his activity which flows out and yet remains within and according to the ground where he remains within Himself, where he is giving birth to his only-begotten Son, where the Holy Spirit blossoms forth: God created the soul by this activity of flowing forth yet remaining within.

Ez ist als natiurlich umbe alliu dinc, daz alle zît den nidersten die obersten sint învliezende, als lange die nidersten den obersten sint zuogevüeget; wan die obersten enpfâhent niemer von den nidersten, mêr: die nidersten enpfâhent von den oversten. Wan nû got über die sêle ist, sô ist got alle zît der sêle învliezende und enmac der sêle niemer entvallen. Diu sêle entvellet wol von im, und als lange sô der mensche sich under gote entheltet, als lange ist er unmittelîche götlîchen înfluz enpfâhende blôz ûzer gote und enist niht under keinen anderen dingen: noch under vorhte noch under liebe noch under leide noch under keinen dingen, daz got niht enist. Nû wirf dich zemâle ganz under got, sô

It is then natural for all things that the higher always flows into the lower, just as long as the lower are accommodating toward[32] the higher. For the higher receive nothing from the lower. Further, the lower receive from the higher. For, God is above the soul now, so God is always flowing into the soul and can never fall away from the soul. The soul indeed falls away from Him, and as long as man holds himself fast under God, so is he receiving the unmediated, bare divine inflowing from God and he is not under other things: under neither the fearful, nor the lovable, nor the hateful, nor any thing which is not God. Now cast yourself completely under God, so you receive the divine inflowing, whole and

[31] That it is a 'something' ('etwaz') that emanates is significant for Eckhart. He puts weight into calling God a 'something' as opposed to a 'nothing'.
[32] The word 'gevüege' means 'accomodating', 'courteous' or 'well-bred', which adds color to the idea Eckhart expresses. We might therefore read 'zuogevüeget' as 'courteous toward'.

enpfæhest dû götlîchen înfluz zemâle und blôz. Wie enpfæhet diu sêle von gote? Diu sêle enpfæhet von gote niht als ein vremdez, als der luft lieht enpfæhet von der sunnen: der enpfæhet nâch einer vremdicheit. Aber diu sêle enpfæhet got niht nâch einer vremdicheit noch als under gote, wan, daz under einem andern ist, daz hât vremdicheit und verricheit. Die meister sprechent, daz diu sêle enpfæhe als ein lieht von dem liehte, wan dâ enist vremde noch verre.

Einez ist in der sêle, in dem got blôz ist, und die meister sprechent, ez sî namelôs, und ez enhabe keinen eigenen namen. Ez ist und hât doch kein eigen wesen, wan ez ist noch diz noch daz noch hie noch dâ; wan ez ist, daz ez ist, in einem andern und jenez in disem; wan, daz ez ist, daz ist ez in jenem und jenez in disem; wan jenez vliuzet in diz und diz in jenez, und dâ, meinet er, vüeget iuch in got, in sælicheit! wan hie inne nimet diu sêle allez ir leben und wesen, und hie ûz sûget si ir leben und wesen; wan diz ist zemâle in gote und daz ander hie ûzen, und dar umbe ist diu sêle alle zît in gote nâch disem, ez sî denne, daz si diz ûztrage oder in ir verlesche.

Ein meister sprichet, daz diz gote sô gegenwertic sî, daz ez sich niemer von gote gekêren müge und im got alzît

bare. How does the soul receive from God? The soul receives from God not as a stranger, as the air receives light from the sun. Air receives according to the foreignness[33] of the light. But the soul receives God not according to the foreignness of God, nor as under God. For what is under is something other, foreign and distant. The masters say that the soul receives as light from light, for in that there is no foreignness or distance.

There is something in the soul, in which God is bare, and the masters say it is nameless and it has no name of its own. It is and has only no being of its own, for it is neither this nor that, neither here nor there. Yet it is what it is in an other and the other in it. For, that which it is, it is that in an other and the other in that[34]. For another flows into this and this into the other. This is what Paul means by, unite yourselves in God, in blessedness! For in here the soul takes its entire life and being, and from here she draws her life and being. For this is entirely in God and all else is outside. Therefore the soul is always in God according to this. It remains, then, unless the soul is carried away to the outside and silences[35] it within you.

A master says: God is so present in this, that it may never turn away from God and God is always present to it and within

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[33] 'Foreign' ('vremdicheit') here refers to what is dualistic and thereby distant from God, perhaps meant to complement the 'strange' ('vremdiu') stories the boy tells in the beginning. Eckhart repeats versions of the word 'vremd-' which means 'strange', 'foreign' or 'unfamiliar'.

[34] This probably sounded just as confusing to his audience. Eckhart's antecedent for 'that' ('jenem', a 'that' as differentiated from another alternative, just as in modern German) is unclear. Walshe explains that this 'that' refers to the part of the soul that is not the nameless something. The fact that Eckhart repeats almost the same phrasing in two consecutive sentences testifies to the difficulty he had in expressing the idea (DW I 418.2-3,3-4).

[35] The word 'verlesche' is difficult to translate here. It means 'extinguish' or 'efface', though Eckhart clearly does not mean that this part of the soul can 'die'. Since being 'carried off' and 'distracted' by ('ûztrage') things other than God implies the 'fading' into the background and 'silencing' (also appropriate for 'verlesche'), 'silences' carries the right connotation for this context.

gegenwertic und inne sî. Ich spriche, daz got êwiclîche âne underlâz in disem gewesen ist, und in disem der mensche mit gote ein ze sînne, dâ behœret gnâde niht zuo, wan gnâde ist ein crêatûre, und dâ enhât crêatûre ze tuonne; wan in dem grunde götlîches wesens, die drîe persônen éin wesen sint, dâ ist si ein nâch dem grunde. Dar umbe, wilt dû, sô sint alliu dinc dîn und got. Daz ist: ganc abe dîn selbes und aller dinge und alles, daz dû an dir selber bist, und num dich nâch dem, daz dû in gote bist.

Die meister sprichent, daz menschlich natûre mit der zît niht habe ze tuonne und daz si zemâle unberüerlich sî und dem menschen vil inniger und næher sî dan er im selber. Und dar umbe nam got menschlîche natûre an sich und einigete sie sîner persônen. Dâ wart menschlich natûre got, wan er menschlîche natûre blôz und keinen menschen an sich nam. Dar umbe, wilt dû der selbe Krist sîn und got sîn, sô ganc alles des abe, daz daz êwige wort an sich niht ennam. Daz êwige wort nam keinen menschen an sich; dar umbe ganc abe, swaz menschen an dir sî und swaz dû sîst, und nim dich nâch menschlîcher natûre blôz, sô bist dû daz selbe an dem êwigen worte, daz menschlich natûre an im ist. Wan dîn menschlîche natûre und diu sîne enhât keinen underscheit: si ist ein, wan, swaz si ist in Kristô, daz ist si in dir. Dar umbe sagete ich ze Paris, daz an dem gerehten menschen ervüllet ist, swaz diu heilige schrift und die prophêten <von Kristô> ie gesageten; wan, ist dir reht, allez, daz in der alten und in der niuwen ê gesaget ist, daz wirt allez an dir volbrâht.

it. I say that God has always been in this, eternally and without ceasing. And in this, man is one with God in this sense. Grace does not belong here, for grace is a creature and that place has nothing to do with creatures. For in the ground of divine being, the three persons are one being. There the soul is one according to the ground. Therefore, if you like, all things are yours and God too. That is: go out of your self, all things and everything that you are presently yourself. Take yourself in according to what are you in God.

A master says: human nature has nothing to do with time, it is completely untouched, and it is more within and closer to a man than he is to himself. And therefore God assumed human nature and united it with his Person. Then, human nature became God, for he assumed bare human nature and not any particular man. Therefore, if you would be the same Christ and God, then go out from all that the eternal Word did not assume. This eternal Word assumed no particular person. Therefore, go out of whatever makes you a particular person and whatever you are. Take yourself according to bare human nature so that you are the same to the eternal Word as human nature is to him. For your human nature and his have no separation: his is one, for whatever it is in Christ, it is in you. Therefore, as I said in Paris, all that the Holy Scripture and the prophets ever said of Christ[36] is fulfilled in the just man. For if you are just right, everything that was foretold in the Old and the New Testament will be fulfilled in you.

[36] Quint adds ‘of Christ’ here, which he says was likely omitted because it was evidently the basis for article twelve of *In agro dominico*.

Wie sol dir reht sîn? Daz ist in zwô wîse ze verstânne nâch des prophêten worte, der dâ saget: 'in volheit der zît sô wart der sun gesant.' 'Volheit der zît' ist in zwô wîse. Danne ist ein dinc vol, sô ez in sînem ende ist, als der tac ist vol in sînem âbende. Alsô, sô alliu zît von dir vellet, sô ist diu zît vol. Daz ander ist: sô diu zît in ir ende kumet, daz ist in êwicheit; wan dâ hât alliu zît ein ende, wan dâ enist noch vor noch nâch. Dâ ist allez daz gegenwertic und niuwe, daz dâ ist, und dâ hâst dû in einem gegenwertigen anesehenne, swaz ie geschach und iemer geschehen sol. Dâ enist noch vor noch nâch, ez ist dâ allez gegenwertic; und in disem gegenwertigen anesehenne hân ich alliu dinc besezzen. Daz ist 'volheit der zît', und alsô ist mir reht, und alsô bin ich wærlîche der einige sun und Kristus.

Daz wir ze dirre 'volheit der zît' komen, des helfe uns got. Âmen.

How should you come to be just right[37]? There are two ways to understand this according to the prophet's words, who said: 'the Son was sent in the fullness of time' (Gal. 4:4). 'Fullness of time' is of two kinds. A thing is full at the time when it is at its end. So the day is full in its evening. And so, as all time falls away from you, so is time full. The other is: time comes to its end in eternity, for there all time has an end. In eternity there is neither before nor after. There, all that is, is present and new. There you see immediately all that has ever happened and ever will happen. There is neither before nor after, it is all present. In this present seeing, I possess all things. That is the 'fullness of time' and in this way I am just right. And in this way, I am truly the only Son and Christ.

God help us so that we come to our 'fullness of time.' Amen.

[37] I tried to preserve Eckhart's wordplay here between 'gerehten' ('just' as in justice) and 'reht' ('right'), even though the latter occurs in the idiom 'ist dir reht' ('if you are as you should be', 'if everything is right with you').

DW II Sermon 40

Manete in me
Abide in me

Manete in me (Jn. 15:4)
Beatus vir qui in sapientia morabitur (Sir. 14:22)
Abide in me
Blessed is the man who dwells in wisdom

Ez sprichet unser herre Jêsus Kristus in dem êwangeliô: ‘blîbet in mir!‘, und ein ander wort sprichet in der epistel: 'sælic ist der man, der dâ wonet in der wîsheit'. Und diu zwei wort tragent über ein: daz wort Kristî 'blîbet in mir!' und daz wort der episteln 'sælic ist der man, der dâ wonet in der wîsheit'.

Nû merket, waz der mensche haben sol, der dâ wonen sol in im, daz ist in gote. Der sol driu dinc haben. Daz êrste, daz er habe verlougent sîn selbes und aller dinge noch niht anehangende sî an deheinen dingen, diu inwendic die sinne begrîfende sîn, noch niht wonende sî crêatûren, die dâ sint in zît noch in êwicheit. - Daz ander ist, daz er niht enminne diz guot oder daz guot, sunder er minne daz guot, von dem allez guot vliezende ist; wan kein dinc enist niht mê lustlich noch begirlich, dan als vil got in im ist. Dar umbe ensol man daz guot niht mê minnen, dan als vil man got in im minnet, und alsô ensol man got niht minnen noch umbe sîn himelrîche noch umbe dehein dinc, sunder man sol in minnen umbe die güeticheit, diu er in im selben ist. Wan swer in minnet umbe anders iht, der enwonet niht in im, sunder er wonet in

Our Lord Jesus Christ says in the Gospel, "Abide in me!" He also says in the epistle, 'Blessed is the man who dwells in wisdom'. The two passages carry the same meaning: Christ's words, "Abide in me!" and the passage from the epistle, "Blessed is the man who dwells in wisdom'.

Now observe what a man should have for him to dwell within God. He should have three things. First, he must renounce himself and all things, being attached neither to any thing the mind has internally grasped[38], nor abiding in creatures that are in time or eternity. Second, he must not love this good or that good. He should only love that good from which all good flows. For no thing is delightful or desirable except to the extent that God is in it. Therefore, one should not love a good thing except to the extent that one loves God in it. One should not love God because of Heaven or because of any thing. One should love Him only for the goodness that He is in Himself. For whoever loves Him for some other thing does not abide in Him, but instead abides in the other thing that he loves. Therefore, if you want to abide in Him, you should

[38] The manuscript varies here. Walshe has “not remain attached to anything that is grasped by the senses within” which is perhaps not optimal. The variations include “anything under the Sun”. The word ‘sinne’ can be either ‘senses’ or ‘mind’ while the variation in spelling between manuscripts makes it ‘svn’, or Sun. Nevertheless, the point is clear: get rid of attachment to all ideas about worldly things.

dem, umbe daz er in minnet. Dar umbe: wellet ir in im blîben, sô minnet in umbe niht sunder umbe in selben. - Daz dritte ist, daz er got niht nemen ensol, als er guot oder gereht ist, sunder er sol in nemen in der lûtern, blôzen substancie, dâ er sich selben blôz nemende ist. Wan güete und gerehticheit ist ein kleit gotes, wan ez bekleidet in. Dar umbe sô scheidet gote allez daz abe, daz in kleidende ist, und nemet in blôz in dem kleithûse, dâ er entdecket und blôz in im ist. Alsô sît ir blîbende in im.

love Him for nothing other than Himself. Third, you should not take God as being good or just. You should only take him in His pure, naked substance as He takes Himself. Goodness and justice are God's clothing, for they clothe him. So detach[39] God from of all his clothing and take Him naked in His dressing-room where he is uncovered and bare in Himself. Then you will abide in Him.

Der alsô in im blîbet, der hât vünf dinc. Daz erste, daz zwischen im und gote kein underscheit enist, sunder sie sint ein. Der engel ist vil âne zal, wan sie enmachent niht ‚sunder-zal', wan sie sint âne zal; daz ist von ir grôzen einvalticheit. Die drîe persônen in gote der ist drîe âne zal, aber ir ist menige. Aber zwischen dem menschen und gote enist <niht> aleine niht underscheit, sunder dâ enist ouch kein menige; dâ enist niht wan ein. - Daz ander ist, daz er sîne sælicheit dâ nemende ist in der lûterkeit, dâ sie got selber nemende ist und sich enthaltende ist. - Daz dritte ist, daz er ein wizzen hât mit gotes wizzenne und ein würken hât mit gotes würkenne end ein bekennen mit gotes bekennenne. - Daz vierde ist, daz got alle zît in dem menschen geborn wirt. Wie wirt got alle zît in dem menschen geborn? Daz merket! Swenne der mensche entblœzet und entdecket daz götliche bilde, daz got in im natiurlich geschaffen hât, sô wirt gotes bilde in im offenbære. Wan bî geberunge dâ ist bî ze merkenne diu offenbârunge gotes; wan, daz der sun heizet geborn bon dem vater,

He who abides in Him has five things. First, there is no difference between him and God. They are but one. The angels are innumerable. They do not make up any particular number, for they are without number because of their great simplicity. The three persons in God are three without number, but they have multiplicity. Yet between man and God there is no distinction and no multiplicity. There is nothing other than one. Second, he takes his blessedness from the same purity where God takes His purity and resides. Third, he has one knowing with God's knowing, one work with God's work, and one understanding with God's understanding. Fourth, God is being born all the time in that man. How is God born all the time in that man? Take note of this! Whenever that man bares and uncovers the divine image that God created in him by nature, God's image will be revealed in him. We should notice God's revelation in the birth. To say that the Son is born from the Father is to say that the Father reveals His mysteries to him in a fatherly

[39] The word for ‘detach’ here is ‘abegescheiden’, which is the same root as ‘abegescheidenheit’, ‘detachment’, which is the chief virtue for Eckhart. Eckhart enjoins us to detach or cut away God’s clothing, stripping him bare of this and that concept, including goodness and justice.

daz ist dâ von, daz im der vater veterlîche offenbârende ist sîne tougene. Und dar umbe, sô der mensche ie mê und ie klærlîcher gotes bilde in im entblœzende ist, sô got ie klærlicher in im geborn wirt. Und alsô ist diu geberunge gotes alle zît ze nemenne nâch dem, daz der vater daz bilde blôz entdecket und in im liuhtende ist. - Daz vünfte ist, daz der mensche alle zît in gote geborn wirt. Wie wirt der mensche alle zît in gote geborn? Daz merket! Von der entblœzunge des bildes in dem menschen sô ist sich der mensche gote glîchende, wan mit dem bilde ist der mensche gotes bilde glîch, daz got blôz nâch der wesunge ist. Und sô sich der mensche ie mê entblœzende ist, sô er gote ie glîcher ist, und sô er gote ie glîcher wirt, sô er ie mê mit im vereinet wirt. Und alsô ist diu geberunge des menschen alle zît in gote ze nemenne nâch dem, daz der mensche mit sînem bilde liuhtende ist in gotes bilde, daz got blôz nâch der wesunge ist, mit dem der mensche ein ist. Und alsô ist diu einicheit des menschen und gotes ze nemenne nâch glîcheit des bildes; wan der mensche ist gote glîch nâch dem bilde. Und dar umbe: als man sprichet, daz der mensche mit gote ein sî und nâch dem einicheit got sî, sô nimet man in nâch dem teile des bildes, an dem er gote glîch ist, und niht nâch dem, und er geschaffen

way[40]. Therefore, as that man more and more clearly uncovers God's image in himself, so God will be that much more clearly born in him. And so, God's continuous birth should be understood by way of understanding how that man[41] uncovers the bare image and the Father shines in him. Fifth, that man is continuously being born in God. How is that man continuously being born in God? Notice this! As the image is bared in that man, so then is he like God. For that man is like God's image by that image, as God is bare according to his essence. The more that man bares, the more he is like God. The more he is like God, the more he is united with Him. The more he is like God, the more he is united with Him. We should understand the continuous birth of that man in God as that man shining with his image in God's image, as God is bare according to his essence, and with which that man is one. And so the oneness of that man and God should be understood by the likeness of the images. For man is like God according to the image. Therefore, as we say that man is one with God and is God by oneness, we are considering him insofar as he is part of the divine image, and not insofar as he is created. In doing so, we consider man as he is in God, not according to his creatureliness. As we consider man

[40] The phrase "der vater veterlîche offenbârende ist sîne tougene" literally means "the father fatherly is revealing his mysteries", which probably sounded odd to Eckhart's audience as well. Since saying "the Father fatherly reveals His mysteries" borders on incoherent, I chose the present formulation.

[41] The manuscripts vary with this sentence. Walshe and Quint translate this as saying that the Father does the uncovering, which is not consistent with what Eckhart says a few lines earlier. One manuscript is missing the ostensible subject "der vater" (DW II 276), which gives us reason to suspect that other alterations may need to be made. Fortunately, as is his habit elsewhere, Eckhart restates the same idea here that he just explained in the preceding sentences. If this is the case, my alteration is justified since "that man" should be the one who does the uncovering of the divine image while the Father is the one who then shines. This amounts to saying that I suspect "der mensch" is either implied or missing in this sentence.

ist. Wan dâ man in got nemende ist, dâ ennimet man in niht nâch der crêatiurlicheit; wan als man in got nimet, sô enlougent man der crêatiurlicheit niht, daȝ diu lougenunge ze nemenne sî nâch dem, daȝ diu crêatiurlicheit ze nihte werde, sunder si ist ze nemenne nâch der verjehunge gotes in dem, daȝ man sie gote nemende ist. Wan Kristus, der got und mensche ist, als man den nimet nâch der menscheit, sô verlougent man sîn nâch der gotheit in dem nemenne, niht daȝ man im der gotheit verlougent, sunder man verlougent im ir nâch dem nemenne. Und alsô ist daȝ wort Augustînî ze verstânne, daȝ er sprichet: »swaȝ der mensche minnet, daȝ ist der mensche. Minnet er einen stein, er ist ein stein, minnet er einen menschen, er ist ein mensche, minnet er got - nû engetar ich niht vürbaȝ gesprechen; wan spræche ich, daȝ er got danne wære, ir möhtet mich versteinen. Aber ich wîse iuch ûf die geschrift«. Und dar umbe, als sich der mensche mit minne ze gote blôȝ vüegende ist, sô wirt er entbildet und îngebildet un überbildet in der götlîchen einförmicheit, in der er mit gote ein ist. Diȝ hât alleȝ der mensche in dem inneblîbenne. Nû merket die vruht, die der mensche dâ bringet. Daȝ ist: swenne er mit gote ein ist, sô ist er mit gote vürbringende alle crêatûren, und er ist sælicheit allen crêatûren bringende nâch dem, und er mit im ein ist.

Nû sprichet daȝ ander wort der epistel alsô: 'sælic ist der man, der dâ wonet in der wîsheit'. Daȝ er sprach 'in der wîsheit': wîsheit ist ein müeterlich name, wan müeterlich name ist eigenschaft

insofar as he is in God, we do not deny his creatureliness, which would mean the denial of him insofar as he is creaturely, as if he did not have creatureliness and we were considering him only according to the claim that God is in him, which means one considers him as God[42]. For Christ, who is God and man, as one takes him according to his humanity, one then denies him according to his divinity, not that on denies his divinity, but only that one denies him according to it. So then should we understand Augustine when he says: "man is whatever he loves. If he loves a stone, he is that stone. If he loves a man, he is that man. If he loves God - now I will not dare to say anything further, for if I then say that he is God, you might stone me. I will point you to Scripture instead." Therefore, as man nakedly yields to God with love, so will he un-form, inform, and transform[43] in the divine uniformity where he is one with God. He has all this in his abiding within. Now notice the fruit that this man brings forth. Whenever he is one with God, so he brings forth all creatures with God. He brings blessedness to all creatures insofar as he is one with God.

The other passage from the epistle says: "Blessed is the man who dwells in wisdom." That is says "in wisdom": wisdom is a motherly name. A motherly name has the property of passivity.

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[42] As Walsh and Tobin both recognize, this is a very difficult sentence since it is ambiguous and complex. As Tobin says, it is an exposition of Eckhart's 'insofar as' principle. Fortunately, the surrounding comments that Eckhart makes help to resolve the ambiguities.

[43] Unform, inform and transform all have ‘bild’ as the root, which is an important term that Eckhart uses elsewhere as 'image'.

eines lîdennes, wan in gote ist würken und lîden ze setzenne; wan der vater ist würkende und der sun ist lîdende; und daȥ ist von der eigenschaft der gebornheit. Wan denne der sun diu êwic geborne wîsheit ist, in der alliu dinc mit underscheide stânt, dar umbe sprichet er: 'sælic ist der man, der dâ wonet in der wîsheit'.

Nû sprichet er: 'sælic ist der man'. Ich hân eȥ mê gesprochen, daȥ zwô krefte in der sêle sint: einiu ist der man und einiu ist diu vrouwe. Nû sprichet er: 'sælic ist der man'. Diu kraft, diu in der sêle ist, diu der man heiȥet, daȥ ist diu oberste kraft der sêle, in der got blôȥ liuhtet; wan in die kraft enkumet niht anders wan got, und diu kraft ist alle zît in gote. Und alsô: sölte der mensche alliu dinc nemen in der kraft, sô næme er sie niht, daȥ sie dinc sint, sunder er nimet sie nâch dem, daȥ sie in gote sint. Und dar umbe sölte der mensche all zît women in der kraft, wan alliu dinc in der kraft glîch sint. Und alsô wonete der mensche in allen dingen glîch und næme sie nâch dem, daȥ sie alliu in gote glîch sint, und alliu dinc hæte der mensche dâ; der mensche næme abe von allen dingen daȥ gröbeste und næme sie nâch dem, und sie lustlich und begirlich sint. Nâch dem hât er sie dâ, wan got der envermac nâch sîner eigener natûre niht, er enmüeȥe dir dâ geben alleȥ, daȥ er ie geschuof, und sich selben. Und dar umbe ist der mensche sælic, der all zît wonet in der kraft, wan er wonet alle zît in gote.

Daȥ wir alle zît in gote women müeȥen, des helfe uns unser lieber herre Jêsus Kristus. Âmen.

Activity and passivity are both in God. For the Father is active and the Son is passive by having the property of being born. The Son is the eternally born wisdom in which all things remain with distinction. Therefore he says: "blessed in the man who dwells in wisdom."

Now he says, "blessed is the man." I have said before that two powers are in the soul: one is the man and one is the woman. Now he says, "blessed is the man." The power which is in the souls that is called 'man' is the highest power of the soul in which God shines bare. For in the power is nothing other than God and the power is always in God. Further, should man take all things in the power, he would not take them insofar as they are things, but only insofar as they are in God. Therefore, a man should always abide in this power, for all things are equal in it. If a man abided in all things equally and taking all things insofar as they are equal in God, then he would possess all things. If he strips away what is coarse and take things insofar as they are equal, then they would be delightful and desirable. Insofar as he does this, he possesses them. God cannot help but to give by the oneness of his nature. He must give you everything, all that He has created and Himself. Therefore, a man is blessed if he continually dwells in the power and if he continuously dwells in God.

Our dear Lord Jesus Christ, help us so that we should continuously dwell in God. Amen.

DW III Sermon 54a

Unser herre underhuop und huop von unden ûf sîniu ougen und sach in den himel
Our Lord raised his eyes and carried his gaze on high to heaven

'Unser herre underhuop und huop von unden ûf sîniu ougen und sach in den himel und sprach: ‚vater, diu zît ist komen, wîse klâr dînen, daȝ dich dîn sun klâr wîse. Alle<n>, die dû mir gegeben hâst, gip in daȝ êwige leben. Daȝ ist daȝ êwige leben, daȝ sie dich erkennen aleine einen wâren got'.

Our Lord raised his eyes and carried his gaze on high to heaven and said: 'Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son that your Son may glorify you. To all those you have given to me, I give them eternal life. Eternal life is that they know you as the one true God.' (Jn. 17:1-3,11)

Eȝ sprichet diu schrift eines bâbestes: swanne unser herre sîniu ougen ûfhuop, sô meinte er etwaȝ grôȝeȝ. Eȝ sprichet der wîse man in dem buoche der wîsheit, daȝ diu sêle wirt getragen mit götlîcher wîsheit in got. Eȝ sprichet ouch sant Augustinus, daȝ alliu diu werk und diu lêre der menscheit gotes sîn ein bilde und ein figûre unsers heiligen lebens und grôȝer wirdicheit vor gote. Diu sêle muoȝ geliutert werden und kleinlich gemachet in dem liehte und in der gnâde und alles abegescheiden werden und abegeschelt, daȝ vremdeȝ ist an der sêle, und ouch ein teil, daȝ si selbert ist. Ich hân eȝ mê gesprochen: diu sêle muoȝ als gar enblœȝet werden alles des, daȝ zuogevallen ist, und als lûter ûfgetragen werden und wider învlieȝen in dem sune, als si ûȝgevloȝȝen ist in im. Wan der vater hât die sêle geschaffen in dem sune. Dar umbe muoȝ si als bloȝ in im wider învlieȝen, als si in im ûȝgevloȝȝen ist.

A pope wrote these words: as our Lord raised his eyes, he thought of something great. The sage said in the Book of Wisdom that the soul is carried to God by divine wisdom (Wis. 7:28). Saint Augustine also said that all of God's works and teaching of humanity are an image and figure of our holy life and our great dignity before God. The soul must be purified and made subtle in light and in grace, totally detached and stripped of all that is foreign to the soul and also of the part that is itself. I have often said: the soul must be totally denuded of all that is 'accident' and carried on high in purity and flow back into the Son as it flowed from him. For the Father created the soul in the Son. That's why it must flow back into him as bare as it flowed from him.

Nû sprichet er: 'er underhuop und huop von under ûf sîniu ougen'. In dem worte ligent zwêne sinne. Der eine ist ein bewîsunge lûterer dêmüeticheit. Suln wir iemer komen in den grunt gotes und in sîn innerstez, sô müeȝen wir ze dem êrsten komen in unsern eigenen grunt und in unser innerstez in lûterer

Now he said: 'he raised his eyes and carried his gaze on high' (Jn. 17:1). These words have two meanings. The first is evidence of pure humility. If we never reach into God's ground and into his innermost, we must first come into our own ground and into our innermost in pure humility. The masters say that the

dêmüeticheit. Die meister sprechent, daȥ die sterne gieȥent alle ir kraft in den grunt des ertrîches, in die natûre und in daȥ element des ertrîches und würkent dâ daȥ lûterste golt. Als verre diu sêle kumet in den grunt und in daȥ innerste irs wesens, als verre ergiuȥet sich diu götlîche kraft alzemâle in sie und würket gar verborgenlîche und offenbâret gar grôȥiu werk und wirt diu sêle gar grôȥ und hôch in der minne gotes, diu sich dem lûtern golde glîchet. Daȥ ist der êrste sin: 'er underhuop sîniu ougen'.

Der ander ist, daȥ sich diu sêle ûftragen sol in dêmüeticheit mit allen irn gebresten und irn sünden und sol sich setzen und underböugen under die porte der erbermde gotes, dâ got ûȥsmilzet in barmherzicheit, und sol ouch ûftragen alleȥ, daȥ tugent und guoter werke in ir ist, und sol sich dâ mite setzen under die porte, dâ got ûȥsmilzet in g*üe*te wîs. Alsô sol diu sêle volgen und sich ordenen nâch dem bilde, daȥ 'er underhuop sîniu ougen'.

Dar nâch sprichet er: 'er huop von unden ûf sîniu ougen'. Ein meister sprichet: der listic wære und wol dâ mite künde, der ordente waȥȥer über wîn, alsô daȥ des wînes kraft möhte dar inne gewürken; sô machete des wînes kraft waȥȥer ze wîne; und wære eȥ wol geordent über den wîn, eȥ würde beȥȥer dan der wîn; doch ze dem minsten wirt eȥ als guot als der wîn. Alsô ist eȥ in der sêle, diu wol geordent ist in dem grunde der dêmüeticheit und alsô ûfklimmet und wirt ûfgeȥogen in der götlîchen kraft: diu engeruowet niemer, si enkome die rihte ûf got und enrüere in blôȥ, und blîbet alleȥ inne und ensuochet niht ûȥen und enstât ouch niht neben gote noch bî gote, sunder alleȥ die rihte ín gote in der lûterkeit des wesens; dar inne ist ouch der sêle wesen, wan got ist ein lûter

stars pour all of their powers into the ground of the earth, into nature and into the element of earth and therein produce the purest gold. To the extent that the soul reaches into the ground and its innermost being, so then does the divine power pour out completely in it. It works there very secretly and reveals itself much in three great works. The soul also becomes very great, elevated into the love of god which is like pure gold. Such is the first meaning of: 'he raised his eyes.'

The second is that the soul must carry itself on high in humility, with all its faults and sins. It must position itself and bow under the door of the mercy of God, as God melts outward in compassion. It must also carry on high its virtue and its good works. It must place itself with those under the doorway where God melts outward by way of goodness. So must the soul follow and order itself according to the image: 'he raised his eyes.'

Next he said: 'he carried his gaze on high.' A master said that he who would be clever would know to put water over wine so that the power of wine could act therein: the power of wine would make the water into wine. If it was well placed above the wine, it would be better than the wine. At the very least, it would become as good as the wine. The same goes for the soul that is well ordered in the ground of humility. It climbs up and is drawn on high into the divine power. It never rests before having gone straight to God and having touched him in his nakedness. It rests entirely on the inside. It seeks nothing outside. It does not stand next to God or near God. Rather, it flows straight into God, into the purity of being. There also is the being of the soul, for God is pure being. A master says: in God,

wesen. Ez sprichet ein meister: in got, der ein lûter wesen ist, enkumet nihtes niht, ez ensî ouch lûter wesen. Dar umber ist diu sêle wesen, diu dâ komen ist die rihte ûf got und in got.

Dar umber sprichet er: 'er huop von unden ûf sîniu ougen und sach in den himel'. Ez sprichet ein kriechischer meister, daz der himel bediutet als vil als ein ‚hütte der sunnen'. Der himel giuzet sîne kraft in die sunnen und in die sternen, und die sternen giezent ir kraft enmitten in daz ertrîche und würkent golt und gesteine alsô, daz daz gesteine hât kraft ze würkenne wunderlîchiu werk. Einiu hânt die kraft, daz sie an sich ziehent bein und vleisch. Kæme ein mensche dar, er müeste gevangen sîn und enmöhte niht dannen komen, er enkünde denne liste, dâ mite er sich dannen lœste. Ander gesteine ziehent an sich gebeine und îsen. Ieglich gesteine und krût ist ein hiuselîn der sternen, daz in im beslozzen hât eine himelische kraft. Alsô als der himel giuzet sîne kraft in die sternen, alsô giezent sie die sternen vürbaz in daz gesteine und in diu kriuter und in diu tier. Daz krûtist edeler dan daz gesteine, wan ez hât ein wahsendez leven. Ez versmâhet im ze wahsenne under dem lîplîchen himel, dâ enwære denne ein vernünftigiu kraft inne, von der ez sîn leben enpfæhet. Alsô als der niderste engel giuzet sîne kraft in den himel und beweget den und tuot in umbeloufen und würken, alsô giuzet der himel sîne kraft gar heimlîche in ein ieglich krût und in diu tier. Dâ von hât ein ieglich krût ein eingenschaft des himels und würket alumbe sich sinwel als der himel. Diu tier tretent baz ûf und hânt vihelich und sinnelich leben und blîbent doch in der zît und in der stat. Aber diu sêle tritet über an irm natiurlîchen liehte in irm hœhsten über zît und über stat in die glîchnisse des liehtes des engels und

who is pure being, nothing at all comes that is not also pure being. It is thus the soul's 'being' that reaches up to God and into God.

That's why he says: 'he carried his gaze on high, toward heaven.' A Greek master says that 'heaven' signifies the 'house of the sun.' Heaven pours its power into the sun and into the stars. The stars pour their power within the earth and produce gold and precious stones of such a kind that the precious stones have the power to do wondrous works. They have the power to attract flesh and bone. If a man approaches them, he would be hindered and could not free himself unless he has the necessary tricks to escape. Other precious stones attract bone and iron. Each precious stone and each plant is a little house of the stars which conceals in itself a celestial power. Further, just as heaven pours its power into the stars, so then do the stars pour theirs in turn into precious stones, plants and animals. The plant is nobler than the precious stone because it has a life that grows. It would disdain to grow under the material sky if there was not in it a spiritual power from which it received life. Also, just as the lowest angel pours his power into the heavens, moves it, and directs its revolution, so does heaven pour its power very secretly into each plant and animal. From this, each plant has a property that it takes from heaven and which surrounds it in every direction like the heavens. The animals raise themselves higher. They have an animal and sensory life and yet remain in time and space. But the soul in its natural light, in that which it has from the highest, raises itself above time and space, to equal the angelic light and work with it intellectually in heaven. Thus, the soul must ceaselessly elevate itself in

würket mit im vernünftichlîche in dem himel. Alsô sol diu sêle allez ûfklimmen in der vernünftigen würkunge. Dâ si iht vindet götlîches liehtes oder götlîcher glîchnisse, dâ sol si hütten und niht widerkêren, biz si aber baz ûfklimmet. Und alsô sol si sich allez baz ûferheben in dem götlîchen liehte und alsô komen über alle hütten in daz lûter, blôze angesihte gotes mit den engeln in dem himel. Dar umbe sprichet er: 'er sach in den himel und sprach: ‚vater, diu zît ist komen; wîse klâr dînen sun, daz dich dîn sun klâr wîse''. Wie der vater den sun klâr wîse und wie der sun den vater klâr wîse, dâ ist bezzer von ze swîgenne dan ze redenne; sie sölten engel sîn, die dâ von reden sölten.

Aber von dem wörtelîne ein wênic, daz er sprichet: 'alle, die dû mir gegeben hâst'. Der den sin eigenlîche anesihet, sô meinet ez als vil: 'allez, daz dû mir gegeben hâst: ich gibe in 'dáz êwige leben', daz ist daz selbe, daz der sun hât in dem êrsten ûzbruche und in dem selben grunde und in der selben lûterkeit und in dem smack, dâ er sîne eigene sælicheit inne hât und dâ er sîn eigen wesen inne besitzet: 'dáz êwige leben gibe ich in' und anders keinez. Disen sin hân ich etwenne gesprochen gemeinlîche; aber hînalt lâze ich in, und liget eigenlîche in der latîne, als ich in mê gesprochen hân. Dû bite in selber und sprich küenlîche ûf mînen lîp.

Dar nâch sprichet er: 'daz ist daz êwige leben, daz sie dich erkennen aleine éinen wâren got'. *Er*kenten zwêne got 'ein<en>', und der eine erkente tûsent, und der ander erkente got mê 'eine<n>', swie kleine daz wære, der erkente <got> mê 'eine<n>', dan der tûsent erkente. Ie mê got wirt éin erkant, ie mê er wirt ál erkant. Wære mîn sêle sinnic und wære edel und lûter, swaz si erkente, daz wære ein. Erkente ein engel, und ez wære

intellectual work. There where it finds something of the divine light or divine likeness, it must make its home, without coming back until it climbs still higher. And so, it must constantly elevate itself in the divine light and also reach above to all the houses, up to the contemplation of God, pure and naked, with the angels in heaven. That's why [John] said: 'he looked to the sky and said: 'Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son so that he may glorify you.'' As the Father glorified the Son and as the Son glorified the Father, it is better to be silent than to speak. Only the angels may speak of it.

Now I will say a little about the words he said: 'all those you gave to me.' For the one who grasps the true sense, 'all that you gave me' means: I gave them 'eternal life,' the same as the Son in the first emanation and in the same ground and in the same purity and in the savor where he had his own beatitude and where he possessed his own being: 'this eternal life, I gave it to them' (Jn. 10:28) and no other. I sometimes offer this common meaning. But tonight I depart from it, although it is found truly in the Latin words that I often said. You should pray it and speak it boldly!

He says further: 'eternal life is knowing him as the one' true God. If two men recognize God as one, and the first understands him as a thousand and the other recognized God as 'more than one', but less than [a thousand], then he would recognize more of the 'one' God than the one who recognized him as a thousand. The more God is recognized as one, the more he is recognized as all. If my soul were sensible, noble and pure, then

zehen, und erkente ein ander engel, der edeler wære, daȥ selbe, eȥ wære niuwan ein. Dar umbe sprichet sant Augustînus: erkente ich alliu dinc und got niht, sô enhæte ich niht erkant. Erkente ich aber got und erkente anders kein dinc, sô hân ich alliu dinc erkant. Ie man got nâher und tiefer erkennet ein, ie man mê erkennet die wurzel, ûȥ der alliu dinc gesproȥȥen sint. Ie man die wurzel und den kernen und den grunt der gotheit mê erkennet ein, ie man mê erkennet alliu dinc. Dar umbe sprichet er: 'daȥ man dich erkenne aleine einen wâren got'. Er ensprichet niht ‚wîsen' got noch ‚gerehten' got noch ‚gewaltigen' got, mêr: aleine 'einen wâren got' und meinet, daȥ diu sêle abescheide und abeschel alleȥ, daȥ man gote zuoleget in gedenkenne oder in verstânne, und neme in blôȥ, als er ist lûter wesen: alsô ist er 'wârer got'. Dar umbe sprichet unser herre: 'daȥ ist daȥ êwige leben, daȥ sie dich erkennent alein einen wâren got'.

Daȥ wir komen ze der wârheit, diu dâ ist lûter wesen, und êwiclîche dâ blîben, des helfe uns got. Âmen.

whatever it knows would be one. If an angel knew one thing and it was ten, and if another nobler angel knew the same thing, it would not be for him more than one. That's why St. Augustine says: if I knew all things but I did not know God, I would know nothing. And if I knew God and I did not know anything else, I would know all. The more someone knows God strictly and deeply as one, the more he or she knows the root from which all things sprout. The more someone knows as one the root and the kernel and the ground of the Godhead, the more he or she knows all things. That's why he says: may they know you as the one true God. He does not say 'wise' God, nor 'just' God, nor 'powerful' God, but only the 'one true God.' He means that the soul must detach and strip away all that is added to God by thought and knowledge, and grasp him in his nakedness as pure being: insofar as he is the 'true God.' That's why our Lord says: 'eternal life is that they know you as the one true God.'

May God help us so that we may reach the truth which is pure being and so that we may abide in it eternally. Amen.

DW IV.2 Sermon 108

Si non lavero te, non habebis partem mecum
If I do not wash you, you will have no part with me

'Si non lavero te, non habebis partem mecum.

Ist daȝ ich dich niht entwahe, sô enhâst dû kein teil mit mir'.

Diȝ wort sprach unser herre ze sant Pêtrô, dô er sînen jüngern die vüeȝe twahen wolte. Sant Pêter erschrac des, daȝ unser herre sô ein groȝ werk tuon wolte, und sprach: 'herre, dû entwahest mîne vüeȝe niemer'. Und dâ mite wolte er unsern herren verwîsen von dêmüeticheit.

Dâ von sprichet sant Augustînus: wære unser herre ze dem êrsten ze allen den aposteln komen, sie hæten in alle verwîset von ir dêmüeticheit. Ein ander heilige sprichet, daȝ unser herre allen den jüngern die vüeȝe hæte getwagen, ê er ze sant Pêtrô kam. Und sie swigen alle von einvalticheit und von tiefe sîner wîsheit, daȝ sie in niht vrâgen enwolten. Sie westen wol, daȝ unser herre sô wîse was, daȝ er alliu sîniu werk in dem aller besten tet. Dar umbe beginnent etlîche geistlîche liute bî den jungen die vüeȝe ze twahenne und ze dem lesten den alten. Ouch sprichet Bêdâ, daȝ unser herre ze dem êrsten ze sant Pêtro kam. Danne Jûdas der hâte sich durch sînen vrevele ze vor gesast. Und dem wurden ze dem êrsten die vüeȝe getwagen. Und der was sô vrevel, daȝ er es niht enahtete. Und durch dise zweierleie rede sô beginnent etlîche geistlîche liute an den alten die vüeȝe ze twahenne.

Der êwangeliste sprichet ouch ein ander wort: 'dâ unser herre die sînen liep hâte, dâ hâte er sie liep biȝ an daȝ ende. Endelîchen an disen worten sint bewîset

Si non lavero te, non habebis partem mecum.
(Jn. 13:8)
If I do not wash you, you will have no part with me.

Our Lord said these words to St Peter as he wanted to wash the feet of his disciples. St Peter was scared of the fact that our Lord wanted to accomplish so great a work, and he said to him: “Lord, you will never wash my feet.” He also wanted to show his humility to our Lord.

About this, St Augustine said: if our Lord had first come to all the apostles, they would have shown him humility. Another saint said that our Lord had washed the feet of all the disciples before he arrived at St Peter. Peter kept silent from simplicity and depth of wisdom to ensure that that they would no longer want to ask him any questions. They knew well that our Lord was so wise that he accomplished all his work in the best way. That why certain spiritual people start by washing the feet of those who are younger, and then the elders. Bede says as well that our Lord first came to St Peter and then to Judas whose pride grew stronger. His feet were washed first. He was so prideful, he understood nothing of this. And through this twofold teaching, some spiritual people start by washing the feet of their elders.

The evangelist spoke again a few words: “As our Lord had loved his own, he loved them until the end” (Jn. 13:1). Finally, three things are shown by these

drui dinc: Ze dem êrsten diu volkomenheit der liebe. Ze dem andern mâle der nutz der gâbe. Ze dem dritten mâle, wie sich die liute halten suln, an den got disiu dinc würket.

Ze dem êrsten prüeven wir die liebe. Ein heilige sprichet: diu sêle, diu got liep hât und enbrant ist in heiȥer gerunge, daȥ si got mit vliȥe suochet, der is bitter und unmære und alzemâle eislich alleȥ, daȥ got niht enist, und loufet umbe in allen crêatûren und enkan keine ruowe vinden. Und als verre si sich selber vindet in der crêatûre, alsô vil ist si ir selber eislich. Und diu heiȥe gerunge der sêle diu muoȥ gote von nôt volgen als daȥ viur sîn selbes natûre volgen muoȥ, daȥ eȥ verzet und verwandelt alleȥ, daȥ eȥ begrîfet.

Dar umbe sprichet sant Augustînus: herre nimest dû uns dich, sô gip uns einen andern vür dich. Er wil sprechen: unser sêle enmac kein leven âne dich gehaben. Swar dû verst, dar volget si dir. Si enmac âne dich niht wesen. Daȥ ist diu volkomenheit der leibe unsers herren gotes, daȥ 'er sie liep hâte biȥ an daȥ ende'. Dô er sich uns nam, als er lîdelich und tœtlich was, dô gap er uns einen andern sich an dem sacrament unlîdelich und untœtlich und alzemâle lûter von allem dem, daȥ er vor des geliten hete, und daȥ er niemer gesterben ensol. Und alsô 'wil er mit uns blîben biȥ ze dem ends der werlt', als er selber sprichet.

Daȥ ander ist der nutz oder diu grœȥe der gâbe. Nû enmöhte got keine grœȥere gâbe gegeben, dan daȥ er sich selber gibet. Zwelferleie nutz oder vruht ist geschriben von unsers herren lîchamen. Und man noch vil schrîben möhte, daȥ wil ich alzemâle mit einem worte treffen: alle die gnâde und sælicheit, diu dâ liget an allen guoten werken und an allen tugenden und siten, und alle die sælicheit, die die heiligen beseȥȥen hânt in dem himelrîche, und alle die sælicheit,

words: first, the perfection of love; second, the usefulness of the gift; third, how people must conduct themselves, in whom God works these things.

First, we consider love. A saint says: the soul which has love for God and which is inflamed with burning desire seeks God eagerly. All that which is not God becomes bitter and distasteful and entirely appalling. It runs around in all creatures and can find no rest. To the extent that it finds itself among creatures, it is appalled by them. The burning desire of the soul must necessarily follow God, as fire must follow its own nature, devouring and transforming all that it grasps.

That's why St Augustine said: Lord, if you take yourself away from us, give us another in your place. This means: our souls can have no life without you. Wherever you go, they will follow you. It cannot be without you. It's the perfection of love of our Lord God, 'he loves us until the end.' He took us into his care by his suffering and dying. Then he gave us another in his place through the sacrament without suffering and without dying, completely free of all that he suffered and of all that can ever die. So "he wanted to remain with us until the end of the world" as he said himself (Mt. 28:20).

He second point is the use or the greatness of the gift. Now, God cannot give a greater gift than when he gives himself. It is written that there are twelve uses or fruits of the body of our Lord and one could still write of more. I want to gather them all together by saying one thing: all grace and blessedness which lies in all good works and in all virtues and in all moral behavior, and all of the blessedness that the saints have possessed in the kingdom of heaven, and

die der eingeborn sun des himelischen vaters beseꝛzzen hât, die enpfæhet diu sêle alzemâle an unsers herren lîchamen.

Si enpfæhet ein wesen aller dinge, daꝛ sô lustlich ist, daꝛ diu sêle mit aller pîne neimer dar ûꝛ geslagen enmöhte werden, si enwölte joch wesen haben von gote.

Ze dem andern mâle enpfæhet si eine bewegunge aller dinge von gote, der mit sîner kraft beweget und würket lustlîche sîn selbes glîchnisse in allen guoten dingen.

Ze dem dritten mâle enpfæhet si ein ende aller dinge, dâ von alliu dinc entspringent und sich wider endent. Waꝛ mac der mensche grœzers gern, dan daꝛ er unsers herren lîchamen enpfâhe? Wan an im enpfæhet er volkomenheit und genüege aller dinge.

Weste ein krût, daꝛ eꝛ von sîner kranken natûre beroubet würde und würde gewandelt an ein alsô edele natûre und leben, als der mensche ist, eꝛ gerte von natûre mit aller kraft, daꝛ eꝛ dem menschen ze einer spîse würde, wan alliu diu spîse, die der mensche enpfæhet, diu im wol gevüeget, diu wirt gewandelt an sîn vleisch und an sîn bluot und wirt ein leben mit im. Ist aber diu spîse ungeseinet oder ungeliutert oder ungar oder rô, sô envereinet si sich niht mit dem menschen: sî gât im zwischen vel und vleisch und swert im ûꝛ dem lîbe. Und dâ von kumet aller meist krankheit und allerleie suht.

Des glîche ist eꝛ an unsers herren lîchamen. Wer in enpfæhet, daꝛ er niht geliutert noch gereiniget enist von sünden, der envereinet sich mit im niht, sunder er wirt im ein gestrenger rihter. Dar umbe sol diu sêle gereiniget und geliutert werden und sol gern mit aller kraft lîbes und sêle, daꝛ si mit gote vereinet werde, sô wirt si alleꝛ daꝛ mit

all the blessedness that the only-begotten Son of the Heavenly Father has possessed - the soul receives it all through the body of Christ.

It receives the being of all things, which is so delightful that the soul doesn't ever want to be deprived of it by any means. It only wants to have the being of God.

Secondly, it receives the movement of all things from God. He moves them with his power and joyfully works his own likeness in all good things.

Thirdly, it receives the end of all things from which all things burst forth and to which all things come to an end again. What greater thing can a man desire than to receive the body of our Lord? For through that, he receives the satisfaction and perfection of all things.

If a blade of grass knew it could be stripped of its lower nature and transformed into a nature and life as noble as that of man, it would desire by the nature of all its power to become food for man, as all food that man receives which is most fitting for him becomes transformed into flesh and blood, becoming one life with him. But if the food is impure or unrefined, uncooked or raw, then it does not unite with man. It creeps in between the skin and flesh and swells up outside of the body. From this, all kinds of illnesses and afflictions arise.

It is the same with the body of our Lord. Whoever receives it when he is not yet cleansed and purified of sin cannot unite with it, but the sacrament will firmly guide him. That's why the soul must be purified and cleansed. It should desire with all its powers, body and soul to unite with God. Then it becomes by grace with God all that God is in himself by nature.

gote von gnâden, daȥ got in sich selber ist von natûre.

Wære si alsô blôȥ und entzogen von allen dingen, als got entzogen und blôȥ ist aller dinge und ein lûter wesen ist über allen dingen, si würde alsô lûterlîche got mit gote, als verre einer crêatûre mügelich ist. Dise einunge hât unser herre Jêsus Kristus uns allen gegeben: 'vater, ich wil, daȥ sie alle ein sîn mit uns, als dû und ich ein sint'.

Daȥ dritte ist, wie die liute suln sîn, an den disiu dinc suln geschehen. Daȥ ist, daȥ unser herre sprach ze sant Pêtrô: 'entwahe ich dich niht, sô enmaht dû kein teil mit mir gehaben'. Dô sprach sant Pêter: 'herre, niht aleine entwahe mîne vüeȥe, sunder hende und houbet'. Hie ane ist bewîset drîerleie reinicheit.

Diu êrste reinicheit sol sîn an den obersten kreften der sêle, als ich ouch mê gesprochen hân, daȥ dem 'manne daȥ houbet blôȥ' sol sîn und 'der vrouwen bedecket', daȥ ist daȥ die obersten krefte blôȥ und unbeworren suln sîn, daȥ sich diu sêle genzlîche gote müge erbieten an dem hœhsten: sô mac si allez daȥ von gote enpfæhen, daȥ got geben mac, und genzlîche mit im vereinet werden. Daȥ den vrouwen daȥ houbet bedecket sol sî, daȥ ist alsô vil, daȥ diu sêle mit den nidersten kreften mit mâȥe enpfâhen sol daȥ dienst der crêatûren, und mit mâȥe sol si gebrûchen aller dinge. Diu sêle hât lîden und anevehten an dem nidersten teile, wan diu ist sô wandelhaftig und unstæte von den dingen, diu in der zît loufen. Mit der lîdunge und anevehtunge sô koufet si die gotheit. Wan alsô vil als diu sêle lîdet anevehtunge durch got, als vil ist si zuonâhende.

Diu ander reinicheit bezeichent die hende, daȥ ist daȥ der mensche ein rein und ein geordent leben sol haben, daȥ sîniu werk alsô wîslîche getân werden,

Were it so bare and abstracted from all things, as God is bare and abstracted from all things and is a pure being over all things, so it would be purely God with God, as far as a creature can. Our lord Jesus Christ gave this unity to us all: 'Father, I want all of them to be one with us, as you and I are one.'

The third point is: how must people be in whom this thing should come to pass? It was about this that our Lord said to St Peter: "If I do not wash you, you will have no part with me." And Peter said to him: "Lord, do not wash only my feet, but also my hands and my head." These indicate three types of purification.

The first purification must be at the level of the highest powers of the soul. As I have often said, it is necessary that "man's head be bare" and "woman's covered," which signifies that the highest powers must be naked and undisturbed so that the soul can strive entirely for God in the highest. Thus it can receive from God all that God can give, and become entirely united with him. That the head of women must be covered signifies that the soul with the lowest powers must receive created things with restraint and that they must be used with restraint with all things. The soul has to suffer and struggle in the lowest part, for there, it is changeable and unstable as a result of things that move in time. With suffering and struggle, it attains divinity. The more it suffers struggles through God, the more the soul draws near him.

The second purification, that of the hands, signifies that man must have a pure and ordered life, that his works should be done wisely so that they would

daȥ ir nieman geergert werde, sunder daȥ er sî ein lieht und ein wanc den liuten ze gote. 'Ergert sich aber ieman ze unrehte, der ist mir unmære', sprichet sant Paulus.

Diu dritte reinicheit ist an den vüeȥen, daȥ der mensche dêmüetic sî an sîner gerunge. Ich spriche daȥ genzlîche: wære der mensche alsô dêmüetic und alsô bereit als sant Paulus, got der gæbe im alsô grôȥe gnâde als sant Paulô. Ich bin des gewis: möhte der mensche alsô grôȥe dêmüeticheit gehaben alsô Marîâ, gotes muoter, er besæze die selbe sælicheit in dem himelrîche, die si beseȥȥen hât. Daȥ uns daȥ geschehe, des helfe uns got. Âmen.

trouble no one. On the contrary, he would be a light for men and a sign toward God. "If anyone wants to be troublesome, it is not our custom," St Paul said.

The third purification at the level of the feet signifies that man must be humble in his desire. I say this absolutely: if man was as humble and as useful as St Paul, then God would give him grace as great as he gave St Paul. I say this precisely: if man could have so great a humility as Mary, the mother of God, he would possess the same blessedness in the kingdom of heaven as she possessed. May God help us so that this happens in us. Amen.

APPENDIX B

CONCORDANCE OF THE ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF ECKHART'S WORKS

The following is a concordance of the English translations of Eckhart's works. In addition to the abbreviations defined after the table of contents (DW, LW, EE, TP) the abbreviations used correspond to the following books:

CBE	Evans, C. de B. *Meister Eckhart by Franz Pfeiffer*, 2 vols., London: Watkins, 1924 and 1931.
B	Blakney, Raymond. 1942. *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation.* New York: HarperOne.
F	Fox, Matthew. 1991. *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation.* New York: Doubleday.
W	Walshe, Maurice O'Connell. 2010. *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart.* The Crossroad Publishing Company.
S	Schürmann, Reiner. 2001. *Wandering Joy: Meister Eckhart's Mystical Philosophy.* Steiner Books.
CS	Clark, James and Skinner, John V. (1958). Meister Eckhart: Selected Treatises and Sermons Translated from Latin and German with an Introduction and Notes. London: Faber & Faber Ltd.
M	Maurer, Armand A., trans. 1974. *Parisian Questions and Prologues.* Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies.
OD	Davies, Oliver. 1994. *Meister Eckhart: Selected Writings.* London: Penguin.
CJ	My translations in the present volume

Note that translations from C. de B. Evans (CBE) and Blakney (B) were often done before the critical editions (DW/LW) of those works were available. In some cases, the text is markedly different. The numbers in each column are page numbers. Though each author has a unique numbering system, I found that having a list of page numbers made findng the translations much faster and easier.

DW	Name	CBE	EE	TP	B	F	W	S	CS	M	OD	CJ
1	Intravit Iesus in templum			239	156	450	66				152	
2	Intravit Iesus in quoddam castellum		177		207	273	77	3			158	379
3	Nunc scio vere			244	140		165					
4	Omne datum optimum			247	183	397	224					
5a	In hoc apparuit charitas						104				188	
5b	In hoc apparuit caritas		181		125	199	108					
6	Iusti autem vivent in aeternum		185		178		328		39			
7	Populi eius			252		440	367					
8	In occisione gladii				170	83	403				164	
9	Quasi stella matutina			255	218		341					
10	In diebus suis placuit deo			261	212		334				168	
11	Impletum est tempus Elizabeth				151		347					
12	Qui audit me			267	203		295				175	
13	Vidi supra montem Syon						159					
13a	Sant Johannes sach in einer gesichtte						163					
14	Surge illuminare iherusalem			271			266					
15	Homo quidam nobilis		189			166	270					
16a	Een meester sprect ware alle middel af						112				192	
16b	Quasi vas auri solidum			275			114					
17	Qui odit animam suam						148	48				
18	Adolescens, tibi dico: surge						211					
19	Sta in porta domus domini						207					
20a	Homo quidam fecit cenam magnam						191					
20b	Homo quidam fecit cenam magnam						196					
21	Unus deus et pater omnium	I, 248		280		188	466				180	
22	Ave, gratia plena		192				279					
23	Compulit Jesus discipulos ascendere in naviculum						285					
24	Induimini dominum Iesum Christum			284		102	448					392
25	Moyses orabat dominum	II, 113			174	226	91					
26	Mulier, venit hora						95	55				
27	Hoc est praeceptum meum					313	99					
28	Ego elegi vos				188		129				118	
29	Convescens praecepit eis			287	192	354	124					
30	Praedica verbum			292		65	133	181	58		122	
31	Ecce ego mitto angelum meum						258					

32	Consideravit semitas domus suae				161		275				
33	Sancti per fidem vicerunt regna						401			111	
34	Gaudete in domino						172				
35	Si consurrexistis cum Christo						200				
36a	Stetis Jesus in medio discipulorum						218				
36b	Venit Jesus et stetit in medio						221				
37	Vir meus servus tuus mortus est						187				
38	In illo tempore missus est angelus	II, 151					177			112	
39	Iustus in perpetuum vivet			296		464	305		53	144	
40	Manete in me (blîbet in mir)			300			318			148	397
41	Qui sequitur iustitiam						238			139	
42	Adolescens, tibi dico surge				133	126	398			184	
43	Adolescens, tibi dico surge						394				
44	Postquam completi erant dies						143				
45	Beatus es, Simon Bar Iona						183				
46	Haec est vita aeterna			304			255				
47	Spiritus domini replevit orbem terrarum					114	155				
48	Ein meister sprichet, alliu glîchiu		197				309			133	
49	Beatus venter, qui te portavit					338	432				
50	Eratis enim aliquando in tenebris						452			136	
51	Hec dicit dominus, honora patrem tuum				146		407				
52	Beati pauperes spiritu		199		227	213	420	214		202	
53	Misit dominus manum suam		203			57	152			127	
54a	Unser herre underhuop										402
54b	Haec est vita aeterna, ut cognoscant						250				
55	Maria Magdalena venit ad monumentum						203				
56	Mâriâ stuont ze dem grabe und weinete	II, 164					418				
57	Vidi civitatem sanctam Ierusalem novam	II, 191					168				
58	Qui mihi ministrat						243			130	
59	Et nunc sequimur te in toto corde			307			362				
60	In omnibus requiem quaesivi					380	246				
61	Misericordia domini plena est terra						384				

62	Got hât die armen gemachet durch die rîchen						289				
63	Man liset hütt da haimē in der epistel						388				
64	die sele die wirt ain mit gotte vnd nit veraint	II, 89					392				376
65	Deus caritas est						62				
66	Euge bone serbe et fidelis	II, 122					300				
67	Got ist diu minne					388	357				
68	Scitote quia prope est regnum dei				129	137	352				
69	Modicum et iam non videbitis me			311	165		233			209	
70	Modicum et non videbitis me			316			229				
71	Surrexit autem Saulus de terra			320			137	122			
72	Videns Iesus turbas ascendit in montem						458				
73	Dilectus deo et hominibus						370				
74	Dilectus deo et hominibus						374				
75	Mandatum novum do vobis					91	427				
76	Videte qualem caritatem dedit nobis pater			327		325	72	131			
77	Ecce mitto angelum meum						262				
78	Missus est Gabriel angelus						175				
79	Laudate caeli et exultet terra				143	151	445				
80	Homo quidam erat dives			332			455				
81	Fluminis impetus laetificat civitatem Dei					363	322				
82	Quis putas puer iste erit?						314				
83	Renovamini spiritu	I, 245	206			177	462			235	
84	Puella surge	II, 186		335			413				
85	Pvella surge	II, 188				266	416			230	
86	Intravit Iesus in quoddam castellum	II, 90		338		478	83			193	
87	Ecce dies veniunt dicit dominus	II, 148									
88	Post dies octo vocatum est nomen eius Iesus	II, 156									
89	Angelus domini apparuit	II, 157									
90	Sedebat Iesus docens in templo	II, 158									
91	Voca operarios et redde illis mercedem suam	II, 161									
92	Cum sero factum esset	II, 165									
93	Quae est ista quae ascendit quasi aurora	II, 167									
94	Non sunt condignae passiones huius temporis	II, 171									

95	Os suum aperuit sapientiae	II, 174										
96	Elisabeth pariet tibi filium	II, 177										
97	Qui manet in me	II, 180										
98	Nisi granum frumenti cadens in terram mortuum fuerit	II, 184										
99	Laetare sterilis quae non paris						576					
100	Et quaerebat videre Iesum quis esset	I, 132										
101	Dum medium silentium tenerent omnia	I, 3		95	293	29						
102	Ubi est qui natus est rex Iudaeorum	I, 9		103	251	39				215		
103	Cum factus esset Iesus annorum duodecim	I, 20		118	238	55				222		
104	In his quae patris mei sunt oportet me esse	I, 14		109		46						
105	Ich hân gesprochen in einer predige daz ich wolte lêren den menschen			136		119						
106	Aemulor enim vos die aemulatione	I, 76										
107	Qui vult venire post me	I, 136										
108	Si non lavero te, non habebis partem mecum											407
109	Nolite timere eos			224	75	292				232		

The following works will appear when the remaining portion of DW IV,2 is published:

DW	Name	CBE	EE	TP	B	F	W	S	CS	M	OD	CJ
110	In omnibus requiem quaesivi	I, 118										
111	Der herre Jêsus Kristus huob ûf sîniu ougen											
112	Alliu diu schare											
113	Sant Peter sprichet											
114	Auferte ista hinc, et nolite facere domum patris mei, domum negociationis											
115	Illumina oculos meos	I, 94										
116	Domine rex omnipotens in dicione tua cuncta sunt posita	II, 190										
117	Reich Gottes-Predigt	I, 267									241	

Eckharts vernacular treatises from DW V:

Name	CBE	EE	TP	B	F	W	S	CS	M	OD	CJ
Book of Divine Consolation	II, 45	209				524		90		53	
Talks of Instruction	II, 1	247				486		47		1	
On the Nobleman	II, 78	240		?	510	557		149		97	
On Detachment		285				566		136			

Eckhart's Latin sermons:

LW	Name	EE	TP	B	F	W	S	CS	M	OD	CJ
I	Caritas dei diffusa est (Rom 5:5)										
II,1	Deus pacis et dilectionis (2 Cor 13:11)							161			
II,2	Gratia domini nostri Iesu Christi (2 Cor 13:13)										
III	Terrena dixi vobis (Joh 3:12)										
IV,1	Ex ipso, per ipsum et in ipso sunt omnia (Rom 11:36)		207								
IV,2	Ex ipso, per ipsum et in ipso sunt omnia (Rom 11:36)		210								
V,1	Caro mea vere est cibus (John 6:56)										
V,2	Hic est panis (John 6:50)										
VI,1	Deus caritas est (1 John 4:8)		212								
VI,2	In hoc apparuit gratia (1 John 4:9)		214								
VI,3	Qui manet in caritate (1 John 4:16)										
VI,4	Timor non est in caritate (1 John 4:18)										
VII	Homo quidam erat dives (Luke 16:19)										
VIII	Homo quidam fecit cenam magnam (Luke 14:16)										
IX	Deus omnis gratiae (1 Peter 5:10)										
X	Erant appropinquantes ad Iesum (Luke 15:1)										
XI,1	Non sunt condignae passiones (Rom 8:18)										
XI,2	Existimo quod non sunt condignae passiones (Rom 8:18)							165			
XII,1	Estote misericordes (Luke 6:36)				417						
XII,2	Estote misericordes, et infra: mensuram bonam (Luke 6:36,38)										

XIII	Omnes unanimes in oratione estote (1 Peter 3:8)						
XIV,1	Ascendens Iesus in unam navim (Luke 5:3)						
XIV,2	Subductis ad terram navibus (Luke 5:11)						
XV,1	In novitate vitae ambulemus (Rom 6:4)						
XV,2	In novitate vitae ambulemus (Rom 6:4)						
XVI	Omnis qui irascitur fratri suo (Matt 5:22)						
XVII,1	Nunc vero liberati a peccato (Rom 6:22)						
XVII,2	Nunc vero liberati a peccato (Rom 6:22)						
XVII,3	Stipendia peccati mors (Rom 6:23)						
XVII,4	Stipendia peccati mors (Rom 6:23)						
XVII,5	Gratia dei vita aeterna (Rom 6:23)						
XVII,6	Gratia dei vita aeterna (Rom 6:23)						
XVIII	Misereor super turbam (Mark 8:2)						
XIX	Debitoress sumus (Rom 8:12)						
XX	Attendite a falsis prophetis (Matt 7:15)						
XXI	Non simus concupiscentes malorum (1 Cor 10:6)				169		
XXII	Homo quidam erat dives (Luke 16:1)				171		
XXIII	Nemo potest dicere: dominus Iesus (1 Cor 12:3)						
XXIV,1	Scriptum est: quia domus mea domus orationis est (Luke 19:46)						
XXIV,2	Domus mea domus orationis est (Luke 19:46)					255	388
XXV,1	Gratia dei sum id quod sum (1 Cor 15:10)	216					
XXV,2	Gratia dei sum id quod sum (2 Cor 15:10)	219					
XXVI	Duo homines ascenderunt (Luke 18:10)						
XXVII,1	Sufficientia nostra ex deo est (2 Cor 3:5)						
XXVII,2	Idoneos nos fecit ministros (2 Cor 3:6)						
XXVII,3	Ministratio spiritus erit in gloria (2 Cor 3:8)						
XXVIII,1	Bene omnia fecit (Mark 7:37)						

XXVIII,2	Bene omnia fecit: surdos fecit audire et mutos loqui (Mark 7:37)				
XXIX	Deus unum est (Gal 3:20, Deut 6:4)	223		179	258
XXX,1	Diliges dominum deum tuum (Luke 10:27)		531	184	
XXX,2	Ex toto corde tuo (Luke 10:27)		535	188	
XXXI	Spiritu ambulate (Gal 5:16)				
XXXII	Surge, vade. Fides tua te salvum fecit (Luke 17:19)				
XXXIII	Si spiritu vivimus, spiritu et ambulemus (Gal 5:25)				
XXXIV,1	Nemo potest duobus dominis servire (Matt 6:24)				
XXXIV,2	Nemo potest duobus dominis servire (Matt 6:24)				
XXXIV,3	Quaerite ergo primum regnum dei (Matt 6:33)				
XXXIV,4	Quaerite ergo primum regnum dei (Matt 6:33)				
XXXV	Flecto genua mea (Eph 3:14)				
XXXVI,1	Ibat Iesus in civitatem quae vocatur Naim (Luke 7:11)				
XXXVI,2	Dum approprinquaret (Luke 7:12)				
XXXVII	Unus deus et pater omnium (Eph 4:6)				
XXXVIII	Amice, ascende superius (Luke 14:10)				
XXXIX	Gratias ago deo meo pro omnibus vobis (1 Cor 1:4)				
XL,1	Diliges dominum deum tuum (Matt 22:37)				
XL,2	Diliges proximum tuum sicut te ipsum (Matt 22:39)				
XL,3	Quid vobis videtur de Christo?				263
XLI,1	Induite novum hominem (Eph 4:24)				
XLI,2	Sol non occidat super iracundiam vestram (Eph 4:26)				
XLII,1	Fili, remittuntur tibi peccata tua (Matt 9:2)				
XLII,2	Fili, remittuntur tibi peccata (Matt 9:2)				
XLIII,1	Videte quomodo caute ambuletis (Eph 5:15)				
XLIII,2	Dies mali sunt (Eph 5:16)				
XLIII,3	Gratias agentes semper pro omnibus (Eph 5:20)				
XLIII,4	Subiecti invicem in timore dei (Eph 5:21)				

XLIV,1	Simile factum est regnum caelorum homini regi (Matt 22:2)				
XLIV,2	Omnia parata. Venite ad nuptias (Matt 22:4)				
XLIV,3	Multi sunt vocati, pauci vero electi (Matt 22:14)				
XLV,1	Accipite armaturam dei (Eph 6:13)	227			
XLVI	Domine, descende, prius quam moriatur filius meus (John 4:49)				
XLVII,1	Confidimus in dominus Iesu (Phil 1:6)				
XLVII,2	Hoc oro, ut caritas vestra magis ac magis abundet (Phil 1:9)				264
XLVII,3	Hoc oro, ut caritas vestra magis ac magis abundet (Phil 1:9)				
XLVIII,1	Nostra conversatio in caelis est (Phil 3:20)				
XLVIII,2	Multi ambulant, qui terrena sapiunt (Phil 3:18-20)				
XLIX,1	Cuius est imago haec et superscriptio? (Matt 22:20)	234			
XLIX,2	Cuius est image haec? (Matt 22:20)	236			
XLIX,3	Imago	236			
L	Non cessamus pro vobis orantes (Col 1:9)				
LI	Ecce dies veniunt, dicit dominus (Jerome 23:3)				
LII	Induimini dominum Iesum Christum (Rom 13:14)			192	
LIII	Reliquimus omnia et secuti sumum te (Matt 19:27)				
LIV,1	Qui timet deum, faciet bona (Eccl 15:1)				
LIV,2	Implevit eum dominus (Eccl 15:5)				
LV,1	Beatus vir, qui in sapientia morabitur (Eccl 14:22)				
LV,2	Nisi granum frumenti (John 12:24)				
LV,3	Si quis vult venire post me (Matt 16:24)				
LV,4	Qui odit anumam suam in hoc mundo (John 12:25)				
LVI	Sancti per fidem vicerunt regna (Hebr 11:33)				

Works of questionable authorship that have not been included in the critical edition:

Manuscript	Name	CBE	B	W	OD
Pf 37	Adolscens, tibi dico: surge			214	
Pf 61	Egredietur virga de radice jesse et flos			312	
Pf 75	Expedit vobis, etc. vado parare vobis locum, etc.			380	
Pf 76	expedit vobis ut ego vadam		197		
Pf 103	Ego ex ore altissimi prodivi			441	
J 46	There is an uncreated spirit				239
Schmidt MS dated 1440	Amor est fortis sicut et mors	II, 98			
Schmidt MS dated 1440	It is written in the gospel that Mary, James' and John's mother…	II, 101			
Schmidt MS dated 1440	St John saw a lamb standing upon Mt. Sion.	II, 102			
Schmidt MS dated 1440	Dear children you must know that the true spiritual life leads to perfect freedom	II, 105			
Schmidt MS dated 1440	Boethius cries, speaking of the real being	II, 105			
Schmidt MS dated 1440	Mater tua et fratres tui foris stant	II, 106			
Schmidt MS dated 1440	O thou sweet nature of the unborn light	II, 108			
Pfeiffer, Deutsche Mystiker, vol. 1 p.30, attr. to H. von Fritslar	Ecce enim evangelio vobis gaudium magnum	II, 111			
Pfeiffer, Meister Eckhart	Beati qui esuriunt et sitiunt justiciam	II, 117			
Pfeiffer, Meister Eckhart	Christ said, 'Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.'	II, 126			
Pfeiffer, Haupt's Zeitschrift viii (2) 1850	Master, where dwellest thou? said a certain man to out Lord	II, 128			
Pfeiffer, Haupt's Zeitschrift viii (2) 1850	In the hands let the lanterns burn. Dionysius says …	II, 131			
Pfeiffer, Haupt's Zeitschrift viii (2) 1850	Behold I make all things new.' St John says this in…	II, 134			
Pfeiffer, Haupt's Zeitschrift viii (2) 1850	Si quis vult etc. God has poured all creatures out of himself…	II, 136			
Pfeiffer, attr. to Johannes von Sterngessen	Mary Magdalene say at the feet of our Lord …	II, 138			
Pfeiffer, attr. to Johannes von Sterngessen	He of Sterngassen said, a pure heart is better than knowledge or love	II, 140			
Pfeiffer, attr. to Johannes von Sterngessen	He of Sterngassen said too, as the prophet says in the psalter, all creatures ask me, Who is God?	II, 142			
Pfeiffer, attr. to Johannes von Sterngessen	Unchangeableness and complete detachment from creatures	II, 143			
Pfeiffer, attr. to Johannes von Sterngessen	He of Sterngassen said, I am often asked what our Lady was doing when the angel came to her	II, 143			
Wackernagel 62	It is a saint who says, 'This is sanctity, to know what we were before time…	II, 144			

Wackernagel 63	In all things I have sought rest and in nothing have I found it.'	II, 146
Sievers, Haupt's Zeitschrift 1850, Oxford codex	Sancti per fidem vicerunt regna	II, 179
Sievers, Haupt's Zeitschrift 1850, Oxford codex	Dimissa turba ascendit in montem	II, 182
Sievers, Haupt's Zeitschrift 1850, Cassel MS.	Beatus vir qui inventus est sine macula	II, 195
Sievers, Haupt's Zeitschrift 1850, Cassel MS.	Domus mea domus orationis vocabitur etc.	II, 199
Sievers, Haupt's Zeitschrift 1850, Cassel MS.	Justorum autem animae in manu dei sunt	II, 202
Sievers, Haupt's Zeitschrift 1850, Cassel MS.	The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who made a banquet for his son (Mt. 22:2). In this banquet we are shown a symbol of eternal happiness	II, 204
Sievers, Haupt's Zeitschrift 1850, Cassel MS.	Misericordia domini plena est terra etc.	II, 207
Sievers, Haupt's Zeitschrift 1850, Cassel MS.	Vere dominus iste est in loco isto etc.	II, 210

Eckhart's other works in Latin are much longer and have consequently been translated often only in part. The whole of Eckhart's short work "Super oratione dominica" was translated by Fox on 495. Maurer translated the *Parisian Questions*, *General Prologue*, *Prologue to the Book of Propositions* and the *Prologue to the Book of Commentaries* in his volume. That volume along with Clark & Skinner's text includes partial translations of Eckhart's *Commentary on Exodus*. The entirety of the *Commentary on Exodus* is translated in TP. Also in TP are portions of the *Commentary on Wisdom* (TP 147 nn.19-40,96-120,144-157,279-285), portions of the *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (TP 174 nn.42-61) and the *Commentary on John* (TP 182 nn.546-576). Clark and Skinner also translated a portion of the *Commentary on John* (CS 202, 149-160 nn.226-248). In EE, we find partial translations of the *Commentary on Genesis* (EE 82 nn.1-28), *Book of the*

Parables of Genesis (EE 92 nn.1-40,135-165), *Commentary on John* (EE122, nn.1-131). The complete text of the defense is also found there (EE 71) along with a translation of the bull *In agro dominico* (EE 77).

The following portions have not been translated into English: *Commentary on Wisdom* (nn.1-18, 41-95, 121-143, 158-278, 286-300), *Commentary on Genesis* (nn.29-end), *Book of the Parables of Genesis* (nn.41-134, 166-end), *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (nn.1-41, 62-end), *Commentary on John* (nn.132-225, 249-545, 577-745). There is also no translation in English of the fragments of Eckhart's *Commentary on the Song of Songs.*