The Outer and the Inner:

The Reflective Mysticism of Eckhart, Seuse, and Tauler

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The aging Hildegard corresponded with the first great Hohenstaufen emperor, who died in 1190 during the Third Crusade after bitter quarrels with the pope. The young Eckhart would have heard the shocking news of the last Hohenstaufen, executed in 1268 at the age of sixteen. Between the death of Hildegard in 1179 and the birth of Eckhart around 1260, the ideal of a Holy Empire, *Sacrum Imperium,* gave rise to dreams and nightmares. Ideals were crushed and Germany threatened with dissolution in struggles between *sacerdotium* and *imperium* and within either.

Around the year 1300, the Church was locked in a contest for political hegemony, the pope against the ascendant power of the French monarchy. Philip IV ruled France during Eckhart's stays in Paris as a student and professor. Philip counteracted the papal attempt to attain supremacy by instigating an assault on the person of Pope Boniface VIII, forcing the relocation of the papal seat to Avignon. Philip expelled the Jews and acted in collusion with the office of the inquisition to eliminate the crusading order of Knights Templars. Symbolizing the ideal of selfless service, the Order of Templars had inspired Parzival's Knights of the Holy Grail, but they had grown enviably rich and powerful, if not as perverted as the inquisition charged. The public rhetoric of denunciation became violent enough to dismay and confuse the common people over whose heads the fierce volleys were exchanged.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, dissatisfaction began to assume more radical and dogmatic forms. The most spectacular of these was the Joachite movement that aroused expectations of a world soon to be prophetically transformed. The brightest of these hopes had been dashed by the mid-thirteenth century, but the persecution of the Joachite Franciscan Spirituals would continue. Toward the close of the century, the forward-looking expectations were replaced by or subsumed within the Flagellant movement. Its adherents inflicted fearful public floggings upon themselves for the disobedience of the world. Moving from city to city in Italy and Germany, the Flagellants became lay champions of penitential practices exercised by the cloistered religious from around the year 1000.

The impending repressive aspects of public life, coupled with the natural catastrophe of an especially harsh winter at the beginning of the fourteenth century, make it appear plausible to interpret the mysticism of Eckhart as a turn inward anticipating outer hardships and despair. The interpretation is attractive for a number of reasons. Since we know almost nothing of his reaction to the conditions of his historical environment, it is seductive to suppose that he turned his back on the world. The great themes of his sermons are concerned with the inner being: "the birth of God in the soul," and the "small spark" *(Fünklein)* in the soul. Eckhart advised against praying for the fulfillment of human needs and desires, against external works or religious exercises as intended to bring about such responses from God.

Like Hildegard's visions, Eckhart's "inwardness" cannot be interpreted without allowing for the difference between his world and our own. Upon hearing his invocations against "time, place, number, and body," our inclination may be to interpret him in a post-Kantian manner, or in the sense of a pure philosophical Neoplatonism. The Scholastic theorist and the spiritual adviser who counselled against entertaining *Bilder,* "images," in prayer and the contemplation of God, may have had a peculiar perspective on the world of appearances, but this relationship should not be interpreted outside its

institutional context. The world from which Eckhart exhorted his monastic flock to turn inward was a worldliness that penetrated the cloistered cells, prayers, and thoughts of the religious. The dark and superessential Oneness of God was found not only in the desert of the soul, but also in an evanescent union of freedom and order, of *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa,* in the ideal society of the cloister. We shall see that the context of Eckhart's invocations to rid the soul of "place, time, body, and number" sanctions an interpretation of place as the authority of the high position of the pope or emperor and hence of time as the times. Body could have meant physical well-being in an age in which good health was rare or perhaps flagellation in a period in which asceticism was on the rise. Number recalls a rising mercantile class whose ethos challenged the mendicant orders, which were dependent on largesse and troubled with a growing penchant for personal possessions.

Far from counselling quietism or withdrawal, Eckhart cited Origen in urging his listeners to find God in every creature and activity: "I tell you—and it is true—: In each good thought or good meaning or good work, we are perpetually born anew in God" (*Ich spriche—und ez ist war—: in einem ieglîchen guoten gedanke oder guoter meinunge oder guoten werke werden wir all zît niuwe geboren in gote).*[1] Just as the image of the quietistic mystic does not fit with Eckhart's dual emphasis on the *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa,*[2] the dismal panorama of fourteenth-century calamities in the offing likewise has no room for the outgoing thirteenth century, a golden age for Scholasticism and monasticism—the formative period and realm of the young man Eckhart. Moreover, while nature and society were apparently of no interest to him, they are by no means excluded from his mentioning.

Eckhart the preacher was not an anchorite, estranged from the world. The environment of his activity was a powerful order in which he rose meteorically: as a student and magister, as a priest, prior,

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[1] *Qui sequitur iustitiam,* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 2, ed. Josef Quint (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1971), 293.

[2] See Friedrich-Wilhelm Wentzlaff-Eggebert, *Studien zur Lebenslehre Taulers* (Berlin: Gruyter, 1940), on the union of the active and comtemplative life in Dominican mysticism; and Dietmar Mieth, *Die Einheit von* Vita activa *und* Vita contemplativa (Inaugural Dissertation, Regensburg, 1969).

vicar, provincial head, spiritual instructor, and counsellor. At the height of his administrative career, the scope of his responsibilities might have matched *mutatis mutandis* those of a regional director in a modern international corporation. His mystical sermons were not private meditations, but part of his guiding role. Much of what strikes us as otherworldliness in Eckhart has to do with a real world distinct from our own and distinct from certain calamities yet to come.

However, this does not solve the problem of Eckhart's relationship to the surrounding society. The order he served was not only that of the great minds of High Scholasticism; his was also the order of the inquisitors who were condemning heretics and their books throughout much of his career, sometimes even in his vicinity.[3] Was Eckhart an intellectual somnambulist who knew all the masters of the present and past, who could urbanely quote from "Rabbi Moyses" (Moses Maimonides), who saluted Plato as "the great priest"—yet saw and heard nothing of the inquisition's offices? Was Eckhart concerned with the ordeals of the Dominican nuns, but indifferent to the martyrdom of innocent Beguines and Beghards? It would be senseless to consider these questions from an anachronistic vantage, to confront Eckhart with options that were nonexistent in his time, or to reconstruct his life minus the vow of obedience at its core. However, it is an equal failure of perspective to write about Eckhart's understanding of faith, as if these persecutions committed by the Church were an irrelevant backdrop, like perennial bad weather.

In interpreting Eckhart, we can benefit from a number of recent scholarly studies written from opposing points of view. In addition to the philosophically oriented overviews by Fischer or Waldschütz, the Bochum school represented by Kurt Flasch and Burkhard Mojsisch offers a

[3] For an overview, see Richard Kieckhefer, *Repression of Heresy in Medieval Germany* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), 19ff. ("The War Against Beghards and Beguines").

challenging view of the "philosopher of Christianity" whose declared purpose in all his treatises and sermons was to explicate the truth of faith and Scripture by means of "natural," that is, philosophical, arguments.[4] This school has much to commend it, but it leaves us with an Eckhart who seems out of place in his nonintellectual activities. The opposing school represented by Alois M. Haas reclaims Eckhart for the history of Christian spirituality.[5] This school has the advantage that it can address the whole Eckhart who was not an alienated intellectual or an open rebel against society. The more recent books by Kurt Ruh and Otto Langer are crucial efforts at fleshing out the wider historical world of Eckhart.[6] Ruh has undertaken the difficult task of interpreting an evolution within Eckhar's oeuvre in view of the events of his times. Langer's study evaluates results of some previous researches and provides valuable new insights into the forms of female monastic piety that confronted Eckhart. By expanding on arguments dating back to the nineteenth-century debate between Preger and Denifle, these new books highlight the range of possible approaches.[7] Any integrated study of Eckhart's work, life, and times can be expected to take them into account. An interpretation should address the contrastive aspects of his life and work, doing so without playing one aspect off against another, without neglecting the scholastic *Lesmeister,* a thinker of great subtlety, or the *Lebmeister,* a man of practical counsels; neither ignoring the independent mind and voice whose utterances were at least redolent of heresy, nor the humble servant of his order, consistent to the end in his vow of obedience.

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[4] Heribert Fischer, *Meister Eckhart. Einführung in sein philosophisches Denken* (Freiburg, Munich: Alber, 1974)*;* Waldschütz, *Denken und Erfahren des Grundes;* Kurt Flasch, "Die Intention Meister Eckharts," in *Sprache und Begriff.* Festschrift B. Liebrucks (Meisenheim am Glan: 1974): 292-318; Burkhard Mojsisch, *Meister Eckhart. Analogie, Univozität und Einheit* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1983), 6 (offers a summary of further relevant literature).

[5] See Alois M. Haas, *Sermo Mysticus: Studien zu Theologie und Sprache der deutschen Mystik* (Freiburg/Switzerland: Universitäts-Verlag, 1989), esp. 136ff.

[6] Langer, *Mystische Erfahrung und spirituelle Theologie. Zu Meister Eckharts Auseinandersetzung mit der Frauenfrömmigkeit seiner Zeit* (Munich: Artemis, 1987); Kurt Ruh, *Meister Eckhart. Theologe, Prediger, Mystiker* (Munich: Beck Verlag, 1985).

[7] Eckhart the philosopher was already familiar to Franz von Baader (1765-1841) and to Hegel who saw him as a forerunner. Eckhart's interactions with Scholastic philosophy and female piety were first elucidated by Heinrich Seuse Denifle and Wilhelm Preger. See Ernst Soudek, *Meister Eckhart* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1973), esp. 53ff.

A guiding idea of this study is that mysticism arises when the authority of doctrines or articles of faith is challenged. In Eckhart's time, the highest achievements and aspirations of the schools and orders coincided with the mortification of the Church both by its secular opponents and by its own representatives. It would be difficult to imagine a more extreme clash of spiritual aspirations and historical realities. I will argue that Eckhart in effect elevated obedience to a transcendental plane. Not only the willful self but all the powers and correlatives of immanence, of space, time, body, and number were shunned in this absolute stage of obedience. Paradoxically, renunciation led to autonomy by rendering humility so immediate before God that all external authorities commanding the obedience of the outer man or woman became irrelevant to the inner human being, assimilated to God by mystical knowledge.

Eckhart's earliest work is the *Talks of Instruction*. These were informal lectures for the spiritual orientation and training of his younger Dominican confrères. The instructions were given in Erfurt sometime between 1294 and 1298 by the young prior who had recently completed his studies in Paris. Compared with the difficult later sermons, these talks are readily comprehensible and practical in their spiritual advice. The talks can therefore offer a point of reference, giving us something like a base tone for the normal monastic life, from which the more subtle mystical pitch of the later sermons rises. True and complete obedience is the virtue of all virtues. God assuredly enters into those who surrender to him in absolute obedience. In prayer, one should seek to become united with God in body and soul; above all, one should abandon one's own selfish will completely.

The mystical virtues of *Abgeschiedenheit,* distance from all things, and *Gelassenheit,* serene abandonment to God, are thus a part of the monastic life Eckhart urges upon his fellows. The virtues of "distance" and "serenity" require a self-knowledge that overcomes self. Eckhart's most compelling advice to his fellow monks is that they should not worry so much about what they ought to do, but

rather more about what they are: our actions are justified by our being, not our being by our actions *(Die rede der underscheidunge,* 4). Being and knowledge, spiritual distance and serenity—these are chords that will be sounded again in a new and metaphysical key in the later sermons.

Returning to Paris to teach in 1302, Eckhart was obliged to participate in academic disputes and to elucidate the Bible. His so-called *Questiones Parisienses* were formulated for such disputes. The first question was whether being and knowing are identical in God.[8] Eckhart embraced the position that in God knowing precedes being. Though, obviously, the divine knowing did not come before the divine being in time, *intelligere* is the foundation of *esse* in God. Eckhart's position can therefore be interpreted as a metaphysical heightening of the Dominican and Thomistic emphasis on knowledge. There are ambiguities in the theology of Eckhart.[9] The later *Opus Tripartitum* states: *Esse est deus.* Since both positions are expressed in Eckhart's German sermons, with intellect more often and more prominently taking priority, it is not possible to offer a contradiction-free Eckhartian theology.[10] Here, the main questions to be considered are the scriptural and philosophical authority on which his doctrines of being and intellect stood, and how these doctrines related to the lives of the nuns.

Eckhart's speculations on the Word played a key role in his philosophical work. The paradoxes of the preacher are grounded in the Platonism of the theologian who identified the "beginnings" in Genesis and John with the logos or ratio, as the Idea in which all other "ideas" (prototypes) of creation have their ground: *De primo sciendum quod principium, in quo 'creavit deus caelum et terram' est ratio idealis. Et hoc est quod Ioh. 1 dicitur:* 'in principio erat verbum' *Graecus habet logos, id est ratio….*[11] Repeatedly in his

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[8] *Utrum in Deo sit idem esse et intelligere,* see: *Quaestiones Parisienses...,* in Eckhart, *Lateinische Werke* 5, ed. Bernhard Geyer (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1936), 37ff.

[9] Lossky and others have discussed these ambiguities with respect to Eckhart's negative theology. See Vladimir Lossky, *Théologie négative et connaisance de Dieu chez Maitre Eckhart* (Paris: Vrin, 1960), 207-220.

[10] Eckhart, *Prologi in Opus Tripartitum,* in *Lateinische Werke* 1.2, ed. Loris Sturlese (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1987), 28.

[11] Eckhart, *Expositio Libri Genesis (Exhordium hoc scripturae Genesis tractat Augustinus diffuse, specialiter Super Genesim ad litteram et Super Genesim contra Manichaeos et in tribus ultimis libris Confessionum),* in *Lateinische Werke* 1, ed. Konrad Weiss (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1964), 186. Cf. also Jürgen Eberle, *Die Schöpfung in ihren Ursachen. Untersuchung zum Begriff der Idee in den lateinischen Werken Meister Eckharts* (Inaugural Dissertation, Cologne, 1972), esp. 47-51.

sermons and treatises, Eckhart cites John 1:1, interpreting the divine Word "in the beginning" as *intellectus*. As the cause of all that is, God's essence is higher than his being, and God's "purity of being"—*puritas essendi*—amounts to the divine knowing. Mojsisch has shown that Eckhart was in line with the Scholastic avant-garde in a thinking influenced by the theory of the active intellect of his fellow Dominican, Dietrich of Freiberg.[12] In an age of speculative systems rivalling the Gothic cathedrals in their ingeniousness, a thesis such as the Eckhartian *deus est intelligere* undoubtedly seemed less abstruse than it may now.

Eckhart's theory of analogy is pivotal to the understanding of the riddles and paradoxes of his sermons. This famous theory maintained that the transcendental predicates of oneness, being, living, knowing, goodness, or justice were imparted by the higher term, God, to the subordinate term of the analogy as an image is imparted to a mirror or as light to luminous air. Without the source, the image or luminosity is nothing. The image is the creature, the source or exemplar the Creator. The theory of analogy grounds many puzzling usages of the sermons, including the apodictic statements that creatures are purely "nothing," or that the Son, born in the soul of the believer, is none other than the selfsame Son of God.[13]

In his Scholastic treatises, Eckhart refers back to certain signally important passages in Augustine. In chapter seven of the Confessions, Augustine recalled having found in the books of the Platonists the Word, but not the humble human incarnation of God. Attempting to go beyond Augustine, Eckhart is resolved to reconfirm the truths of Scripture by means of natural arguments, thereby proving that Moses, Aristotle, and Christ all reveal the same thing. According to Eckhart, faith

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[12] Cf. Kurt Flasch, ed., *Von Meister Dietrich zu Meister Eckhart* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1984).

[13] See Maurer, "Analogy in Patristic and Medieval Thought," in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* 1, 64-67; Kurt Ruh, *Meister Eckhart,* 82—86; Mojsisch, *Meister Eckhart;* Josef Koch, "Zur Analogielehre Meister Eckharts," in *Altdeutsche und altniederländische Mystik,* ed. Kurt Ruh (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964), 275-308.

(Moses) and knowledge (Christ) are related to one another as an opinion is related to its proven certainty.[14] The program is philosophical without departing from revelation.

The *tertium comparationis* of the treatises and sermons is the interpretation of the Word. Mojsisch documents that Eckhart's paradox of the divine universals (as both entirely within and entirely outside the things) has a long tradition.[15] The sermons vest the Word with the plastic contours of an utterance, doing so reflexively: the Word as Creator is likened to the word spoken by the preacher to his congregation. The inconceivable paradox of *totus intus, totus foris* is rendered understandable by the complementation of inner intention and external expression: If it were possible to divorce the expression from what remains within (the thought or intention), the world of created place, time, body, and number would be as insubstantial as the images caught in mirrors. If it were possible to divorce what remains within from what goes out in the act of creation, the Word would not stand in the eternal self-knowledge that is the *puritas essendi.*

The distinctions between inner and outer and between the immediacy of grace and the nothingness of the creature were of relevance to the heresies of the day. Ruh sees Eckhart's final teaching stay in Paris as decisive for his mysticism.[16] A year before Eckhart's return to Paris in 1311, a celebrated heresy trial and execution took place in the city. The prosecutor was a Dominican inquisitor who lodged in the same monastery as Eckhart.

The victim was the Beguine Marguerite Porete. Marguerite was the author of a mystical treatise called *The Mirror of Simple Souls (Miroir des simples ames)*. This small book was a work of deep spirituality with an enduring impact in the Middle Ages. The *Mirror* had given offense by appearing to contradict

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[14] Mojsisch, *Meister Eckhart,* 6-10.
[15] Mojsisch, *Meister Eckhart,* 69 (Die Formel 'totus intus, totus foris' taucht nicht nur bei Eckhart häufig auf, sondern besitzt auch—mit terminologischen Abwandlungen—eine reiche Tradition: Plotin, Proklus, Hilarius, Augustin, Gregor der Große, Johannes Eriugena, Abelard, Bernhard von Clairvaux, Petrus Lombardus, Alanus ab Insulis, Bonaventura, (nach Eckhart) Heinrich Seuse, Nikolaus von Kues, Angelus Silesius und Francesco Patrizzi.)
[16] See Ruh, *Eckhart,* 95ff.

accepted doctrines. Marguerite had written that the soul which was "annihilated" by God took leave of the virtues. The virtues stood at the disposal of the soul.[17] This smacked of the heresy of the Free Spirit. We have to ask to what extent the ideas of Marguerite and of her kindred spirits threatened the prevailing order. An older interpretation holds that many of the Beguines and Free Spirits were genuine rebels and heretics,[18] but other scholars have maintained that the victims were for the most part devout independents, senselessly persecuted by the Church.

There is a third possibility between the conscious heresy and the random victimization. As an author, Marguerite was a proselytizing independent. Her "noble soul," having "abandoned" itself to God, can say nothing more of God. Since the soul lives only in its love of the deity, it is beyond virtue or vice. The "great church" is set off against a "small church" of the humble souls. If this was taken literally, the Church was explicitly divested of its foundation of authority as the exclusive arbiter of truth about salvation. Even if Marguerite intended no heresy, this was at least obnoxious during a period in which the standing of popes and churchmen had already taken quite a thrashing. The office of the inquisition may have had grounds for regarding the spiritual independence of Marguerite as an affront, a potential rallying point for popular anticlerical scorn, if not an outright threat to their battered and tarnished authority.

Eckhart was confronted with this case. Ruh submits that he may have acquired her book from one of three Parisian theologians who dissented from a first judgment against her. The essential point is that Eckhart, like the author of *The Mirror of Simple Souls,* increasingly came to reject the external aspects of faith. Although the elements Eckhart shared with Marguerite were already present *in nuce* in

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[17] See Ruh, *Eckhart,* 96ff. Cf. "Marguerite Porete," in Zum Brunn and Epiney-Burgard, eds., *Women Mystics,* 143-175.
[18] Norman Cohn concluded that the heresy of the Free Spirit constituted "an elite of amoral supermen," precursors of Nietzsche. See *The Pursuit of the Millenium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford UP, 1970), 163ff. Cf. Franz-Josef Schweitzer, *Der Freiheitsbegriff der deutschen Mystik. Seine Beziehung zur Ketzerei der "Brüder und Schwester vom Freien Geist," mit besonderer Rücksicht auf den pseudoeckartischen Traktat "Schwester Katrei"* (Frankfurt/ Main: Peter Lang, 1981).

his earlier work, it may indeed be true that an encounter with Beguine mysticism accentuated these elements. Citing the findings of Edmund Colledge and J. C. Marler, Ruh contends that it was only after 1311 that Eckhart's Scholastic theories became infused into his mystical teachings: Eckhart may have taken this step in order to provide a defensible theological foundation for the allegorical formulations of the Beguines.

Like Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite employed allegory and personification. Eckhart the dialectician now adapted his Scholastic theories in order to rationalize the spirituality of the Beguine *unio mystica.* The "analogy of the mirror image" made it possible to assert the identity or union of the believer with Christ. Accordingly, the ideas of Marguerite's *Mirror of Simple Souls* were deepened and transformed by the Neoplatonizing philosophical thought of Eckhart. The hypothesis that Eckhart knew Marguerite's Mirror and took over decisive statements from it, giving them a more precise and defensible form by means of his own Scholastic theories, can integrate Eckhart's work with his life and times. Even without an encounter with Marguerite's mysticism, Eckhart's academic and pastoral duties confronted him with a potential conflict of pursuits and involvements. His resolve to reconcile them, to speak with the same voice to his students in Paris and to his spiritual charges in the convents, can account for many features of his mystical sermons.

After his last stay in Paris, Eckhart was entrusted with the duties of providing spiritual counsel in the Dominican convents of the Upper Rhine region. Other developments were simultaneous with this renewed activity. The Council of Vienne (1311-1312) disbanded the Beguines and Beghards who had numerous adherents in Strasbourg and Cologne. These two main cities of Eckhart's later career were considered suspect since the mendicant orders were coming under the suspicion of aiding the

Beguines in their path of error.[19] The nuns were also making themselves heard in the convent chronicle literature. Since the recorded *Lives* extended back into the previous century, the chronicles provide a background for the ascetic and visionary impulses in the Dominican convents of the Upper Rhine prior to and during Eckhart's activity there.

Eckhart's reflective sermons raised the love mysticism of the free Beguines to a plane of high intellectuality and at the same time disengaged the visionary mysticism of the Dominican nuns by denying that phenomenal experience can be the realm in which the believer communicates with God. Interpreted in this manner, Eckhart's "negative theology" falls into place with his real concerns and environment. Other churchmen also discouraged "corporeal" visions. Langer has shown that the visions included self-oriented experiences. Self-flagellation and the extremes of self-doubt were symptomatic of an evolving convent spirituality in which self-oriented supplications prevailed over prayers of praise or thanksgiving.[20]

Against a disturbingly achievement-oriented and self-centered piety, Marguerite's precept that "the noble soul desires nothing" must have appeared to Eckhart as a beneficent antidote. This can be recognized in a programmatic tract written at the beginning of his period of pastoral activities on the Upper Rhine: the *Liber Benedictus,* with its attached treatise on the noble being *(The Aristocrat).*[21] The *Liber Benedictus* begins with a philosophical precept alluding both to the metaphysics of analogy and to the mystical trope of the birth of the Son in the soul: "Goodness is neither created nor made nor born; yet it is birth-giving and gives birth to the good being *(den guoten);* and the good being, insofar as he is good, is unmade and uncreated, and yet the born child and son of goodness" *(diu güete enist noch geschaffen nock gemachet nock geboren; mér si ist gebernde und gebirt den guoten, und der guote, als verre sö er guot ist, ist*

[19] Cf. Ruh, *Eckhart,* 113.
[20] See Langer, *Mystische Erfahrung,* 115—124.
[21] Ruh, *Eckhart,* 115ff.

ungemachet und ungeschaffen und doch geborn kint und sun der güete[22]*).* The theory of analogy is adapted here to rationalize what soon becomes Eckhart's leitmotiv of "the birth of the Son in the soul."

The small tract called *The Aristocrat (Von dem edeln menschen)* begins by presenting without context Christ's words in Luke 19:12: "A man of a noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return." Whereas in Luke this sentence merely sets the stage for the parable of the master and his servants, Eckhart focuses on the sentence and states that much of Holy Scripture is already touched upon in it. The "nobility" is found in the human soul.

As *The Aristocrat* interprets this nobility, Eckhart's focus winds inward, from the whole of Scripture implicit in the words to the words by themselves, and then to self-knowledge—the key which unlocks the path back to the broader scope promised at the beginning of the tract. Eckhart moves from his decontextualized and open-ended sentence to a single word, then by way of it—as if he were passing through the focal point of all truth—back out to the broad plane of the universal. This is the characteristic movement of many of his sermons.

In the sermons, the project of the noble soul absorbs all his themes. In the Word as the ideal ground of being, God knows himself. This transparent knowing of God is the divine image in accordance with which the human soul is created. According to the preacher: "(God's) image is that he knows himself through and through and is nothing but light. When the soul touches him with proper knowledge, it is like him in this image" *(Sîn bilde ist, daz er sich durchkennet und all ein lieht ist. Swenne in diu sêle rüeret mit rehter bekantnîsse, sô ist si im glîch an dem bilde).*[23] Not only are Genesis and John two accounts of the same origination; the principle of creation lies within the soul: "in the innermost

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[22] *Daz buoch der götlichen troestungen (Liber Benedictus),* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 5, ed. Josef Quint (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1963), 9.
[23] *Consideravit semitas,* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 2, 136.

and in the highest [part] of the soul, God creates the entire world" *(in dem innigsten und in dem hoehsten der sêle schepfet got alle dise werlt).*[24] God's speaking is his creating. Speaking as creating and creating as knowing encompass the crux of Eckhart's homiletic mysticism. What could this have meant to the Dominican nuns who were not trained in the subtleties of a magister from Paris?

The nuns who heard his sermons were absorbed in an act of speaking that dominated their lives. Prayer, both liturgical and private, was the rhythm and focus of their existence. In prayer alone, their lives could be miraculously and perilously creative. Prayer and contemplation could result in exultation, illness, terror, and deliverance. It could confront the nuns with visions of Christ and transport them into heaven or hell. The extremes of heaven and hell were known by two of the Swiss nuns within Eckhart's pastoral circle: Jützi Schulthasin and Anna of Ramschwag.[25] In the piety of many nuns, a mixture of traits surfaced: a concern with personal salvation and a resultant unstable alternation between ecstasy and fear, giving rise to visions; a preponderance of prayers of supplication; and the expectation that the conferral of grace should take the form of perceptible signs. If Eckhart could hope to have an effect on the lives and the thinking of the nuns, this influence could only be exerted through their absorption in prayer.

In his instructions to his Erfurt the *Lehmeister* had recognized both the necessity and the pitfalls of the path pursued by these nuns. He had urged his brethren to pray so as to unite themselves in prayer with God: "So powerfully should one pray that one would wish that all human parts and powers, eyes and ears, mouth, heart, and all the senses should be directed to it; and one should not stop before one feels that one is intent upon uniting oneself with the one whom one has present and to whom one prays, that is God" *(Also kreftlichlîche sol man beten, daz man wölte, daz alliu diu gelider des menschen und krefte, beidiu ougen, ôren, munt, herze und alle sinne dar zuo gekêret wæren; und niht ensol man ûfhoeren,*

[24] *Praedica verbum,* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 2, 96.
[25] Walter Muschg, *Die Mystik in der Schweiz* (Frauenfeld und Leipzig: Huber, 1935), 189ff., 192-93.

man envinde denne, daz man sich welle einen mit dem, den man gegenwertic hât und bitet, daz ist got).[26] Eckhart had recognized the dangers of a self-directed or misguidedly ambitious spirituality. He had instructed his novitiate brethren that even if they were experiencing the ecstasy of Paul, it would be better for them to come out of it in order to give a sick man soup.[27] In Strasbourg and Cologne, Eckhart's thinking developed a dynamic unity of antitheses: the movement inward, toward union with God and away from the world of common experience, is joined by the movement outward, back to the world of shared life and activity.

The paradoxes of immanence and transcendence, of communality and single-minded devotion, resound in homiletic reformulations of the philosophical *totus intus, totus foris* motif: "It is a miraculous thing that something flows out and yet remains within. That the Word flows out and yet remains within" *(Ez ist ein wunderlich dinc, daz ein dinc üzvliuzet und doch inneblibet. Daz daz wort üzvliuzet und doch inneblibent...).* "God is in all creatures, insofar as they have being, and yet is above them. With the very thing that he is in all creatures, with that he is above them" *(Got ist* in *allen crêatûren, als sie wesen hânt, und ist doch dar* über. *Daz selbe, daz er ist* in *allen crêatûren, daz ist er doch dar über).*[28] Eckhart's central paradox confronts us with the Prolog of the Gospel of John, the creation through the Word—here in the figure of an existential continuity with the act of speaking or praying. The inexpressibility of the Godhead is superseded by the expressiveness of all things and words:

> When the Father gave birth to all creatures, he gave birth to me, and I flowed out with all creatures, and yet remain within in the Father. Just like the word that I now utter: It arises within me; second, I abide upon its image; third, I utter it forth, and all of you discern it; yet it actually remains in me. Just so have I remained in the Father.

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[26] *Die rede der underscheidunge* 2, in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 5, 191.
[27] *Die rede,* 221.
[28] *Quasi stella matutina,* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 1, 143.

> *Dô der vater gebor alle crêatûren, dô gebor er mich, und ich vlôz ûz mit allen crêatûren und bleip doch inne in dem vater. Ze glîcher wîs, als daz wort, daz ich nû spriche, daz entspringet in mir, ze dem andern mâle sô ruowe ich ûf dem bilde, ze dem dritten mâle sô spriche ich ez ûz, und ir enpfâhet ez alle; nochdenne blîbet ez eigenlîche in mir. Alsô bin ich in dem vater bliben.*[29]

We can extend this from the sermon to the prayer, and from the voiced word and concrete image, to the prayer of silence that asks for nothing from God. The total absorption without images encouraged by Eckhart passes over into a contemplation and love of all things and creatures as expressions of God. All things have a word-like character: they are expressions of a substantial intention that remains within, even while uttering itself as the generative power that communicates being and life in creation: "Whoever were to know nothing more than the creatures would not need to think about any sermon, for each creature is full of God and is a book" *(Der niht dan die crêatûren bekante, der endörfte niemer gedenken ûf keine predige, wan ein ieglîchiu crêatûre ist vol gotes und ist ein buoch).*[30]

The material of ideas in Eckhart's sermons and treatises is received doctrine from Scripture, tradition, and contemporaneous Scholasticism. Quoting perpetually from these sources, he could scarcely have intended a wholesale rejection of such common and traditional opinions. However, the German sermons are far from being academic lectures. They stand on the principle that all knowledge presupposes a universal faculty for recognizing truth. This universality is dramatically evidenced by the very fact that the erudite sermons are addressed to the non-scholarly nuns. The noetic faculty is the human image of the transcendent One whose knowing is the same as his being and creating. In persuading the nuns that God created the entire world within them, he was not espousing an esoteric form of idealism; he was confirming their divine right as knowing beings, capable of giving birth to truth within themselves. From Hildegard to Luther, the opposing view deprecating human knowledge

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[29] *Ave, gratia plena,* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 1, 376-77.
[30] *Quasi stella matutina,* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 1, 156.

was linked to an adjunct doctrine of creation (created out of nothing with no comprehension of its whence and whither, the mind is subject to external authority).

Eckhart's sermons have a stock of recurrent themes: there is the knowledge of God (or self-knowledge in God); the distance or detachment *(Abgeschiedenheit)* from things; the self-abandonment or "releasement" *(Gelassenheit)* to God; the removal of "images" *(Bilder)* from the soul; the "ground" or "small spark" *(Fünklein)* of the soul which seeks God and desires the good; the birth of the Son in the soul; the divine darkness of the Godhead; the silent desert in the soul; the generation of all creatures through the Word; the paradoxical interiority and exteriority of God; and others. However imperfect the resultant composite image, all these terms and themes should be thought of as aspects of one single theme.

The term *gelassen* survived through Tauler and the *Theologia Deutsch* to provide a slogan and ideal for dissenting Protestants of the Reformation era. Even now, this word retains a certain suggestiveness implying serene calm and ease. With Eckhart, it came into use between the terrors of hell and the beckoning of paradise. The reflective knowledge associated with the calm of *Gelassenheit* is the eye that is both the seeing and the seen, the ear that is both the hearing and the heard—the mystical knowing of a monk or nun whose life is absorbed in prayer.

The calm of *Gelassenheit* is the silence in which, as Eckhart repeatedly preaches, God utters the eternal Word: this utterance is the same as the birth of the Son in the soul of the believer. The soul is emptied of "images" *(Bilder)*—of all representations of God in terms of time, place, body, and number—to be filled virtually by its emptying with divine essence. Through the power of a deity beyond representation in images, the soul conceives in itself the birth of the Son. The birth of Christ in the heart or transformation of the believer into Christ is, as we have seen, a Pauline motif with a

long tradition.[31] But Eckhart's statement that the believer is none other than the eternal Son of God substantiated the heresy charges against him. The believer is transformed by truth and knowledge into the divine object of knowledge. The annihilation of time, place, and number as qualifiers in the divine knowledge has as its corollary this identity of human subject and divine object.

In place of the special grace sought by some visionaries, Eckhart's mysticism recognizes in each soul the divine force or spark created in the image of the transcendent Godhead: "Within the soul, there is a power for which all things are equally pleasing; indeed, the very worst and very best are entirely equal for this power..." *(Ein kraft ist in der sêle, der sint alliu dinc glîche süeze; jâ, daz allerboeseste und daz allerbeste daz ist allez glîch an dirre kraft).*[32] In regarding all things with equanimity, this power leaves place and time and self behind to become empty and free of self. The soul's emptiness is filled by the Father with the Son in the power of the Spirit, through which the Son is reborn again and again. This birth and rebirth in an eternal Now is identical with the utterance of the eternal Word in John 1:1.

Various metaphors designate the innate faculty within the soul: it is a force, a spark, a ground; and it is the highest and the innermost part of the soul. In replying to his inquisitors, Eckhart presented the ground as created but in the image of God. Approached theoretically, it undoubtedly relates to that knowing which precedes being in God. Understood practically, the spark of the soul implies that those to whom he preached were capable of a divine knowledge, effected not by seeking, but by ceasing to seek. When all images have been expelled from the soul and all supplications of the self have been suspended, the ground is made ready for this birth. Seeing, Eckhart preached, goes out through the senses, while hearing remains inside and receptive. Several Middle High German terms are equivalents of the Latin *cognitio* and *intelligere.*[33] Quint renders almost all of them with the German

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[31] Hugo Rahner, S.J., "Die Gottesgeburt," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 59 (1935): 333-418.
[32] *Adolescens, tibi dico,* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 2, 306.
[33] See Benno Schmoldt, *Die deutsche Begriffsprache Meister Eckharts* (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1954), 15-27 *("bekantnisse—verstantnisse").*

Erkennen, a verb that is specific neither to hearing nor to seeing, but which instead generally implies a recognizing as true. Infinitive as well as substantive, *Erkennen* thus denotes both the noetic capacity and its fulfillment.

Though not without inconsistencies, the theme of knowing occupies the high ground in the sermons. The mystical knowing of the soul is a divine self-knowledge: "The same knowing in which God knows himself is none other than the knowing of each detached spirit. The soul receives its essence immediately from God; therefore God is closer to the soul than it is to itself; therefore God is in the ground of the soul with his entire divinity" *(Daz selbe bekantnisse, dâ sich got selben inne bekennet, daz ist eines ieglîchen abgescheidenen geistes bekantnîsse und kein anderz. Diu sêle nimet ir wesen âne mitel von gote; dar umbe ist got der sêle næher, dan si ir selber sî; dar umbe ist got in dem grunde der sêle mit aller sîner gotheit).*[34] This striking statement rests its case on an allusion to Augustine, but takes its final coherence from the complicity of human renunciation, self-annihilation, divine omnipotence, and human deification. The sermons offer many similar evocations of mystical knowledge: "Knowing is higher than life or being, for, insofar as it knows, it has life and being" *(Bekanntnisse ist hoeher dan leben Oder wesen, wan in dem, daz ez bekennet, sö hit ez leben und wesen).*[35] "[God's] image is that he knows himself through and through and is nothing but light. When the soul touches him with proper knowledge, then it is like him in this image" *(Sîn bilde ist, daz er sich durchkennet und al ein lieht ist. Swenne in diu sêle rüeret mit rehter bekanntnisse, sô ist si im glîch an dem bilde).*[36] "One must know that to recognize God and to be recognized by God, to see God and to be seen by God, is, in itself, one. In that we recognize and see God, we recognize and see that he makes us recognize and see" *(Ez ist ze wizzene, daz daz ein ist nâch dingen: got bekennen und von*

[34] *In diebus suis placuit,* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 1, 162.
[35] *In occisione gladii,* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 1, 129.
[36] *Consideravit semitas,* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 2, 135.

got bekant ze sînne und got sehen und von got gesehen ze sînne. In dem bekennen wir got und sehen, daz er uns machet gesehende und bekennende).[37]

The Dionysian *via negativa,* the regression by which the qualities of the world are denied to the divine, also leads to a denial that God knows particular things:

> The masters say that God is a being and a rational being and that He knows all things. But I say: God is neither being nor rational being nor does he recognize this or that. Therefore, God is free of all things, and therefore he is all things.
>
> *Die meister sprechent, got der sî ein wesen und ein vernünftic wesen und bekenne alliu dinc. Sô sprechen wir: got enist niht wesen noch vernünftic noch enbekennet niht diz noch daz. Her umbe ist got ledic aller dinge, und her umbe ist er alliu dinc.*[38]

Because all predicates must be lifted from God, he is free to be all in all. God is beyond definition. Hence all things bespeak the unutterable deity. The sermon, an appeal to spiritual poverty, ends by advising that whoever does not understand should not be troubled: until the hearer is like the truth it expresses, its message, which comes immediately *(âne mittel)* from the heart of God, will remain incomprehensible.

Since Eckhart's terms only begin to reveal their full range of implications and their play of association and contradiction in their homiletic context, we need to consider a characteristic sermon from beginning to end.

It is characteristic that Eckhart's sermon on Ecclesiastes 24:30, *Qui audit me,*[39] begins with an elliptical text. What stands out in its scriptural context is the juxtaposition of "hearing" God with

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[37] *Videte qualem caritatem,* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 3, 310-311.
[38] *Beati pauperes spiritu,* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 2, 497.
[39] In Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 1, 192-203 (subsequent page references to this sermon appear in parentheses).

"acting" in God. Instead of exploring this pertinent context, Eckhart begins by announcing, rather oddly, that each of the three words, "Who hears me..." might suffice for a sermon unto itself. The notion of a sermon on a single particle seems to border on whimsy. Yet, taken seriously, Eckhart's pronouncement may well have opened the listener to the reflexivity of words which—like the text *Virgo Israel* sung by the nun Hailrat—would have pointed to the one "who hears me." The pattern of an awakening through the word elevates the discrete phrase, the individual experience, to a condition of immediacy before God.

The eternal Wisdom, quotes Eckhart, proclaims that "whoever hears me" is not ashamed. This signifies that whoever is to hear the wisdom of the Father must be "within," "at home," and "One" (192). Three things hinder us in hearing the eternal Word: corporeality, multiplicity, and temporality. Whoever goes beyond these dwells in the spirit, in "unity" and in the "desert." Eckhart, like Mechthild of Magdeburg, sees the desert within as the place of encounter with God. Christ's summons is absorbed into the single word *gelassen:* the hearers should abandon self. This abandonment is the desert in which they are to hear the eternal Word (193).

At this point, Eckhart offers the first of several startling surprises in the course of his sermon, stating: "The very thing that hears is that which is heard in the eternal Word" *(Daz selbe, daz dâ hoeret, daz ist daz selbe, daz dâ gehoeret wirt in dem êwigen worte*—p. 193). The creature who has "gone out"—the noble soul of Eckhart's tract on the man who went out to receive a kingdom in order to return—is God's own Son, for everything God teaches and reveals is actuated nowhere else but in the Son.

After establishing that the destination is the same as the departure, Eckhart expands on the state of *Gelassenheit* in order to clarify the union:

> If you love yourself, you love all others as yourself. As long as you love a single human being less than yourself, you do not truly love yourself—if you do not love all others

> as yourself, in one human being all human beings: and this human being is God and man.
>
> Hist dû dich selben liep, sô hâst dû alle menschen liep als dich selben. Die wîle dû einen einigen menschen minner liep hâst dan dich selben, dû gewünne dich selben nie liep in der wârheit, dû enhabest denne alle menschen liep als dich selben, in einem menschen alle menschen, und der mensch ist got und mensche. (195)

Here, unexpectedly, the contours of the Son crystallize out of the interchange of self and others. This thought is then rendered absolute: one should not care more about what happens to one's best friend than about what befalls anyone else. Moreover, Eckhart quotes (and modifies) Paul: "I should be willing to be eternally separated from God for the sake of my friend and for God" ('ich wolte êwiclîche gescheiden sîn von gote durch mînes vriundes willen und durch got—195). In the NIV, Romans 9:3 states: "For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my race...." The modification extracts the paradox of abandoning God for the sake of a friend or for the sake of God as the true perfection that Eckhart now accords to Paul in his willingness. The highest thing that one can abandon is God for the sake of God. Having just urged equanimity in the love of oneself and others, Eckhart now urges a sacrifice which, to his listeners, meant nothing less than accepting eternal loss. One would not want to underestimate the unedifying severity of this idea for Eckhart's flock. In perfect obedience and willingness, the Apostle Paul went beyond every form of giving and taking in his relationship to God. He took nothing from and gave nothing to God. Instead, states Eckhart, elliptically: "it was a one and a pure unification. Here, the human being is a true human being..." *(ez ist ein ein und ein lûter einunge. Hie ist der mensche ein wâr mensche*...—197). Most likely, the emphasis fell on the word "true": to live in truth, the human being must renounce all thought

of rewards in the service of God. In the monastic society, this presumably meant equal love for all of one's fellows.

The "true" human being is the same as Eckhart's noble human being. Eckhart hints at something uncreated in the soul (197-8). This was one of the teachings that led to a condemnation linking him to the heresy of the Free Spirits. But he goes on to state that everything created is "nothing." The true human being is alien to this createdness. If his own human being were to dwell for only a moment in the true being, which is set over against the created nothing, then he, the preacher, would think as little of himself as a worm (198).

Now the sermon moves for the second time from *Gelassenheit,* from the acceptance of hell, to the destination which is already attained in the proper state of abandonment. As all things flow out of God, they are equal (199). Invariably, this trope of the emanation of all things from God appears in connection with the creation by the Word. Here, the contemplative soul that has figuratively gone to hell, like Christ out of obedient love, is returned to a paradise which is already at hand in the equality of all things in God. To bring home the bliss of this divine equality, Eckhart employs two figures. The first is that of the fly which in God is equal to the highest angel (199). The second is that of the joy of God's equality; it is compared to a horse playfully running and jumping on a green meadow: the levelness of the meadow of play is the felicity with which God pours out his being. The lowliest of the angels who serve and protect us here below have the same joy and equality as the highest in the celestial hierarchy. If such an angel were commanded to do some seemingly absurd task such as counting caterpillars on a tree, doing so would mean blessedness and God's will (200). As is often the case, the celestial hierarchy is the model for the worldly hierarchy: Eckhart interprets obedience as equality in a manner both medieval and egalitarian. The human creature who is completely in God's will would not even care to be well when ill: "All pain is for him a joy, all multiplicity is a simplicity

and a unity… *(Alliu pîne ist im ein vröude, alliu manicvalticheit ist im ein blôzheit und ein einicheit...*—200). This classical motif is remarkably close to the beautiful lines in Novalis's *Hymns to the Night: "und jede Pein/ Wird einst ein Stachel/ Der Wollust sein."*

The true inner asceticism recommended by Eckhart is then translated into knowledge. *Gelassenheit* is like the eye that must be free of all color in order to discern color. As at the beginning of the sermon, this constitutes a paradox of knowledge: "The eye in which I see God is the same eye in which God sees me; my eye and God's eye are one eye and one sight and one knowing and one loving" *(Daz ouge, dâ inne ich got sihe, daz ist daz selbe ouge, dâ inne mich got sihet; mîn ouge und gotes ouge daz ist éin ouge und éin gesiht und éin bekennen und éin minnen*—201). This may be one of Eckhart's boldest formulations of the *unio mystica*. But precisely the same statement is formulated by him in a Scholastic treatise; there he defended himself in making it by referring to Augustine.[40]

Eckhart's mystical state of abandonment is a contemplative asceticism, a renunciation of the world and self that seeks no visionary signs, but instead finds its validation in the world and in a life understood as within the divine being. The sermon on the text *"Qui audit me"* concludes that what one should give up is not something one happens to possess, but rather oneself altogether. Whoever gives up all, if only for a moment, but does so completely, is truly *gelassen.*

If the great *summae* of High Scholasticism are appropriately compared to the architecture of the Gothic cathedrals, Eckhart's non-systematically mystical homiletics might be compared to their interior space. Even in its imagery, his preaching is like the play of light that must have formed the backdrop for his speech. Pellucid and obscure, his sermons embody the eternal light that shines in the darkness without being touched or contained by the darkness in John 1. His mysticism which begins

[40] Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 1, 201, note 4.

with distance and abandonment in view of the nothingness of all created things concludes by elevating all words, works, and creatures into the divine light:

> Words also have great power; one could do wonders with words. All words have power from the first Word.... Since like can accomplish so much with like, the soul in its natural light ought to elevate itself into the highest and the purest realm and enter into the angelic light, and with the angelic light make its way into the divine light, and there stand between three lights in their parting of ways, in the heights where the lights strike together. There, the eternal Word utters life into it; there the soul becomes alive and responsive in the Word.
>
> *Wort hânt ouch grôze kraft; man möhte wunder tuon mit worten. Alliu wort hânt kraft von dem êrsten worte.... Wan glîch in glîchem sô vil würket, dar umbe sol Sich diu sêle ûf erheben in irm natiurlîchen lichte in daz hoehste und in daz lûterste und alsô treten in engelischez lieht und mit engelischem liehte komen in göttlich lieht und âlso stân zwischen den drin liehten in der wegescheiden, in der hoehe, dâ diu lieht zesamen stôzent. Di sprichet ir în daz êwige wort daz leben; dâ Wirt diu sêle lebende und widersprechende in dem worte.*[41]

Eckhart's motifs are somewhat like chords resounding in various keys, often surprising and startling us. Yet there are overall oppositions and harmonies: the many and the one, self and others, time and eternity, individual and community. Within the patterns of opposition, the Eckhartian paradox of the inner and the outer is the central enigma. It is in turn keyed to the recurrent references to the eternal Word that takes precedence over the creation in time. The world is seen in aspect rather than in time, space, or number.

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[41] *Adolescens, tibi dico,* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 1, 306-7.

Instead of mobilizing theoretical abstractions to explain away the inconsistencies of his sermons, we would do better to acknowledge the sporadic as integral to the message. If his reasoning habitually jumps from what appears to be an arbitrary pretext (for example, from the meaningfulness of the conjunctive particle *and* to his perennial theme of the birth of God in the soul),[42] the aim is to demonstrate the universal accessibility of the central divine birth by showing that "all words have power from the first Word"—spoken, as Augustine says, by truth itself.

With this in mind, we may be closer to an understanding of such Eckhartian oddities as the metaphor of God as a young horse frolicking on a blooming meadow, or the preacher's declaration that in lieu of any comprehending listeners, he would have been compelled to deliver his sermon before the collection box. Haas views this second example as Eckhart's clear confirmation of the inadequacy of all language (whereby the mystic realizes that his experience is ineffable, but is still compelled to speak of it, so that the powerlessness of language somehow ends up being a deep confirmation of its own power).[43] Perish the thought that the preacher was making a little joke.

Though difficult and profoundly serious, Eckhart's sermons are not grave or ponderous. They have a lightness, which (if the word humor offends) is at least closely akin to humor. Haas has observed that the great Franciscan preacher of the thirteenth century, Berthold of Regensburg, preached the end of the world in sermons that contained elements of humor and wordplay. Why should Eckhart have been loath to mix profound seriousness with lightness? His sermons combine detachment with concentration. A detachment close to humor can be sensed in the casual tone of his anecdotes of the type, "I was once asked what the Father does in heaven. I replied: He gives birth to his Son, and doing this is such a joy and pleases Him so well that He does nothing other than give birth to His Son..." (*Ich wart einest gevrâget, waz der vater tæte in dem himel? Dô sprach ich: er gebirt sinen sun, und daz werk ist im sô*

[42] *Postquam completi,* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 2, 337.
[43] Haas, *Sermo Mysticus,* 29.

lüstlich und gevellet im sô wol, daz er niemer anders getuot dan gebern sînen sun...).[44] The play element here comes from nonchalantly transferring the notions of passing time by doing things, from the plane of time to that of eternity. The playfulness in Eckhart's metaphor of the divine power as a young horse prancing about a blossoming meadow is also akin to the stylistic delight he himself took in antithesis and paradox. There is verbal play in the superfluous repetition of Eckhart's characterizations of God: "God is in all things. The more he is in the things, the more he is outside of the things; the more within, the more without, and the more without the more within" *(Got ist in allen dingen. le mê er ist in den dingen, ie mê er ist ûz den dingen: ie mê inne, ie mê ûze, und ie mê ûze, ie mê inne).*[45] A single leap on this meadow would have sufficed to make the point.

A play of the hypothetical imagination is activated when Eckhart calls upon his congregation to consider two situations in order to grasp how "the kingdom of God is near at hand":

> First of all, we should know how the Kingdom of God is near. . . . Therefore, we should know the meaning of this. If I were a king, but did not know it myself, I would not be a king. But if I had the firm belief that I was a king, and if all people imagined this together with me and I knew for certain that all people imagined it, then I would be a king, and the entire wealth of the kingdom would be mine, and I would lack for none of it.
>
> *Ze dem êrsten suln wir wizzen, wíe daz rîche gotes uns nâhe ist... . Dar umbe suln wir wizzen den sin dâ von. Daz ich ein künic wære und ich des nicht enweste, ich enwære niht ein künic. Aber, hæte ich des einen ganzen wân, daz ich ein künic wære, und wænden des alle die liute mit mir und ich weste*

[44] *Omne datum optimum,* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 1, 72.
[45] *Praedica verbum,* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 2, 94.

daz vür wâr, daz des alle die liute wænden, sô wære ich ein künic, und so wære aller der rîchtuom des küniges mîn, und des engebræche mir nihtes niht.[46]

Regarded in its own right as a *jeu d'esprit,* the effect of this imagined choice of two kings is to dethrone the one who is simply passively royal and to enthrone the one who receives recognition: even in the field of political authority, knowing precedes being. This political implication accords with Eckhart's valuation of humanity over hierarchy. But his reference is to the kingdom of God, and his point that the inner certainty acquired through *Gelassenheit* is already within the domain of salvation, and therefore in need of no external verifications. Anticipating certain difficulties of Luther's doctrine of salvation by faith alone, Eckhart's terms of abandonment conceive of a salvation by a kind of knowing that surpasses merely believing by virtue of its indestructible inner certainty. If Luther's salvation by faith rather than works runs the risk of turning faith itself into a work, then, by contrast, Eckhart's salvation by knowing seems intent on precluding this very risk: in the state of *Gelassenheit,* the knowing of the serene soul has repudiated the very self that desires rewards. In part for this reason, the early Protestant dissenters against Luther's doctrine of imputed justification were attracted to the term *Gelassenheit.*[47]

In the last decade of his life, Eckhart ran afoul of the increasing repressiveness of his times. The long controversy over poverty had only recently ended with the suppression of the Franciscan Spirituals. In 1328, the judgment of Pope John XXII who had opposed the apostolically impoverished Franciscans and moved against alleged witches, fell upon the Dominican teacher of spiritual poverty.

The question for us is not so much whether Eckhart really violated correct doctrine as whether the Church had reason to perceive a threat in the event that his kind of Christianity had ever become widespread. It would be misguided to expect Eckhart to have acted out the rebel's openly defiant role

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[46] *Scitote, quia prope,* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 3, 140-141.
[47] See Ludwig Völker, *"Gelassenheit,"* in *Getempert und Gemischet* (Festschrift for Wolfgang Mohr), ed. Franz Hundschnurcher und Ulrich Müller (Göttingen: Kümmerle, 1972), 281-312.

(a role which, judged by his writings, he did not seek). The affirmation of unity is a strong undercurrent in his thought. Nothing in his writing gives one the impression of an intention to assault institutions in the manner of Luther. Everything in his work, however, speaks of an uncompromising pursuit of his ideal of truth. Eckhart challenged authority with his radical shift of emphasis away from all external knowledge to the inner ground of the soul. If all truth resides in the ground of the soul, then it would appear that nothing can be authentically true for us simply because we are told to believe it.

The radical nature of this challenge is evident when Eckhart preaches that if God could be separated from truth, one should adhere to truth and not to God: "The truth is so noble, that if it were possible for God to turn away from the truth, I would adhere to the truth and leave God" *(Waz ist diu wârheit? Wârheit ist als edel, wære, daz sich got gekêren möhte von der wârheit, ich wölte mich an die wârheit heften und wölte got lâzen...).*[48] Although Eckhart goes on to confirm that only God and no creature is truth, the confrontation here with the choice *per impossibile* which would adhere to truth rather than to God has the effect of shifting the locus of authority inward. Similarly with respect to justice: "The just human beings take justice so seriously, that, if God were not just, they would not care a bit for God and stand so firmly in justice...that they would not care about the pain of hell or the joy of heaven nor any thing" *(Den gerehten menschen, den ist alsô ernst zu der gerehticheit, wære, daz got nicht gereht wære, sie enahteten eine bône niht ûf got und stânt alsô vaste in der gerehticheit...daz sie niht enahtent pîne der helle noch vröude des himelrîches noch keines dinges).*[49] Eckhart's invocation to conceive of God as distinct from truth or justice is not an appeal to skepticism. But neither is it an empty phrase: justice is not justice because it comes from God. God is God because he is just. As Augustine had written, justice and truth are known to us by an inner sense, tantamount to an absolute self-certainty.

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[48] *Mulier, venit hora,* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 2, 24-25.
[49] *Iusti vivent,* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 1, 103.

Two of the articles of indictment against him were concerned with Eckhart's alleged denial of the need for the works of faith. The papal bull stopped short of condemning these two indicted pronouncements as heretical, warning instead that without further clarification they would be objectionable. Eckhart's accusers felt that he was undermining the connection between works and the attainment of grace. Since *Gelassenheit* (like the "annihilation" of the noble soul for Marguerite Porete) is total, it annihilates virtue along with good works as means to an end. In Eckhart's sermon, *Intravit Jesus in templum,* on driving the merchants and moneychangers out of the temple (Matthew 21:12), the merchants are said to be "good" people. The merchants represent all those who, no matter how well-intentioned in their fasts, vigils, and prayers, expect that God should do something for them in return *(sie wellent daz eine umbe daz ander geben und wellent alsô koufen mit unserem herrn).* This is not so much an evil as a hindrance for the pure truth, an encumbrance with self, "with time and with number, with before and with after" *(mit zît und mit zal, mit vor und mit nâch).*[50] Eckhart's rejection of the economy of works and of time and number conveys a critique of a widespread problem of spiritual life, a pattern no doubt familiar to the monks and nuns and layfolk of his time: the increasing subordination of the supreme ends of spiritual life to the private ends of personal justification and the ancillary ends of defending and aggrandizing institutions.

The essential goodness of divine being makes good works an end in themselves: "Whoever were to ask life for a thousand years: 'Why do you live?'—if life could answer, it would speak nothing else but: 'I live in order that I live'" (*Swer daz leben vrâgete tûsent jâr: war umbe lebest dû? solte ez antwürten, ez spræche niht anders wan: ich lebe dar umbe daz ich lebe).*[51] We should react the same way about our performance of works—'I do it in order that I do it!' *(ich würke dar umbe daz ich würke)*—not to receive anything from God. If all things are considered in the manner of the divine utterance that eternally

[50] *Intravit Jesus,* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 1, 7, 11.
[51] *In hoc apparuit,* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 1, 91-92.

expresses and realizes itself, all creatures and works and all of humanity appreciate in worth precisely because the point of reference is no longer the "self" of the creature: "I tell you: humanity is in the poorest or most despised human being just as perfect as it is in the pope or in the emperor; for humanity in itself is preferable to me than the human being which I carry upon myself" *(Ich spriche: menscheit ist an dem ermsten Oder versmæhesten menschen als volkomen als an dem bâbeste Oder an dem keiser, wan menscheit in ihr selber ist mir lieber dan der mensche den ich an mir trage).*[52]

In doctrinal theory of course, the pope perhaps should not have ranked higher before God than the humblest human being. But as the fate of Marguerite suggests, the message was provocative. Although Eckhart always preached obedience, the suggestion that the life of the spirit should be free from all temporal ambitions and encumbrances stood in stark contrast to the conduct of a church engaged in quests of power and intent upon suppressing both the quiet independence of the Beguines and the active stirrings of the Franciscan Spirituals.

Eckhart's inner movement was a turning away from a religion of self-hatred and ambition, rooted in fear, obsessed with human depravity, and therefore bound to an economy of salvation based on works and rewards as external tokens of good will and divine favor. Hildegard taught that the fear of God was the beginning of all wisdom. By contrast, Eckhart preached that, "The human being should not fear God, for whoever fears him flees from him" *(Der mensche ensol got niht vürhten, wan der, der in vürhtet, der vliuhet in).*[53] It is against the entire orientation toward human depravity, external authority and punishments and rewards that Eckhart's "spark of the soul" is said to incline toward the good and toward God—"even in Hell" *(nochdenne in der helle).*[54] Eckhart preaches against sin, but without threatening his hearers with damnation or enticing them with rewards.

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[52] *Moyses orabat,* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 2, 18.
[53] *Ave, gratia plena,* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 1, 385.
[54] *Homo quidam fecit,* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 1, 333.

Before his female hearers Eckhart's theology of the Word gave rise to egalitarian implications:

> They [the just] live eternally "with God," precisely with [bei] God, neither above nor below. They enact all their works with God, and God with them. St. John speaks: "The Word was with God." It was equal and alongside, not below and not above, but rather equal. When God created man, he created woman from the side of man, so that she would be equal with him. He made her neither from his head nor from his feet, so that she would be ... equal to him. Thus the just soul should be right alongside of God ...
>
> *Sie lebent êviclîche "bî gote," rehte glîch bî gote, noch unden noch oben. Sie würkent alliu iriu werk bî gote und got bî in. Sant Johannes sprichet: "daz wort was bî gote." Ez was alzemâle glîch und was bî neben, noch undenân noch obenân, sunder glîch. Dô got den menschen machete, do machete er die vrouwen von des mannes sîten, dar umbe daz si im glîch wære. Er machete sie niht von dem houbte noch von den vüezen, daz sie im...glîch wære. Alsô sol diu gerehte sêle glîch bî gote sîn ....*[55]

Eckhart's egalitarianism is not conditioned by a correct modern understanding of gender. It is correlative with his theories of being and knowing, with the predominance of the eternal One over the many in time.

Before and during his trial, the offices of inquisition were at work. It was a period of repression: heretics were tried and executed, books condemned. Courageously or foolishly, Eckhart seems to have disregarded this impending threat during much of his life. The first investigation carried out by his fellow Dominican, Nikolaus of Strasbourg, in 1325-1326 may have been a preventive maneuver for anticipating and deflecting the more hostile proceedings planned by others. It is possible that the subsequent charges brought against him nevertheless came as a surprise. Though introduced

[55] *Iusti vivent,* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 1, 106-7.

by the Archbishop of Cologne, they were to be pressed by the formidable office of inquisition. The prosecutors took issue with the content of his objectionable utterances, as well as with their capacity to mislead the laity. In defending himself, Eckhart either conceded or disavowed minor points, but upheld the correctness and orthodoxy of his teachings as a whole. He also pledged in advance to recant, should errors be clearly demonstrated. In 1326, he journeyed to Avignon in order to appeal in person to Pope John XXII. Some time prior to the papal condemnation of April 1329, he died while awaiting the results of the proceedings. Obviously, we cannot know what he was thinking in Avignon, much less how he would have reacted to the condemnation.

Another accused theologian was also awaiting a verdict in Avignon: William of Ockham, the founder of the Nominalist school that led to the *via moderna* and ultimately to the underpinnings of modern empirical science. Nominalism broke ground for modern empiricism by distancing itself from a medieval Realism that accepted the real essence of universals. In Eckhart and Ockham, two opposites in the spectrum of philosophical alternatives were brought together by chance and papal indictment. Reporting what he understood of Eckhart's teachings, Ockham registered them only as "absurdities." A watershed of Western thought separated them. We are on the side of Ockham and can therefore only speculate in interpreting the significance of Eckhart's mysticism.

Eckhart, it is clear, knew nothing of our modern outlook in which truth and justice are relational terms, designating no real being or entity in itself. Truth is an all-informing real power. Based on, but going beyond Augustine, Eckhart's concept of truth as indivisible defines his philosophy and mysticism:

> St. Augustine speaks a word which sounds quite unlike him, and is yet quite like him: Nothing is truth that doesn't contain all truth within it. That force [i.e., the "noble

force" or the "small spark" of the soul] encompasses all things in the truth. For this force, nothing lies concealed.

Sant Augustînus sprichet ein wort, daz disem hilet gar unglîche und ist im doch gar glîch: niht enist wârheit, ez enhabe in im beslozzen alle wârheit. Disiu kraft nimet alliu dinc in der wârheit. Dirre kraft enist kein dinc bedecket.[56]

All of Eckhart's mystical terms are aspects of this idea of the structure of truth. All truth is one. Truth, in Scripture or philosophy, is concentrated in an eternal generation that God effects in the innermost citadel of the soul. His sermons are mystical because they include all believers in the reciprocity of the divine knowing. If he had expressed his ideas only in Latin treatises and only for learned readers, his reputation might not now be that of a mystic. It was not his term for himself. Yet before his congregation, theory became revelation as he attempted to disencumber faith of the weight of external authority; as New Testament and Old, philosophy ancient and modern, and the voices of many masters all converged in his assertion of the creative power of recognition. Surrounded by vicious controversy and repression, beset even inside cloistered circles by clamoring for signs of certainty and grace, his tracts and sermons strove to unite all voices in the integral word of divine knowledge.

It was after Eckhart's death that the worst catastrophes of the fourteenth century unfolded. In 1324, Louis the Bavarian, the German king and later Holy Roman Emperor, was excommunicated in another attempt of the papacy to assert its political mastery. The resultant turmoil and uncertainty

[56] *Implementum est,* in Eckhart, *Deutsche Werke* 1, 184.

stimulated another of the shattering controversies over the powers of monarchs and popes. Eminent figures such as William of Ockham and Marsilius of Padua supported the royal position.

There were also conflicts within the spiritual estate. As a result of the excommunication, the clergy in all the territories under Louis's jurisdiction were restricted in performing the Mass and administering the sacraments, a grave state of affairs for any priest concerned with the spiritual well-being of his flock. Among the Dominicans, some complied with the papal order to stop administering the sacraments to their congregation. Others resisted. Popular opinion rallied to the king. In the nun Margaretha Ebner, an impassioned sympathy for the excommunicated king stimulated prayers and mystical transports. After Louis's death, Tauler entreated Margaretha to pray for the dead sovereign and inquired of her how God might judge in such a case. Margaretha prayed to Jesus and learned that despite the excommunication of the king his salvation was assured. Why? Because the king had loved Jesus, and human opinion (that of the pope!) is often deceived.[57] Here the conflict of authority has become topical and political, with a corresponding turn toward a personalistic mysticism.

The pious layfolk and religious of South Germany and the Upper Rhine were drawn into the conflict and forced to choose between allegiance to their sovereign or loyalty to their pope. This and the ensuing confusions came during a period of worsening conditions and unheard of disasters—years of pestilence, floods, famines, and mass hysteria. The Black Plague swept across Europe in 1348. In times like these, the bonds of friendship and shared devotion must have been especially productive.

A characteristic current was that of the "Friends of God." The devout circles of "Friends" were given to a mystical piety that could take various forms. Rulman Merswin was a Strasbourg banker who had been moved by a mystical conversion experience to devote his life to God. He organized a

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[57] There is a readable account of the mysticism of this period by Wilhelm Preger, *Geschichte der deutschen Mystik im Mittelalter* 2 (reprint of the edition of 1874-1893; Aalen: Zeller, 1962), 289-92. Cf. Philipp Strauch, *Margaretha Ebner und Heinrich von Nördlingen,* xxxii-ff.

retreat community on a river island (Grünwörth). Merswin is also suspected as the secret hand that penned the mystical tracts that he attributed to the mysterious persona of the "Friend of God from the Upper Land" *(Gottesfreund vom Oberland).*[58] From the private languages of medieval nuns to the legendary society of the Rosicrucians, the mystical milieu periodically gave rise to arcane obsessions.

However, the most famous representatives of the mysticism of the Friends of God showed nothing of this inclination. They were Heinrich Seuse (Henry Suso) and Johannes Tauler, both of whom had known the influence of Meister Eckhart.

Seuse had arrived at an important insight through the advice of Eckhart. Born in or near Konstanz around 1295, Seuse eagerly entered the Dominican monastery in Konstanz at the tender age of twelve. Since this was below the minimum age for acceptance, and since donations from his parents may have played a role in Heinrich's premature entry, the young monk suffered for years at the thought that he might have inadvertently committed the mortal sin of simony. His *Anfechtungen,* or agonizing doubts about his justification, stand comparison with those of the young Luther.

It was Eckhart's counsel to Seuse in Cologne that freed him from these tormenting thoughts of mortal sin and damnation. The transition is significant for the study of the evolving forms of German mysticism because it suggests that Seuse passed through the same crisis over admission to or exclusion from grace, which, according to our hypothesis, lies at the root of the visionary mysticism of nuns like Elsbeth of Oye.

The problems of spiritual authority and of deciding between conflicting views did not end for Seuse with Eckhart's consoling advice. When the master was condemned for heresy, the pupil came

[58] A summary of the literature on Merswin and a translation of his writings has been provided by Thomas S. Kepler, *Mystical Writings of Rulman Merswin* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960).

under suspicion for espousing his teaching. Moreover, during the harsh and uncertain period of the interdiction under King Louis, the public authority of the clergy suffered greatly.

Seuse's tract with the title *Little Book of Truth (Büchlein der Wahrheit)* was composed around 1327, before the papal judgment fell against his revered teacher. Defending Eckhart's teachings, Seuse incurred the reprimand of his Dominican superiors. Around 1330, he wrote his *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom (Büchlein der ewigen Weisheit),* which he expanded and translated into Latin under the title *Horologium Sapientiae.* A book of letters *(Das Briefbüchlein)* and his *Life* completed the four books of *Das Exemplar.* There is speculation about how much his work may owe to the editorial or authorial assistance of his friend, Elsbeth Stagel, a Dominican nun in Töß who solicited from Seuse accounts of his spiritual experiences. He died in 1366.

Seuse's accounts of his early visionary experiences and his more personal and affective tone place him in the tradition of the older convent mysticism. He records visions, experiences of ecstasy, and self-flagellations. However, this is only one side of Seuse. The visions and self-torments form part of what might be called a developmental novel, *ein Entwicklungsroman,* of his spiritual quests and passages. The decisive turn in his life is his overcoming of his early literal-minded imitations of Christ and Saint Paul. This he accomplishes by replacing his self-inflicted torture with ordeals of a common life which, even without crosses and hair shirts, was arduous enough in his age. After this turning point, Seuse began to devote himself to service to others and to the Divine Wisdom (who is characteristically represented by Seuse as a female figure identical with Christ).[59] Personal exploits and inner experiences thus acquire an exemplary character. Experience is ennobled by chivalrous self-sacrifice. Humiliations and perils are borne bravely in the service of Lady Wisdom. Since all is for the honor and glory of God, everything terrifying and degrading can be transfigured into the stations of a

[59] On the general Christian and specifically German mystical tradition of Sophia as wisdom and as Christ, see Lucinda Martin, "Jacob Böhme and the Spiritualist Reformation of Gender," *Daphnis* 40 (2020): 214-246.

chivalrous quest: a horrendous encounter with a cutthroat in a dark forest, or the bitter stings of false accusation from a woman who slanders Seuse by announcing that he is the father of her child.

Seuse's *Life* offers a panorama of his times and its customs, its diurnal fears and its spiritual adventures. He had something to offer for everyone. To those in need of images and miracles, he had them in plenty, while to those of a keener mind such as the inquisitive and wise Elsbeth Stagel he could still explicate the subtleties of Eckhart's forbidden mysticism.

In contrast to the colorful roundedness of Seuse, Johannes Tauler (1300-1361) comes down to us mainly as the author of some eighty-four sermons. He was born in Strasbourg and spent the greater part of his life in that city. He was influenced by Eckhart, whom he may have known, and affected by the conflict between the king and the pope. A loyal Dominican, he found refuge in Basel during the period of the interdiction. Like Eckhart, Tauler was entrusted with the pastoral care of Dominican nuns, preaching to them in the vernacular. He also cultivated the lay adherents of the Friends of God.

Tauler's sermons utilize the conceptual symbolism of Eckhart in order to instruct his flock on the itinerary and stations of the inner life. In his usage, the terminology of *Innerlichkeit* acquires transparence and refinement. For Tauler, the stages of spiritual rebirth conform to the classical *purgatio, illuminatio,* and *unio;* and these in turn correspond roughly to a trichotomy of sensory, intellectual, and spiritual faculties. Only the third faculty, the *Seelengrund* or *Seelenfünklein* or *Gemüt,* is created in the image of God. The goal of all spiritual experience is to become *gottförmig,* "deiform." The destiny of worldly existence and spiritual life is to return to God. The divine abyss calls out to the human abyss. The soul longs to lose itself like a drop of water in the deep sea.[60]

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[60] Johannes Tauler, *Die Predigten Taulers, aus der Engelsberger und der Freiburger Handschrift sowie aus Schmidts Abschriften der ehemaligen Straßburger Handschriften,* ed. Ferdinand Vetter (Berlin: Weidmann, 1910), 378 (subsequent page references in parentheses refer to this edition).

In Eckhart's sermons, the terminology of *Innerlichkeit* was employed in order to shatter a contemplative imagery based upon space, time, body, and number. In Tauler, the same terminology tends rather to compose an extensive system of symbolic images that serve as an alternative to a spiritless or superficial religiosity. The purpose is still to bring about a purity of devotion, deeper than any quid pro quo of works for salvation. However, Eckhart's radical attempt to lead his listeners to a realm of absolute inner autonomy is less evident in Tauler.

Long considered the work of Tauler, the Christmas sermon on the text of Isaiah 9:6 (the first sermon in Vetter's edition of Tauler), is now attributed by some scholars to Eckhart (though it seems to lack the latter's radical challenge to pictorialism). Since the sermon could conceivably have been composed by either, and since it was known to Luther and still paraphrased by Baader in the nineteenth century, it is perhaps wisest to examine it as a testimony to the continuity and impact of German mysticism.

The basic chord of its well-fashioned composition is sounded in the initial pronouncement that on this day one is celebrating a "threefold birth." The first of the three births takes place in the heavenly Father. The second is the birth that occurs out of virginal fertility and purity; and the third the one that should be taking place every day and every moment in the heart of the believer. The Father gives birth by looking into himself, thereby knowing his own being through and through. The eternal birth of the Son within the heavenly Father is perfect because of its eternal repetition. The circular course of the heavenly bodies symbolizes this. For the human creature, this represents the necessity of returning to the origin that is God. Like God, the human creature should go into itself wholly in order to go out from self. The soul replicates the divine pattern in three noble powers: memory, understanding, and will. As in Saint Augustine, because of these three powers, the soul, born between time and eternity, is receptive to God. The sermon continues by evoking the powers of

concentration needed for the turn inward. Allegorizing Abraham's journey, the sermon compares it to Christ's call to leave father, mother, and native soil behind in order to find eternal life. Coming back to the middle of the three births, the sermon spiritualizes it as the speaking of the Word in the complete stillness of night from the heart of the Father into the spiritualized virginity of Mary. The sermon closes by calling upon the congregation to be the spiritual mother for this same birth.

Tauler cites Dionysius, Plato, and Aristotle, but no one more often than Augustine. To the latter, he attributes the idea that God is a unity that "brings about all multiplicity and is all in all things, one in all and all in one" *(ein einformig götlich wesen und wurket doch alle manigfaltikeit und ist al in allen dingen, ein in al und al in ein)*. This same thought leads Tauler to praise the labor of a simple plowman as a worship honoring the noble blood of Christ (177, 179), a sentiment anticipating Luther. Tauler memorializes "a dear master" who "spoke from eternity, and you discern it in accordance with time" *(er sprach uss der ewikeit, und ir vernehment es noch der zit*—69). If it is Eckhart who remains unnamed here, Tauler elsewhere recognizes, as did the dear master, that there is a divine knowledge enacted in the human creature *(dis bekent sich Got in Gotte*—350). Another sermon interprets Hildegard's vision of the fear of God—viewing the image now very differently as an allegory of self-knowledge (379).

In Tauler's sermons, the symbol, trope, allegory, or image is a semiotic coinage that has gained currency to the point that it can be utilized even without the large-scale metaphysical or cosmological frames of reference that molded it. A sermon on John 8:12 projects a cosmic outlook: the elements are all moved to return to their origin; how does it happen that only the human creature does not hasten to return (47)? Tauler concludes with the Johannine light shining in darkness without being received by the darkness. The underlying coordinates of Tauler's semiotic system are what might be termed a directional paradox. The path back leads into the coming state. The path inward is a path

outward. Self-recognition is a leaving behind of self. Tauler's sermons became the classic standard of a reflective spirituality. Their popularity survived in Pietistic circles into the nineteenth century.

However, the most consequential offshoot of the reflective school was an anonymous treatise popularized by Luther. It was probably written about 1350, apparently by a monk at the house of the Teutonic Order in Frankfurt am Main. Luther published it on the eve of the Reformation, in 1516. Returning to it in 1518, he declared that, except for the Bible and Saint Augustine, no other book or author had taught him more—averring that it anticipated the new Wittenberg theology. It soon acquired the programmatic title of a *Theologia Deutsch*. For Luther, as well as for the dissenters in the ranks of his Reformation, this work possessed great significance. Scholars have long debated Luther's praise for the *Theologia* and his debt to the mystics. More will be said about this influence elsewhere.