

Robert Crouse on Meister Eckhart

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Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.¹

In the few remarks on Meister Eckhart scattered throughout Robert Crouse's publications and lectures, one finds a consistent characterization and sentiment. The essence of these remarks is simple: in Eckhart, according to Crouse, there is a radically new "conception of pure subjectivity in the presence of the infinite as the ground of speculation."² The profundity of Crouse's analysis emerges once it is situated within the wider context of Eckhart scholarship, which he both depends on and anticipates; furthermore, when read within the trajectory of Crouse's historiography of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, it will become clear how this succinct phrase focuses on one of the major philosophical problems confronting Eckhart and his interpreters, namely the tension between the assumed perfection of the soul and the way to it. In other words, there is for Eckhart a need to reconcile the immediacy of the soul's relation to God with the finite world in which it operates. In the spirit of this commemoration, as a continuation of Crouse's work, I conclude with a suggestion of how Eckhart himself may already provide an indication of the path through what is, for Crouse, the Hell of this "new" or "modern" emphasis on irreducible individuality, by considering the inspiration and structure of Eckhart's characteristic teaching of "abandon" or "detachment" as a spiritual exercise. This, ultimately, places Eckhart much closer to Crouse's own enterprise than his history would suggest.

For those at all familiar with Eckhart's work and who look back on it from our modern standpoint, what Crouse is referring to in his remark is fairly

1. James 5:7.

2. R. Crouse, "Trinitarian Anthropology in the Latin Middle Ages," ed. S. Harris, *Christian Anthropology: The Trinitarian Theology of Man*, Proceedings of the Atlantic Theological Conference (Charlottetown: St. Peter Publications, 1997), 72; idem, "St. Augustine and Descartes as Fathers of Modernity," in *Descartes and the Modern*, ed. N. Robertson, G. McOuat & T. Vinci (Newcastle upon Tyne: Scholars Publishing, 2007), 16–25; idem, "The Birth of Modernity: Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio," Foundation Year Programme Lecture (1997) MS, page 7.

obvious. The language of the “ground” (*grunt/grund, abgrund*) where God and the soul are indistinctly One, pervades Eckhart’s vernacular sermons and, in all of its connotations and polyvalence, appears as a signpost of a nascent form of thinking coming to its fruition. Yet this is only made possible by an encounter with a robust scholastic tradition. For while Eckhart certainly draws on a vernacular spiritual vocabulary that extends from the Lowlands to the southern provinces in Germany, and which reaches a crisis around 1310 when Marguerite Porete is burned in Paris with her *Mirouer des simples âmes anienties*, the tendency to focus primarily on Eckhart’s German work for his doctrine of the ground is now outdated. The notion of the indistinct *grund* receives crucial elaboration in its parallel terms *principium*, *abditum*, and *unum indistinctum*, which brings a vast Neoplatonic tradition to bear on any discussion of this crucial doctrine.³ At the encounter of these two traditions occurs a shift from the earlier attentiveness to the “depth” or “abyss” of the intentional unity of human and divine loves, which had preserved an essential difference between them, to a standpoint that finds their essential union founded on the intentional nothingness of thinking as such.⁴ This shift brings us into a landscape dominated by a seemingly unprecedented association of the essence of the soul with thinking which is, in turn, placed in a univocal relation with the divine thinking as such. *That* there is a “ground of speculation” (in both senses of the genitive) in the soul and in God for Meister Eckhart is, therefore, undisputed.

More controversial, however, is the claim that indistinct union is achieved for a “pure subjectivity in the presence of the infinite” in a form which, as Crouse argues, anticipates the modern philosophies of Kant and Fichte that methodically establish the *a priori* conditions of experience and thought. Eckhart’s theology of the *grund* is, therefore, a precursor to Descartes’ philosophical beginning point where, writes Crouse quoting Floy Doull, one finds “the beginning of the philosophical reconstruction of that [Augustinian] theology from the standpoint of finite subjectivity.”⁵ That four-century leap forward to Kant and Fichte tacitly draws on research initiated by two influential articles published in the 1970s by Kurt Flasch on Dietrich of Freiberg,

3. In at least two sermons, Eckhart himself draws attention to the Latin equivalents to the *grunt*: *Predigt* [henceforth = *Pr.*] 69 (*DW*III, 179,2–6); *Pr.* 18 (*DW*I, 302, 6–7). Kurt Flasch’s work has pioneered the historical reading of Eckhart, which recognizes his immense debt to Averroes, Avicenna and Maimonides; see K. Flasch, *D’Averroès à Maître Eckhart. Les sources arabes de la «mystique» allemande*, texte français établi par J. Schmutz (Paris: Vrin, 2008); idem, *Meister Eckhart: Philosoph des Christentums* (München: C.H. Beck, 2011).

4. For a more detailed account of this shift, see B. McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany (1300–1500)*, vol. 4 of *The Presence of God* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2005), 87–88.

5. R. Crouse, “St. Augustine and Descartes,” 22.

Eckhart's Dominican confrere, *magister actu regens* in Paris, co-administrator, and virulent anti-Thomist, whose gradual rediscovery has not only been crucial for all subsequent historical and philosophical Eckhartian studies, but for the revision of traditional periodizations of medieval and modern thought as a whole.⁶ With Flasch we find the explicit linkage of Dietrich with the "modern conception of consciousness" and, more precisely, with the thought of Kant and Fichte.⁷

Flasch argues that Dietrich of Freiberg produces a robust "philosophy of the autonomous subject," in which the pure rationality and autonomy of the subject is understood to be the determining source of its world.⁸ Strong indications of this are present in the fifth chapter of Dietrich's earliest treatise, *De origine rerum praedicamentarium* (c. 1286), which concerns the origin of things which can be determined by the categories (*res praedicamentales*).⁹ The cosmological and spiritual consequences of this are then fleshed out in two later treatises on intellection, *De intellectu et intelligibili* and *De visione beatifica*. Dietrich of Freiberg maintains that there are "some beings" of which "intellect is the causal principle" and, moreover, that these are beings of "first intention."¹⁰ In other words, the objects constituted by mind are not simply the *secondary* objects of logic which arise in a reflection on a reality that is *primary*, but are themselves real entities. In the two later treatises on intellect, this new kind of being is given a name: the standard division of being into either natural or fictive entities (*ens naturae / ens rationis*) must, for Dietrich, give way to a third kind, called "conceptional being" (*ens conceptionale*). Speculation concerning this ontological order belongs exclusively to metaphysics and, therefore, cannot be considered in terms of the efficient and final *extrinsic* relations belonging to natural, physical being.¹¹ Proclus, Augustine and Aristotle are brought together to show how conceptional being

6. R. Imbach, "Gravis iactura verae doctrinae. Prolegomena zu einer Interpretation der Schrift *De ente et essentia* Dietrichs von Freiberg O.P.," *Quodlibeta*, hrsg. F. Cheneval et al. (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1996), 153–208, at 154–55. K. Flasch, "Kennt die mittelalterliche Philosophie die konstitutive Funktion des menschlichen Denkens? Eine Untersuchung zu Dietrich von Freiberg," *Kant-Studien* 63 (1972): 182–206; idem, "Zum Ursprung der neuzeitlichen Philosophie im späten Mittelalter. Neue Texte und Perspektiven," *Philosophische Jahrbuch* 85 (1978): 1–18.

7. K. Flasch, "Einleitung," in Dietrich von Freiberg, *Schriften zur Intellekttheorie*, mit einer Einl. von K. Flasch, *Opera omnia*, tom.1, hrsg. von B. Mojsisch (Hamburg: Meiner, 1977), xi.

8. K. Flasch, "Zum Ursprung," 17–18.

9. Dietrich von Freiberg, *Tractatus de origine rerum praedicamentarium*, *Opera omnia*, tom.3, *Schriften zur Naturphilosophie und Metaphysik*, hrsg. L. Sturlese (Hamburg: Meiner, 1983), 119–201.

10. Dietrich, *De origine* (Sturlese, 181,1–3): "quod entia aliqua, quae sunt res primae intentionis ordinabiles in genere, constituuntur per intellectum."

11. K. Flasch, *D'Averroès à Maître Eckhart*, ch. 3.

forms a gradually articulated order, defined according to increasing degrees of exteriority constituted by thinking as it relates to its own hidden content.¹² The traditional medieval understanding of the causal relationship of mind and its object is effectively reversed by Dietrich, inaugurating what Flasch unhesitatingly calls a “Copernican turn” in medieval thought.¹³

Crouse clearly finds in Eckhart a “turn” similar to that inaugurated by Dietrich, even though the question of their familiarity or influence has only just begun in the 1970s. For Flasch, Dietrich appears as the “key” to interpreting “Eckhart [who has] drawn the religio-philosophical consequences from the speculations of Dietrich, as Xenophanes from the fundamental thought of Parmenides.”¹⁴ Before looking into the scholarly developments on this question, one should have a sense of why Crouse produces this particular, and somewhat outdated, portrait of Meister Eckhart at this crucial juncture of his intellectual history.

For Crouse, Meister Eckhart appears as a novelty and, consequently, as among the first signs of autumn in late medieval thought, anticipating the winter of modernity. This follows from his elegant and thoroughly Dantean reading of fourteenth-century theology. When discussing what follows after the “finished expression of Christian anthropology” achieved in Dante’s *Commedia*, Crouse speaks of the “radically new and different directions of thought about human nature and destiny” in Duns Scotus, William of Occam, Petrarch and Eckhart:

One thinks of Duns Scotus’ insistence upon the *haecceitas*, the “thisness,” the absolutely irreducible individuality of each existing thing; one thinks of Eckhart’s focussing upon the absolute unitary ground of the self; one thinks of the voluntarism (the doctrine of the priority of the will) in Scotus and Occam; but perhaps most antithetical to the whole Augustinian and Medieval tradition in anthropology was the isolation of theology from metaphysics and the natural sciences in Duns Scotus, the abolition of metaphysics altogether in Occam, and the relegation of theology to the realm of faith alone, faith now being considered essentially act of will rather than of intellect.¹⁵

12. Dietrich von Freiberg, *De visione beatifica, Opera omnia*, tom.1, hrsg. B. Mojsisch (loc. cit.), 1.2.1.1.7, 2: “[intellectus] secundum quendam formalem defluxum essentiae suae ab illa summa et formalissima essentia, quae Deus est, intellectualiter procedens ab ea et eo capiens suam essentiam, quod intelligit illam summam essentiam.” For a more detailed exposition of this hierarchy, see A. de Libera, *La mystique rhénane. D’Albert le Grand à Maître Eckhart* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), 166–67, 210–14, 216–20.

13. K. Flasch, “Einleitung,” xv.

14. K. Flasch, “Die Intention Meister Eckharts,” *Sprache und Begriff. Festschrift für Bruno Liebrucks*, hrsg. H. Röttges (Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1974), 292–318, at 317. Flasch tempers this in later publications, explaining that it was never his intention to “derive” Eckhart’s philosophy from Dietrich. See K. Flasch, “Converti ut imago—Rückkehr als Bild. Eine Studie der Theorie des Intellekts bei Dietrich von Freiberg und Meister Eckhart,” *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 45 (1998): 130–50, at 142.

15. R. Crouse, “Trinitarian Anthropology,” 71–72.

In this understated and powerful diptych of mysticism and voluntarism, we see Dante's Heaven of the Sun broken asunder: Dominican intellectualism is once again opposed to the voluntaristic theology of the Franciscans. Now, however, this opposition denies the very essence of what had allowed Dante to give a complete expression to the "Augustinian and Medieval tradition"; there can be no return to a synthesis achieved in the transformative interdependence of knowing and loving in man as the *imago trinitatis*, because this "new thinking" posits a principle (faith; *grunt*) which is, by definition, entirely antithetical to mediation. In the Heaven of the Sun, Dante sings of the great doctors of the intellect through the voice of Aquinas, himself holding the "middle way," flanked by Albertus Magnus (reason in its natural state) and Siger of Brabant (reason as separate from the body), "whose oppressive thoughts made death appear to come far too slowly."¹⁶ Thomas' mediation of the two holds that faith must strengthen the mind of the wayfarer, granting an imperfect knowledge of the separate substances here below. But autumn comes as a tide: the Eckhartian ground re-asserts the Averroism of Siger, claiming for itself what belongs to the separated soul; its dialectical opposite is the assertion of will's priority over intellect, of sentiment over and against the end which is known as good. When such emphasis is given to "irreducible individuality," according to Crouse, the relation of man to God becomes inherently unstable, enabling the splintering of institutions which had once been framed on the assumption, which is perfected in the *Paradiso* and grounded in the theology of Aquinas: that human nature can be brought into a free relation with the divine *Amor* which moves all things when reason is firmly grounded in the faith which perfects it.¹⁷

True to the principles established in the *Commedia*, Crouse identifies this modernity with Hell. Modernity is founded on "a rejection of the principles of the Augustinian position," for which it is utter "folly" to grant integrity to "independent reason," just as Scotus and Ockham abandon Augustine by relegating theology to the realm of faith, which is identified with an act of will.¹⁸ Dante has shown that the consequences of freely absolutizing one's particular individuality at the expense of the whole are paid variously by every soul, all the way down to the frozen pit, until, finally, they are granted their desire to be the very centre of all things. Modernity, Crouse explains to the Foundation Year of 1997, is less of a "temporal category," and more a "way

16. R. Crouse, "Dante as Philosopher: Christian Aristotelianism," *Dionysius* 16 (1998): 141–56, at 147–48.

17. On the unity of reason and nature, Word and flesh, in Augustine and Dante, see R. Crouse, "Commentary: The Augustinian Philosophy and Christian Institutions," in *Philosophy and Freedom: The Legacy of James Doull*, ed. D. Peddle and N. Robertson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 210–18, at 211–12.

18. R. Crouse, "St. Augustine and Descartes," 23.

of thinking.”¹⁹ Thus we find modernity emerging in Dante’s own time, in the opposition of *antiqui* and *moderni*, between those who seek to preserve the tension of philosophy and revelation, of the temporal and eternal, whose unity is established “theocentrically,” and the self-conscious departure from that standpoint with the *moderni*, for whom the relevance of metaphysics for theology is denied, coinciding with a loss of confidence in the coherence of philosophy and revelation. Already in “some late medieval mystics” one finds “the inward isolation of Descartes” that amounts to the severing of philosophy from its strength in revelation, and that will fundamentally set the Jesuit philosopher apart from his Augustinian heritage.²⁰

Eckhart’s association with Dietrich of Freiberg fits well in Crouse’s Dantean history. From that perspective, both Dominicans couple Siger’s Averroism with an “inward isolation” which is by definition irreducible and immediate, in which all self-knowledge is reducible to the primordial divine self-knowing. Crouse’s judgment that such immediacy produces an inherently unstable relation of human and divine in fact anticipates later developments in Eckhartian studies, even those which endeavour to oppose Flasch, to which I now return.

The intellectual kinship of Meisters Dietrich and Eckhart is witnessed very early on. A text written in the vernacular by one Eckhart von Gründig, entitled *Ler von der selikeyt* and written sometime between 1302–1323, contrasts the teachings of “Masters” Thomas Aquinas, Dietrich and Eckhart on beatitude, providing a basic framework within which the three can, and have subsequently been, compared:

Now other masters arrive, wanting to discuss the image of the soul. They ask: In what does the image reside? Master Thomas says that it is in the powers. Now Master Dietrich enters and contradicts this argument, saying that it is not so. Now mark. He says that the image does not reside in the powers, that all that Master Eckhart and the others have said had intended to prove that beatitude consists in the fact that the soul suffers God [*got lide*] in a supernatural way. Master Dietrich says it is not so. He says: This is not so, and I say that there is something in the soul which is so noble that its essence is an intellectual activity. I say that this is blessed by nature. It is true that every intellectual being must be blessed by nature. That is why it is called the agent intellect.²¹

19. R. Crouse, “The Birth of Modernity,” MS, page 5. For the historical reconsideration of nominalism as something more than merely a response to the problem of universals, and rather as a “mode of thinking,” see P. Vignaux, “La problématique du nominalisme médiévale peut-elle éclairer des problèmes philosophiques actuels?” *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 75 (1977): 293–331.

20. R. Crouse, “St. Augustine and Descartes,” 23; idem, “Commentary,” 210–18.

21. L. Sturlese, “Alle origini della mistica speculativa tedesca. Antichi testi su Teodorico di Freiberg,” *Medioevo* 3 (1977): 21–87, at 48–58. For later and similar vernacular testimonies, see W. Wackernagel, “Vingt-quatre aphorismes autour de Maître Eckhart,” *Revue des sciences religieuses* 70.1 (1996): 90–101.

While this text is at best suggestive, it is not for that reason superficial. In exploring what is meant by “suffering God,” we can test the association of Eckhart and Dietrich which Crouse assumes.

Philologically, Alain de Libera notes that the direct lineage of Dietrich to Eckhart is “difficult to establish” and that it is better to regard any similarities between them as “convergences within a group.”²² One finds support for both sides of the question, both based on the assumption of an earlier dating of Dietrich’s work; Eckhart is seen as either an inheritor and developer of Dietrich’s thought or as its critic.

Among the former group of interpretations, Mojsisch’s publications provide insightful philosophical and, to a lesser extent, philological corroboration of Flasch’s thesis. In Meister Eckhart’s understanding of the analogy of being, a creature (*ens hoc*) relates to being, or any divine perfection, as something completely extrinsic which it possesses precisely to the extent that it *cannot, qua* finite and determinate, partake of what is inherently infinite.²³ Mojsisch argues that this analogical ontology is grounded in the “univocal correlationality” obtaining between man and God.²⁴ This univocal relation is assumed throughout Eckhart’s writings, particularly when he develops his theory of the *imago* and its archetype which, taken in the strictly formal perspective of intentional content, are indistinguishable: the relation between the principle and what is principled is, metaphorically speaking, a purely “horizontal” relation in which both terms reciprocally ground each other, as the Father is in the Son, God and the *imago Dei*. Eckhart achieves this, argues Mojsisch, by developing the noetic and causal theories of Dietrich where “ground and grounded, the cognitive ‘I’ and the cognized ‘I’ interchange with one another.”²⁵ Just as efficient and final causality do not belong to metaphysics for Dietrich and Eckhart, so too the indeterminacy of intellect indicates its superiority over all finitude, in which consists the mind’s status as the *imago Dei*.²⁶

22. A. de Libera, *La mystique rhénane*, 309, n.147, italics removed; cf. K. Flasch, “Converti ut imago,” 142.

23. A. de Libera, *Le problème de l'être chez Maître Eckhart* (Lausanne-Genève-Neuchâtel: Cahiers de la Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie, 1980).

24. B. Mojsisch, *Meister Eckhart. Analogie, Univozität und Einheit* (Hamburg: Meines, 1983), 61–70.

25. B. Mojsisch, “‘Dieses Ich’: Meister Eckharts Ich-Konzeption, *Das Licht der Vernunft. Die Anfänge der Aufklärung im Mittelalter*, hrsg. K. Flasch und U.R. Jeck (München: C.H. Beck, 1997), 100–09, at 105.

26. K. Flasch, “Procedere ut imago. Das Hervorgehen des Intellekts aus seinem göttlichen Grund bei Meister Dietrich, Meister Eckhart, und Berthold von Moosburg,” *Abendländische Mystik im Mittelalter. Symposium Kloster Engelberg 1984*, hrsg. K. Ruh (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1986), 125–35.

A problematic but enticing alternative arising from the *Ler von der selikeyt* is the notion that here Meister Eckhart criticizes the blatant Averroism of his senior Dominican brother with his famous doctrine of abandon (*Gelassenheit*; *Abgeschiedenheit*), effectively preserving Eckhart from the consequences which would follow from the association with Dietrich understood by Flasch and Mojsisch,²⁷ and *a fortiori*, Crouse. In this view, Eckhart would not, as Dietrich allegedly does, deny the necessity of grace for the blessed perfection of the intellect. Rather, the pure potentiality and indeterminacy of intellect is perfected only to the extent that it renounces all finite intentions and images, and is receptive to the indeterminate excess of divine being. Therefore, any supposed self-positing of intellect would be, for Eckhart, only the realm of alienation.

If we follow this logic, Crouse's verdict is, in the end, only more strongly confirmed. A recent article by Wouter Goris exposes the tension in the notion of a pure passivity standing over against what would be divine freedom or grace. Goris suggests that the absence of any robust doctrine of the agent intellect in Eckhart's work, and the strong association of the human with the pure intellectual potentiality, leaves the Eckhartian soul in a profoundly unstable relation to God.²⁸ He begins by citing a sermon (*Pr.* 80) where Eckhart, following "bishop Albert," describes the operation of the "Light of Lights" in and through the human, which he identifies with the "Father" or "agent intellect" that "brings back all creatures to their first origin," giving them the participation in God's being (*esse divinum*) which is the perfection they seek.²⁹ When this light shines in the soul, it performs the elevating and purificatory work appropriate to it. Goris uses this to elucidate a crucial distinction made by Eckhart, in a recently edited early sermon (*Pr.* 104), between the "agent, passive and possible intellect" in man.³⁰ In *Pr.* 104, God is identified with the agent intellect who, in familiar Eckhartian language, "is the one doing the working" in the "passive intellect" while "the spirit must remain silent." The spirit is the "possible intellect," standing by, waiting for

27. N. Largier, "Intellectus in deum ascensus. Intellekttheoretische Auseinandersetzungen in Texten der deutschen Mystik." *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 69 (1995): 424–71, esp. 442ff.; idem, "Negativität, Möglichkeit, Freiheit. Zur Differenz zwischen der Philosophie Dietrichs von Freiberg und Eckharts von Hochheim," *Dietrich von Freiberg. Neue Perspektiven seiner Philosophie, Theologie und Naturwissenschaft. Freiburger Symposion: 10–13 März 1997*, hrsg. K.-H. Kandler et al. (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: B.R. Grüner, 1999), 149–68.

28. W. Goris, "The Unpleasantness with the Agent Intellect in Meister Eckhart," *Philosophical Debates at Paris in the Early Fourteenth Century*, ed. S.F. Brown et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 151–59, esp. 157–59.

29. *Ibid.*, 155–56; cf. Eckhart, *Pr.* 80 (DW III, 385).

30. Eckhart, *Pr.* 104 (DW IV, 568).

that pure passivity to be made active. The tension in Eckhart's account of the agent intellect is manifest, therefore, in the contradiction between the dividedness implicit in this active conversion of multiplicity and the refrain that the soul must remain free of images if it will receive God. In the end, it seems, the soul is left with only the *possibility* that its pure *passivity* will be fulfilled, suspended in its isolated turn away from the travail of creation.³¹ Identified with the passive intellect, which for Anaxagoras and Aristotle has "nothing in common with nothing,"³² the human has indeed become a "pure subjectivity," interpreted as pure receptivity. From Crouse's standpoint, this form of passivity, as problematized by Goris in *Pr.* 104, takes Eckhart only further into modernity, where individual "experience" which refuses mediation is taken as fundamental.³³ Any interpretation which sets Eckhart's turn to the passivity "whose fulfillment depends on God" and "drama of life" against Dietrich, as a supposed liberation from intentionality and reason only confirms the prison.³⁴ We have come too late—not only creation, but we too, groan within ourselves, sons awaiting the adoption: Hell, it seems, at last.³⁵

The recently established dating of the sermons "On the Eternal Birth" (*Pr.* 101–04), as well as the evidence that the prologues to the *Tripartite Opus* were composed around Eckhart's first tenure as *magister* in Paris (c. 1302) have shaped the current scholarly consensus that Eckhart's thought remains substantially consistent throughout his writings, sealing off the way to facile developmental readings.³⁶ But this does not require that we wholly affirm Crouse's judgment at either side of the opposition between self-grounding reason and pure passivity. The limitation of either side is rather internal to Eckhart's own thought.

31. W. Goris, "The Unpleasantness," 157, discussing Eckhart's division of active, passive and possible intellect in *Pr.* 104 (DW IV, 571–72).

32. Aristotle, *De anima* III.4, 429a18.

33. R. Crouse, "Tradition and Renewal," in *Tradition: Received and Handed On*, Proceedings of the 1993 Atlantic Theological Conference, 27 June–1 July 1993, ed. D. Petley (Charlottetown: St. Peter Publications, 1994), 90–98, at 95.

34. Cf. N. Largier, "*Intellectus in deum ascensus*," 443.

35. Compare Thomas Aquinas' introduction of Siger of Brabant to Dante: "Questi onde a me ritorna il tuo riguardo / è 'l lume d'uno spirto che 'n pensieri / gravi a morir li parve venir tardo" (Paradiso X, 133–35).

36. G. Steer, "Meister Eckharts Predigtzyklus *von der ewigen geburt*. Mutmaßungen über die Zeit seiner Entstehung," *Deutsche Mystik im abendländischen Zusammenhang. Neu erschlossene Texte, neue methodische Ansätze, neue theoretische Konzepte. Kolloquium Kloster Fischingen 1998*, hrsg. W. Haug und W. Schneider-Lastin (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000), 253–81, esp. 266ff.; L. Sturlese, "Meister Eckhart in der Bibliotheca Amploniana. Neues zur Datierung des 'Opus tripartitum'," *Die Bibliotheca Amploniana. Ihre Bedeutung im Spannungsfeld vom Aristotelismus, Nominalismus und Humanismus*, *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 23, ed. A. Speer (Berlin-New York: De Gruyter, 1995), 434–46, esp. 445.

Flasch responds to Largier's strong separation of Eckhart from Dietrich in an interpretation of the famous *Pr. 52, Beati pauperes spiritu*.³⁷ Eckhart there announces a "better" definition of spiritual poverty than an earlier view he once held under the influence of "bishop Albert": the pauper not only "finds no sufficiency in all things which God has created," but furthermore "wants nothing, knows nothing, and has nothing."³⁸ Similarly, Eckhart modifies his former teaching, "that one must be free of all things and works . . . so that one might be a place for God to work." Rather, God himself must be the place of his own work and this, says Eckhart, is only in the "something of the soul," its very essential being, from which knowing and loving flow.³⁹ Explaining the similarities between Eckhart's characterization of this "something" with Dietrich's account of the agent intellect, Flasch shows how this "something" must not be construed as an object of experience, for "it is in need of nothing from without . . . neither can it gain something nor lose something." God cannot at one moment "replace" this ground within the "drama" of salvation history. Again, it is fruitless to speak of external (efficient/final) causation where intellect is concerned. Eckhart's theory of the image as a pure reference to its exemplar necessitates that this ground or "something" of the soul is "so poor that it does not know that God works in it."⁴⁰ Flasch himself, however, limits the extent of this correction only to *Pr. 52*, realizing that other sermons validate Largier's reading.⁴¹ This is the apparent incompatibility which can be explained if each sermon is understood as a particular perspective.

The perspective adopted in *Pr. 52* becomes clear at its conclusion, where Eckhart gives a crucial hermeneutical remark: "As long as man is not like unto this Truth, he will not understand this discourse, because this is the uncovered Truth which proceeds immediately from the heart of God."⁴² The Beatitudes are known from Christ, who is the Truth proceeding immediately from the heart or ground of God. In what way the poor in spirit will see God is known, strictly speaking, only to Christ and those taken into the grace of adoption. We should see this as Eckhart's answer to a problem which, according to Paul Vignaux, occupies many theologians of the fourteenth century, namely, to establish the conditions under which a theology is possible at

37. K. Flasch, "Converti ut imago," 141–50; idem, "Predigt 52: 'Beati pauperes spiritu,'" *Lectura Eckhardi. Predigten Meister Eckharts von Fachgelehrten gelesen und gedeutet*, hrsg. G. Steer und L. Sturlese (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1998), 163–200, esp. 187ff.

38. Eckhart, *Pr. 52* (DW II, 488).

39. Ibid. (DW II, 500).

40. Ibid. (DW II, 496–97).

41. Flasch, "Converti ut imago," 143. Largier's interpretation, that God "replaces" the natural agent intellect holds, for example, for *Pr. 38*. Cf. N. Largier, "Intellectus in deum ascensus," 443.

42. Eckhart, *Pr. 52* (DW II, 506,7–10).

all.⁴³ This answer brings us to the very centre of Eckhart's preaching, which is both what set him at odds with his contemporaries and what enables the oscillation between those two perspectives.

This centre appears most clearly in the documents surrounding Eckhart's trial and condemnation. When John XXII issues the bull *In agro dominico* (1329) against Eckhart, the heretical theses culled from his writings are substantial indeed, but the preacher himself is not established as a heretic. Eckhart had already sworn to renounce any teachings which would inspire heretical belief, since his intention was never to depart from the faith.⁴⁴ Instead, the Pope, echoing allegations made against Dominicans in Teutonia during the early 1320s, condemns Meister Eckhart primarily for presenting his subtle speculations to the "hearts of simpletons." In other words, he condemns Eckhart for not doing his job.⁴⁵ For Eckhart, however, it is necessary not only to teach literacy to the unlearned, but moreover to bring them to the "inward knowing" which is irreducible to doctrine and education. This inward knowing can be achieved only through the transformation of the soul:

When I preach, I tend to speak of abandon [*abgeschiedenheit*] and that man should become free of himself and all things. Second, that man should be reinstated in the simple Good, that God is. Third, that man should ponder the great nobility that God has placed in the soul so that man might come in a marvellous way to God. In the fourth place, I speak of the purity of the divine nature; the clarity of the divine nature is inexpressible. God is a Word, a Word Unspoken.⁴⁶

The condition of theology is, therefore, that one must be within this Truth.⁴⁷ The awareness of this "nobility" is at the heart of Eckhart's methodology, as the assumption underlying his argument for the philosophical demonstrability, "for those with ears to hear," of the highest theological doctrines (Trinity, Incarnation, Resurrection), and for the identity of John's Gospel with the science of "being as being."⁴⁸ Christ has been revealed as the Logos, the unity

43. P. Vignaux, *Philosophie au Moyen Âge*, éditées, présentées et annotées par R. Imbach (Paris: Vrin, 2004), 214.

44. Eckhart, *Proc. Col. I*, n.80 (LW V, 277).

45. For a study which contrasts Eckhart's understanding of the pastor with that of a contemporary Dominican who held the favour of the Pope, see G. Steer, "Die deutsches *Rechtssumme* des Dominikaners Berthold—ein Dokument der spätmittelalterlichen Laienchristlichkeit," *Laienfrömmigkeit im späten Mittelalter*, hrsg. K. Schreiner et al. (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1992), 227–40. On the similar restraint shown by Eckhart's follower, John Tauler, see A. de Libera, *Penser au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 391, n.21.

46. Eckhart, *Pr.* 53 (DW II, 528,5–529,2).

47. Eckhart, *In Ioh.*, n.190 (LW III, 159,10–11): *Non enim sufficit esse veracem eum qui docet, nisi in ipsa veritate fuerit; nam in ipsa noscit veritatem quam docet, non extra ipsam.*

48. Th. Kobusch, "Lesemeistermetaphysik—Lebemeistermetaphysik. Zur Einheit der Philosophie Meister Eckharts," *Meister Eckhart in Erfurt*, *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 32, ed. A. Speer and L. Wegener (Berlin-New York: De Gruyter, 2005), 239–58, esp. 241–46.

of all wisdom, and the Gospel for Eckhart sets out the principles of being and the means to their apprehension. To ascend to this standpoint, which is at once to die to oneself and return to the true "I" that is in God before creation, before that "I" knows of or "says 'God,'" requires that one "negate the personal and one's own."⁴⁹ This pure subjectivity is no longer, then, the "inward isolation" which Crouse attributes to Eckhart and the other "German mystics," but the attainment of a standpoint that is truly *common* and indistinct.⁵⁰ We must distinguish this relation of nobility and dividedness in Eckhart from Petrarch, whom Crouse places in Eckhart's wake, where the individual is endlessly divided from the divine end he longs for by the very sentiment of that longing itself. Eckhart's confidence in their continuity, in the attainability of a *blessed life*, is an indication of a very different kind of thinking. The two perspectives of Flasch and Largier are necessary for the particular kind of spiritual practice that characterizes Eckhart's work.

This spiritual practice receives its determining structure in another crucial text for grasping Eckhart's self-understanding as preacher, namely his address to his accusers in Cologne. Before responding to each of the compiled articles in turn, he suggests that, on the whole, they have failed to grasp the crucial role of the term "insofar as" (*inquantum*) in his thought. He defines the term simply as a "reduplication which excludes everything other and foreign, according to reason, from the term."⁵¹ This principle has a widespread application in his thought, from his insistence that "the just man insofar as he is just is identical to Justice itself," to the introductory remarks of the *Tripartite Opus*, which make the same claim for the relation of an inhering white colour and whiteness itself.⁵² One of the most crucial questions a reader of Eckhart must ask is what perspective is assumed to stand before God and creation and *to think this inquantum*. The common, or divine, and the distinct, or creaturely, are equally present to this standpoint, although the common appears always through an *exercise* of negating the negation of determinate particulars.⁵³ Here, as above, the goal of this exercise is the transformation of the self beyond the particular and distinct, to return

49. Eckhart, *In Ioh.*, n.290 (LW III, 202,6); *In Ioh.*, n.119 (LW III, 104): *Non enim est imaginandum falso quasi alio filio sive imagine Christus sit filius Dei, et alio quodam homo Iustus et deformis sit filius Dei. Ait enim: transformatur in eandem imaginem* [Co. 3.18]; *In Ioh.*, n.397 (LW III, 338,5–7): *homo quilibet divinus et sanctus ut sic pure passive se habet et super nudo suscipit omne donum dei: sic omnes et singuli sicut unus quilibet ex illis, et per consequens sunt omnibus omnia communia*. Cf. Th. Kobusch, "Lesemeistermetaphysik," 255–57.

50. See Th. Kobusch, "Lesemeistermetaphysik," 247–49 on the unity of Eckhart's ethics with his metaphysics of the transcendentals which identifies God directly with what is "common."

51. Eckhart, *Proc. Col. I*, n.81 (LW V, 277,7–278,2).

52. Eckhart, *Prologus in opus propositionum*, nn.2–3 (LW I, 166–67).

53. Cf. Th. Kobusch, "Lesemeistermetaphysik," 250ff.

before the reflexive difference of *this* God and *this* I. The unity of God and the soul in the ground is, therefore, not an attainment, nor an event, nor a property—which would reduce it back into a *this*—but a *confirmation* of an anteriority always present: when the soul breaks through to this ground, it only says “I am, what I was.”⁵⁴

In the sermons discussed by Goris, the inspiration that Eckhart draws from Avicenna and Albert for his understanding of human destiny is also crucially informed by Eriugena; in becoming the “intelligible universe” the human would purify creation and “elevate” it from its travail, leading creatures back to their origin through the light of the the agent intellect.⁵⁵ Taking Eriugena into an Augustinian framework, this cosmic reversion, for Eckhart, must be grounded in the pure remaining of the veritable “I.” Similarly, in Dietrich’s account of the agent intellect, Alain de Libera locates the “inaugural gesture” which animates the whole tradition of Rhineland mysticism: the separate agent intellect as “simple and impassible, having nothing in common with anything” once identified with the “Ground of the soul [...] paradoxically places the furthest at the heart of the greatest proximity, that of the Self.”⁵⁶ This “impassible, impersonal, anonymous Self,” he continues, “is placed at the ground of the soul, as that in which all being finds its origin as being, as that [Self] which thought cannot make appear but in externalizing it.” For the perfect Image, there is no reflexive or external awareness of this primordial Self; since every image is immediately related and identical, *qua* image, to the formal exemplar from which it proceeds, the vision of the blessed cannot be reflexive. The Son is pure attention to the silence of the Father—“God is a Word, a Word Unspoken.” Similarly, the ground from which the powers of the soul flow, this self that is other than myself, *interior intimo meo*, is defined by the “internal exclusion of the thinking which is aware of it.”⁵⁷ Eckhart’s

54. Eckhart, *Pr.* 52 (DW II, 505,5).

55. Eckhart, *In Gen. I*, n.115 (LW I, 154–55), citing a portion of Avicenna, *Metaphysica* 9.7 (ed. Van Reit, 510–11), which, however, identifies this “perfection of the rational soul” to “become the intelligible universe” with its *destiny*, not its *procession* from God. This apparent confusion in Eckhart’s text is omitted by Dietrich when he tacitly borrows from his younger confrere—see L. Sturlese, “Hat Meister Eckhart Dietrich von Freiberg gelesen? Die Lehre vom Bild und von den göttlichen Vollkommenheiten in Eckharts *Expositio libri Genesis* und Dietrichs *De visione beatifica*,” *Recherches sur Dietrich de Freiberg*, ed. J. Biard et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 193–219. Eckhart, however, may have a deliberately more Eriugenan assumption in mind. Recall that, for Eriugena, the completion of creation requires that Adam co-operate with the divine creativity by naming the animals (Eriugena, *Periphyseon* IV.6, PL 768D, 414). The proper differentiation of the creatures *is* their unity in the Word, of which man is the image. The purifying, elevating and unifying method of the *inquantum* is wholly compatible with this assumption. Cf. A. de Libera, *La mystique rhénane*, 309, n.147.

56. A. de Libera, *La mystique rhénane*, 87.

57. *Ibid.*, 37.

dialectical method of the *inquantum* can, ultimately, be connected positively with Crouse's own teachings, although it relies on traditions to which he is not frequently attentive; that method is a particularly Dionysian or Procline form of spiritual exercise which, in fact, provides a response to the Hell into which Eckhart so recently had fallen.

The importance Pierre Hadot's rediscovery of the intrinsic unity of philosophy and life that had characterized antique thought is thrown into sharp relief by the complete severance of the two in many modern universities.⁵⁸ Hadot would want to stand firm in his conviction that this is the result of the intrusion of specifically Christian theology onto the integral, natural ground of philosophy as a way of life, which deprives philosophy of the freedom that is adequate to it; once it is placed at the service of theology in the scholastic period, philosophy becomes professionalized and instrumental, a strictly theoretical science, while the unity of "doctrine and life" is displaced to Christianity.⁵⁹ Christians, as Hadot notes, would often present this revelation as *the* comprehensive philosophy, effectively undermining the primacy of will or choice which would freely choose its own way of life, since the rigorous separation of nature and grace (characteristic of Christianity as a whole for Hadot) allows for only a supernatural transformation of the self.⁶⁰ If Goris' suggestion about Eckhart is right, then the skepticism and instability of the Eckhartian nature which eliminates itself to await the influx of grace would be entirely antithetical to the philosophical life of antiquity. However, once balanced with Flasch's interpretation of *Pr.* 52, that forced separation of nature and grace, of the earthly and heavenly, disappears into one movement.

Clearly Eckhart does not sever philosophy from its perfection in theology. This world has the Incarnation as its model, and the Inhabitation as its purpose. The patristic theology which sought to unite the Incarnation and the Inhabitation—"God became man so that man should become God," in Athanasius—is fully operative in Eckhart's thought: since the Incarnation is "the model of all inferior nature," the philosophers, Moses and Christ must all conform in their teachings, but under different modes.⁶¹ Accordingly, the preacher and the just man must ponder nothing else but Christ in all their teachings and works; the just man "has negated everything creaturely and, without looking elsewhere, moves himself straightway toward the eternal

58. This account of Hadot is indebted to W. Hankey, "Philosophy as a Way of Life for Christians? Iamblichan and Porphyrian Reflections on Religion, Virtue, and Philosophy in Thomas Aquinas," *Laval théologique et philosophique* 59.2 (2003): 193–224.

59. P. Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 389.

60. *Ibid.*, 355; *idem*, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre. Entretiens avec Jeannie Carlier et Arnold I. Davidson* (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 2001), 168 and 54.

61. Eckhart, *In Ioh.*, n.185 (LW III, 154–55).

Word.”⁶² Accordingly, one should resist any account of the so-called “mysticism” of the middle ages, and in particular its Dionysian form as taken up by Meister Eckhart in which ignorance or unknowing (*agnôsia*) is posited as the ground of union (*henôsis*), as if it were describing “a personalized mental state.” *Agnôsia* and *henôsis* are rather “two attributes of God,” and mystical union is “the divine unknowability which settles itself in the soul, in place of that in her which is the principle of attachment [*saisie*].”⁶³ Therefore, the possibility of a *blessed life* for Eckhart is grounded in the non-reflexive knowledge and love of God that belongs to the just or noble soul, in whom the Son is born.⁶⁴

De Libera, implicitly responding to Hadot, has shown how the doctrine of the Incarnation, independently with Eckhart and Dante, is merged with the cosmology of the *Liber de causis*, giving rise to notions of a “nobility” (*edelkeit; nobilitate*) which they ground in nature rather than in a distinct social or professional class. In principle, a genuinely philosophical and theoretical way of life is made available to the laity, without forsaking the intellectual ideal of the Peripatetic tradition that in fact persisted in the universities. Eckhart, however, leaves behind the cosmological underpinnings employed in Dante, forming the notion of perfect “sufficiency” or “autarky,” considered by those in the Faculty of Arts to be only attainable for those who *live* with others according to what is highest in them, into “abandon” (*Gelassenheit*): when thought ceases to be an instrument of a self, it has become the pure Image or Word of the silence of the Father by “letting itself fall.”⁶⁵ Such a perspective, which both inhabits the Truth and continues on as a wayfarer—a union of philosophy and life—is at the heart of the *inquantum*, the primacy of which Eckhart recognizes as the exercise which comes to unify all things by differentiating them, knowing their essence which is intrinsically “without a why.”⁶⁶ The Aristotelian man which “thinks by means of his soul” gives way to “the thinking of the One.”⁶⁷

“A pure subjectivity in the presence of the infinite as the ground of speculation.” How much is contained in so few words! The fourteenth-century “turn” holds a unique place in Crouse’s historiography; the novelty of irreducible

62. Eckhart, *Pr.* 16b (DW I, 273).

63. A. de Libera, *Penser au Moyen Âge*, 301.

64. Eckhart, *Von dem edeln Menschen* (DW V, 116,20–119,23); cf. *In Ioh.*, n.679 (LW III, 594,1–2: *beatitudo non est in actu reflexo, quo scilicet homo beatus intelligit sive cognoscit se deum cognoscere*) and n.108 (LW III, 93,6–7).

65. A. de Libera, *Penser au Moyen Âge*, 344–47; idem, “On Some Philosophical Aspects of Master Eckhart’s Theology,” *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 45 (1998), 151–68, at 159–60.

66. Cf. Plotinus, *Ennead* VI.7.2, on the whylessness of the living, active forms in *Nous*.

67. A. de Libera, *Penser au Moyen Âge*, 346–47.

individuality appears amid the timelessness of history, where the recollection and forgetfulness of the heavenly friendship uniting God and human nature is always possible. We now have a sense that, in the case of Eckhart at least, any assumptions which *fix* him into the Hell of modernity obscure the Eastern Neoplatonic, Peripatetic and Christian traditions which stand behind him, from which he gathers the material for *Gelassenheit*—a philosophical way of life informed by theology. Eckhart endeavoured to make these traditions which were the heart of his scholastic training relevant to the illiterate and uneducated,⁶⁸ all for the purpose of the renewal of the mind through the instruction of faith, until it lives according to the nobility of “abandon”; this sets him in opposition to the autumntide within the Church he served, which had already assumed the rupture of philosophy and theology, or at least the subjection of one to the other, as we saw in the bull of John XXII. The primacy of the will over the philosophical life that it elects for itself in Hadot would be, then, an initial moment on the way *through* the obsession with experience that characterizes Hell for Crouse. *Gelassenheit*, in turn, founds itself on the active negation of one’s own will. While that active moment might simply make this way of life appear to us as one choice among others, it is in fact an *Aufhebung* of that active will altogether. Abandon cannot be reduced to Stoic *apatheia*; it is not wonder before the Whole, nor simply the sense of one’s own place within it as a part. The nobleman or “divine man” (*homo divinus*), the “lover of the divine form” who leaves off all “final and efficient causes,” finds each thing wholly open to the divine secret within it, for he regards them in common and uniformly like the One which is indistinctly present to them.⁶⁹ The noble soul, therefore, has wholly given itself over to the divine Person, and has become the simple thought of the One. The process to this end does not fall outside of it: the noble soul elevates each thing to its indistinct existence with God in the Word: “I said in Paris, at the University, that all things will be perfected in the just and humble man.”⁷⁰

The more the soul holds itself above earthly things, the stronger it is. Whoever knew but one creature would not need to ponder over any sermon, for every creature is full of God and is a book.⁷¹

68. Cf. Eckhart, *Buoch der göilichen troestunge* (DW V, 60,28–61,1).

69. Eckhart, *In Ioh.*, nn.336 and 338 (LW III, 284–87); *In Ioh.*, n.112 (LW III, 97,3–6), citing the *Liber de causis*, prop. 24; *Sermo IV/1*, n. 21 (LW IV, 22, 12): *quia deus, et per consequens homo divinus, non agit propter cur aut quare.*

70. Eckhart, *Pr.* 14 (DW I, 235,4–5).

71. Eckhart, *Pr.* 9 (DW I, 156,6–9).