

Unum necessarium: Meister Eckhart, the Ground and Theology in the Vernacular¹

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Our Lord said to Martha: "One thing is necessary" [Lk. 10:42], which is as much as to say: "Martha, whoever wants to be free of care and to be pure must have one thing, and that is detachment."²

Meister Eckhart died on January 28th 1328, while trial proceedings against him on the charges of heresy had not reached their conclusion.³ The trial, from all appearances instigated by two miscreants within the Dominican order and endorsed by a beleaguered archbishop, had been underway for over two years, eventually moving from Cologne to the papal court in Avignon. After several rounds of formal proceedings and responses to lists of articles extracted from his works, and after his own declaration of faith and obedience to the Church, the master died – by this time, he may have been almost 80 years old. In a rather exceptional move, the inquisitors resolved to complete the trial posthumously. Thus at last, over a year later, on March 27th 1329, Pope John XXII promulgated the bull, *In agro dominico*, condemning seventeen articles as heretical “as far as the words sound” – that is to say, out of context – and eleven others which are rather “very rash and

1. This paper was originally presented at the 37th Annual Atlantic Theological Conference, “God Everyday and Everywhere,” University of King’s College, Halifax, June 21-24, 2017. It is also published in the annual Report of these conferences.

2. Eckhart, *On Detachment [Von abegescheidenheit]* (DW V 401,8-10; EE 285). Abbreviations: DW / LW = Meister Eckhart, *Die deutschen und lateinischen Werke*, hrsg. im Auftrage der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1936ff.). The following translations are cited when available: EE = *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, trans. E. Colledge, B. McGinn (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1981); TP = *Teacher and Preacher*, trans. B. McGinn, F. Tobin (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986); W = *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*, trans. M. Walshe, rev. B. McGinn (New York: Herder & Herder, 2009).

3. On Meister Eckhart’s life, with bibliography, see W. Senner, “Meister Eckhart’s Life, Training, Career, and Trial,” ed. J. Hackett, *A Companion to Meister Eckhart* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 7-84.

suspect of heresy."⁴ In comparison with the tenor of the earlier stages of the trial, this was a milder verdict; Eckhart was nowhere condemned as a heretic.⁵ The beginning of the papal bull has direct relevance for our considerations:

We are indeed sad to report that in these days someone by the name of Eckhart from Germany, a doctor of sacred theology (as is said) and a professor of the order of Preachers, wished to know more than he should, and not in accordance with sobriety and the measure of faith, because he turned his ear from the truth and followed fables. [...] He sowed thorns and obstacles contrary to the very clear truth of faith in the field of the Church and worked to produce harmful thistles and poisonous thornbushes. He presented many things as dogma that were designed to cloud the true faith in the hearts of many, things which he put forth especially before the uneducated crowd in his sermons and that he also collected into his writings.⁶

The papal court formulated two general accusations in this final verdict. The first accusation was that Eckhart sought to know more than he should. In light of the list of condemned articles which follows, this included Eckhartian statements about the procession of the Word and the eternity of the world (art. 1-3), the relation of evil to God (art. 4-6), prayer (art. 7-9), union with God (art. 10-13), conformity to the divine will (art. 14-15), the insignificance of exterior acts compared to interior acts (art. 16-19), divine filiation (art. 20-22), divine Trinity and Unity (art. 23-25), and the nothingness of creatures (art. 26). After the first set of fifteen decidedly erroneous or heretical articles and the second set of eleven suspicious and evil-sounding articles, the

4. *Acta Echardiana*, n. 66 (LW V 604,114-605,120; EE 80).

5. W. Senner, "Meister Eckhart's Life," 78-80. Cf. *Acta Echardiana*, n. 66 (LW V 605,133-142).

6. *Acta Echardiana*, n.65 (LW V 597,7-17; EE 77, modified): *Sane dolenter referimus, quod quidam hiis temporibus de partibus Theutonie, Ekardus nomine, doctorque, ut fertur, sacre pagine ac professor ordinis fratrum Predicatorum, plura voluit sapere quam oportuit et non ad sobrietatem neque secundum mensuram fidei, quia a veritate auditum avertens ad fabulas se convertit. Per illum enim patrem mendacii, qui se frequenter in lucis angelum transfiguratur, ut obscuram et tetram caliginem sensuum pro lumine veritatis effundat, homo iste seductus contra lucidissimam veritatem fidei in agro ecclesie spinas et tribulos germinans ac nocivos carduos et venenosos palliuos producere satagens, dogmatizavit multa fidem veram in cordibus multorum obnubilantia, que docuit quam maxime coram vulgo simplici in suis predicationibus, que etiam redegit in scriptis.*

commission added two more to the first set, which arose from an objection circulating about the master's preaching: that there is something uncreated and uncreatable in the soul, and if the soul were wholly this, it would be uncreated and uncreatable, "and this is the intellect" (art. 27);⁷ and that the divine name "good" is purely equivocal (art. 28). Apart from these last two articles, Eckhart would have admitted to have spoken or written the other theses. Indeed, several doctrines are isolated in these lists which Eckhart himself places at the centre of his preaching,⁸ and which appear as characteristic themes in his subsequent reception and reputation.⁹ The second overall accusation follows from this: because he tried to know more than he should, he clouded the faith of many, particularly of the uneducated crowd, with his sermons. The papal document was, accordingly, intended to be published before those who have been exposed to Eckhart's teaching,¹⁰ principally but not exclusively in the archdioceses

7. This conflates two points made separately by Eckhart in a public declaration of faith professed before the trial moved from Cologne to Avignon (cf. Senner, "Meister Eckhart's Life," 67-71). Eckhart explicitly disavows the claim that there is "something" (*aliquid*) uncreated and uncreatable in the soul. However, he does not openly deny a related, hypothetical case: if the soul were wholly such a "something," it would be uncreated and uncreatable. In fact, he says, "I understand this to be true, and I understand it to be so even according to my colleagues the *doctores*, [that is] if the soul were essentially intellect" (*Acta Echariana*, n.54 [LW V 548,31-37]: *et quod aliquid sit in anima, si ipsa tota esset talis, ipsa esset increata, intellexi verum esse et intelligo etiam secundum doctores meos collegas, si anima esset intellectus essentialiter.*).

8. Cf. Eckhart, *Predigt* 53 (DW II 528,5-529,2; EE 203): "When I preach, I am accustomed to speak about detachment, and that a man should be free of himself and of all things; second, that man should be formed again into that simple good which is God; third, that he should reflect on the great nobility with which God has endowed his soul, so that in this way he may come to wonder at God; fourth, about the purity of the divine nature, for the brightness of the divine nature is beyond words. God is a word, a word unspoken." On these self-portrayals, see K. Flasch, *Meister Eckhart: Philosopher of Christianity*, trans. A. Schindel, A. Vanides (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 31-44.

9. For a survey of the later vernacular literature associated with Eckhart, see D. Gottschall, "Eckhart and the Vernacular Tradition: Pseudo-Eckhart and Eckhart Legends," ed. J. Hackett, *A Companion to Meister Eckhart* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 509-551.

10. *Acta Echariana*, n.66 (LW V 602,15-18): [...] *ut per publicationem huiusmodi simplicium corda, qui facilliter seducuntur, et maxime illi quibus idem Ekardus, dum*

and ecclesial province of Cologne,¹¹ so that it might be known that the master himself recanted these views – with the typical Eckhartian caveat remaining in the text: in respect to that meaning (*quantum ad illud sensum*) in which they could be misinterpreted.¹²

The same concerns were anticipated in a more general way at a Dominican chapter meeting in Toulouse convened in the months after Eckhart's death, though before the publication of the papal bull, in which the preachers were advised not to introduce subtleties in their sermons before the people lest they lead them into error.¹³ These remarks suggest that the reverberations of the trial proceedings were more widespread, and that the popularity of Eckhart's teaching may have been substantial. When Eckhart first addressed his inquisitors in the opening proceedings in Cologne, he seems to acknowledge this fact: "If I were less well known among the people and less eager for justice, I am sure that such attempts would not have been made against me by envious people."¹⁴

These two accusations and concerns in fact provide an accurate sketch of the distinctive character of Eckhart's pastoral project. As this paper aims to illustrate, they also can and should be understood from Eckhart's own standpoint. A most fruitful point of entry for understanding the nature of the divide that separates intention and reception on this question is offered by John Tauler, one of Eckhart's most ardent spiritual successors in the Dominican order.¹⁵ In a sermon preached on John 17:5, Tauler

vixit, predictos articulos predicavit, erroribus contentis in eis minime imbuantur.

11. On the question of the dissemination and influence of *In agro dominico*, see most recently S. Kikuchi, *From Eckhart to Ruusbroec: A Critical Inheritance of Mystical Themes in the Fourteenth Century* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014), 49-53.

12. *Acta Echardiana*, n.66 (LW V 605,133-142).

13. *Acta Echardiana*, n.63 (LW V 594,2-6): *Cum ex eo quod aliqui in predicacionibus ad populum conantur tractare quedam subtilia, que non solum ad mores non proficiunt, quinimo facilius ducunt populum in errorem, precipit magister ordinis [...] quod nullus de cetero presumat talia in suis sermonibus pertractare.*

14. *Acta Echardiana*, *Proc. Col. I*, n.77 (LW V 275,19-21; EE 71): [...] *si minoris essem famae in populo et minoris zeli iustitiae, certus sum quod contra me non essent talia ab aemulis attemptata.*

15. On Tauler and his relation to Eckhart, see B. McGinn, *The Harvest of*

described the interior prayer that works with Christ beyond images and particular forms, beyond oneself, in eternity and in the spirit.¹⁶ False understandings of this union frequently arise, according to Tauler, because the divine nature is such that it undergoes no accident or addition; and if the mind struggles to comprehend even a natural union, such as that of body and soul, how could it understand a spiritual union? For this is beyond time, creaturliness and multiplicity; here, one is at peace even amid disturbance, for one has sunk “into the ground” with loving desire, drawing all things into God, “just as they are eternally in him.”¹⁷ There was a time, Tauler recalled, “a beloved master” spoke of these things with us, “but you did not understand him – he spoke from eternity, but you understood him in time.”¹⁸ By placing the distinction of eternity and time at the centre of Eckhart’s preaching, Tauler’s remarks incidentally shed light on the rationale behind the theses singled out by the papal bull. If there is any pattern behind the arrangement of the articles, one might say that it traces the movement of God toward himself in eternity from the generation of the Word back into divine Unity, into which the human alone of all creation is taken up through Christ. Tauler has given us the key to making sense of both perspectives on Eckhart’s work in more adequate terms: the understanding that belongs to eternity and that which belongs to time.

Let us turn to Meister Eckhart’s own words. The same accusations and concerns raised in Avignon and Toulouse were anticipated by the master himself in his late work, the *Book of Divine Consolation*, written sometime between 1313 and 1323. Together with the sermon *On the Nobleman* which follows it, *Divine Consolation* is one half of the *Liber “Benedictus,”* a work of philosophical consolation

Mysticism in Medieval Germany (1300-1500) (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2005), 240-296.

16. Tauler, *Predigt 15*, ed. F. Vetter, *Die Predigten Taulers* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1910), 67,11-71,2.

17. *Ibid.* (Vetter 69,12-22).

18. *Ibid.* (Vetter 69,27-28): [...] *er sprach uss der ewikeit, und ir vernement es noch der zit.*

written in the vernacular.¹⁹ This work features prominently in the early stages of the trial in Cologne. The first articles brought against Eckhart are extracted from it. At the conclusion of this *Book*, Eckhart added the following remark, suggestive of an atmosphere leading to the formation of an inquisition:²⁰

I expect that many stupid people will say that much that I have written in this book and elsewhere is not true. To that I reply with what Saint Augustine says in the first book of his *Confessions*. He says that God has already made every single thing, everything that is still to come for thousands and thousands of years, if this world should last so long, and everything that is past during many thousands of years he will make again today. Is it my fault if people do not understand this? [*Conf.* I.6.10]. And he says in another place that a man's self-love is too blatant when he wants to blind other men so that his own blindness may be hidden [*Conf.* X.23.34]. It is enough for me that what I say and write be true in me and in God.²¹

These selections from Augustine were carefully chosen: those who are blind have become aggressive in their ignorance of the distinction of eternity and time. In God's eternal present, all things past and future are made in one today. Eckhart simply echoed Augustine's own concern for those who do not have proper regard for the character of eternity: "If anyone finds your simultaneity beyond his understanding, it is not for me to explain it."²² He then paraphrases a third text from Augustine to describe how a person's inner state gives rise to this misunderstanding:

19.Eckhart, *Liber "Benedictus"* (DW V 1-136; EE 209-247).

20.Perhaps Eckhart added this passage to the *Book* while preparing his response ("*Requisitus*") to the pamphlet published by Hermann of Summo (and William of Nideggen?) of allegedly heretical extracts from the *Book*, from which the Cologne trial sprang. On the pamphlets, see Senner, "Meister Eckhart's Life," 51-52. A similar hypothesis has been advanced by Eckhart Triebel, who notes the fragmentary state of the *Book* in several manuscripts [<http://www.eckhart.de/tbuch.htm#Dat> – accessed 3 June 2017].

21.Eckhart, *Liber "Benedictus"* (DW V 60,5-14; EE 238-239).

22.Cf. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. H. Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), I.6.10: "'But you are the same'; and all tomorrow and hereafter, and indeed all yesterday and further back, you will make a Today, you have made a Today. If anyone finds your simultaneity beyond his understanding, it is not for me to explain it. Let him be content to say 'What is this?' [Exod. 16:15]. So too let him rejoice and delight in finding you who are beyond discovery rather than fail to find you by supposing you to be discoverable."

Saint Augustine says: "Whoever without thought of any kind, or without any kind of bodily likeness and image, perceives within himself what no external vision has presented to him, he knows that this is true."²³ But the man who knows nothing of this will laugh at me and mock me, and I can only pity him. But people like this want to contemplate and taste eternal things and the works of God, and to stand in the light of eternity, and yet their hearts are still fluttering about yesterday and tomorrow.²⁴

The truth of which Eckhart speaks can only be fully understood within oneself, without recourse to image or likeness, without external vision. This knowing has its correlative in the will: the heart must be free of its preoccupations with yesterday and tomorrow. Then one stands in the light of eternity. As Eckhart preaches in a sermon from the same period, the soul hears the divine Word by becoming the divine Word:

Three things hinder us from hearing the eternal Word. The first is corporality, the second multiplicity, the third temporality. If a person had passed beyond these three things, he would live in eternity, in the spirit, in oneness, in the vast solitude; and there he would hear the eternal Word. Now our Lord says, "No one hears my words nor my teaching unless he has forsaken himself" [cf. Lk. 14:26]. Who would hear the Word of God must be totally detached. In the eternal Word, that which hears is the same as that which is heard.²⁵

According to Eckhart, one must become like the eternal truth in order to receive it, and this is the state of detachment.

Here we can look back on a striking claim made in one of Eckhart's earliest known texts, an academic sermon preached on the feast of Saint Augustine (28 August) in 1302 or 1303, during his first regency as master of theology in Paris.²⁶ The first part of this sermon outlines the nature of wisdom that Augustine exemplifies to an extraordinary degree. There Eckhart provides a preliminary division of the science of philosophy, which is heavily dependent on the 12th-century commentary on Boethius' *De Trinitate* by Clarembald of Arras.²⁷ Philosophy is divided firstly into its

23. This is likely a paraphrase of Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, XII.14.29.

24. Eckhart, *Liber "Benedictus"* (DW V 60,19-24; EE 239).

25. Eckhart, *Predigt 12* (DW I 193,1-8; TP 267).

26. Eckhart, *Sermo die b. Augustini Parisius habitus* (LW V 89-99).

27. On the Boethian background of the sermon, see A. Speer, *"Ethica sive*

theoretical, logical and ethical or practical branches. Eckhart's slight but significant innovation then follows when, in the subdivision of theoretical philosophy, he lists mathematics, physics, and "ethics or theology."²⁸ Each member of this subdivision is then described with Boethius' *De Trinitate*, concluding with the remark that "in theology it will be fitting to proceed intellectually, not to be diverted toward images, but rather to gaze upon that form which is truly form."²⁹ Thus, in addition to the more familiar notion of ethics as concerned with human action and what is capable of being otherwise, Eckhart describes the intellectual method of theology as a second kind of ethical philosophy. The content of this speculative ethics is then sketched in brief as Eckhart resumes his modification of Clarembald's commentary:

The ethicist or theologian more acutely gazes upon the ideas of things which are in the divine mind and which exist from eternity there in an intelligible mode before they go forth into bodies.³⁰

Eckhart returned to this Boethian understanding of theology in his defense in Cologne.³¹ Having addressed all the articles culled from the *Liber "Benedictus"* and his first commentary on Genesis, he dismissed the "determined malice" and "gross ignorance" of those who "attempt to measure divine, subtle and incorporeal things with material imagination, against what Boethius says in *De Trinitate*."

Returning to the conclusion of the *Book of Divine Consolation*, after the authority of Seneca corroborates Augustine's notions of wisdom, time and eternity, we find that Eckhart speaks directly to the issue of whether the unlearned ought to be instructed in such things:

theologia. Wissenschaftseinteilung und Philosophieverständnis bei Meister Eckhart," eds J. Aertsen, A. Speer, *Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter?* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1998), 683-693.

28. Eckhart, *Sermo die b. Augustini Parisius habitus*, n.2 (LW V 89,13-90,1): *Theoricam sive speculativam ulterius partiuntur in mathematicam, physicam et ethicam sive theologiam*.

29. Eckhart, *Sermo die b. Augustini Parisius habitus*, n.2 (LW V 90,2-4): *in divinis intellectuabiliter [sic] versari oportebit neque deduci ad imagines, sed potius respicere formam, quae vere forma est [...]. Cf. Boethius, De Trinitate, c.2.*

30. Eckhart, *Sermo die b. Augustini Parisius habitus*, n.2 (LW V 90,8-10): *Ethicus sive theologus ideas rerum, quae in mente divina, antequam prodirent in corpora, ab aeterno quo modo ibi intelligibiliter existerunt, subtilius intuetur.*

31. *Acta Echardiana, Proc. Col. I*, n.125 (LW V 293,1-9).

A pagan philosopher, Seneca, says: "We must speak about great and exalted matters with great and exalted understanding and with sublime souls" [*Ep.* 71.24]. And we shall be told that one ought not to talk about or write about such teachings to the untaught. But to this I say that if we are not to teach people who have not been taught, no one will ever be taught, and no one will ever be able to teach or write. For that is why we teach the untaught, so that they may be changed from uninstructed into instructed. If there were nothing new, nothing would ever grow old. Our Lord says: "Those who are healthy do not need medicine" [Lk. 5:31]. That is what the physician is there for, to make the sick healthy. But if there is someone who misunderstands what I say, what is that to the man who says truly that which is true? Saint John narrates his holy gospel for all believers and also for all unbelievers, so that they might believe, and yet he begins that gospel with the most exalted thoughts any man could utter here about God; and both what he says and what our Lord says are constantly misunderstood. May our loving and merciful God, who is Truth, grant to me and to all those who will read this book that we may find the truth within ourselves and come to know it. Amen.³²

Eckhart himself thus openly professed his intent to instruct the unlearned in the highest subtleties of divinity. Saint John is the exemplar of this approach, and Eckhart's final remarks imply that he placed himself in his lineage. In view of what has been said already, this instruction must amount to an inner transformation directing one to find the truth within themselves, and specifically in relation to the standpoint of eternity in which the Word is spoken. Saint John disclosed these "depths of the divine mysteries," Eckhart writes following Augustine, because "he drank in the Word who was in the Father's breast."³³ As we have read already from *Predigt* 12, "in the eternal Word, that which hears is the same as that which is heard," or from *Predigt* 29, "no one can receive the Holy Spirit unless he lives above time in eternity."³⁴

Whatever learning Eckhart had in mind, it is not what would require a person to seek a university degree in theology. While being one of the most highly-trained intellectuals of his day, and twice holding a chair in theology in Paris, Eckhart consistently maintained that the realisation of the perfect intellectual life was

32. Eckhart, *Liber "Benedictus"* (DW V 60,25-61,12; EE 239).

33. Eckhart, *Expositio sancti Evangelii secundum Iohannem [In Ioh.]*, n.1 (LW III 3,7-4,3; EE 122).

34. Eckhart, *Predigt* 29 (DW II 73,7; TP 287).

to be found outside the university.³⁵ He is reported to have said, "One master of life is better than a thousand masters of reading."³⁶ Similarly, in a sermon on Mary and Martha of Bethany, we read that "living gives the most valuable kind of knowledge."³⁷ Eckhart implies that the doctors of theology had everything to learn from a certain exemplar of the perfect life of knowledge. Along these lines, it is interesting to observe how Eckhart summarises his Parisian teaching to his German audiences: "I said in Paris at the university that all things are accomplished in the truly humble person."

Eckhart was clearly very pleased with this expression and recalled it, with minor alterations, in three sermons.³⁸ It is in these kinds of formulations that Eckhart transmitted the subtleties of divinity. In each case, Eckhart presented the *intelligibility* of this notion in the strongest possible terms by grounding it in a metaphysical necessity.³⁹ All things are accomplished in the humble because God by necessity must draw that person into himself:

The truly humble person does not have to beg God; he can order him. For the heights of the Godhead seek out nothing other than the depths of humility, as I said in the convent of the Maccabees [*Pr.* 15]. The humble person and God are one; the humble person has as much power with God as he has himself.⁴⁰

God by necessity descends into the humble person and is formed or born within them. This notion of a necessity imposed on God, as it were, is a dominant motif in Eckhart's thought, from beginning to end. He defended it against the commission

35. On Eckhart's relation to the professionalization of philosophy, see the relevant discussions in A. de Libera, *Penser au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 299-347; *Raison et foi* (Paris: Seuil, 2003), 334-343.

36. F. Pfeiffer, *Deutsche Mystiker des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts*, t.2: *Meister Eckhart* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1906), 599.

37. Eckhart, *Predigt* 86 (DW III 482,18-19; TP 338-339).

38. Eckhart, *Predigt* 14 (DW I 235,4-5; TP 273); *Predigt* 15 (DW I 247,4-6; EE 190); *Predigt* 24 (DW I 421,1-422,1; TP 286). Cf. *Acta Echariana*, n.37 (LW V 181).

39. Cf. L. Sturlese, "Meister Eckhart. Ein Porträt," *Homo divinus: philosophische Projekte in Deutschland zwischen Meister Eckhart und Heinrich Seuse* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007), 17-21.

40. Eckhart, *Predigt* 14 (DW I 235,5-11; TP 273). Cf. *Predigt* 15 (DW 246,9-248,1; EE 190).

of inquisitors in Cologne.⁴¹ Its first articulations can be found in his earliest and most popular German work, known as the *Discourses of Discernment* (*Rede der unterscheidung*), given in his home convent of Erfurt as its prior, sometime between 1294 and 1298. These *Discourses* begin by discussing obedience:

When a man in obedience goes out of himself and renounces what he possesses, God must necessarily respond by going in there, for if anyone does not want something for himself, God must want it as if for himself. If I deny my own will, putting it in the hands of my superior, and want nothing for myself, then God must want it for me, and if he fails me in this matter, he will be failing himself. [...] When I empty myself of self, he must necessarily want everything for me that he wants for himself, neither more nor less, and in the same manner as it wants it for himself. And if he were not to do this, by that truth which is God, he would not be just, nor would he be the God that it is his nature to be.⁴²

When the will goes out of itself or leaves itself, it is necessarily taken up into God's eternal self-relation. We shall consider other forms of this notion in later sermons, but it is worth observing how Eckhart tailors his instruction to a specific audience. The *Discourses* are Eckhart's evening talks (*collationes*) with his fellow friars and novices, though the sisters may also have attended.⁴³ This fundamental emphasis on obedience reflects the Dominican profession of vows. Dominicans make a public profession only of obedience and understand poverty and chastity to be included within it.⁴⁴

41. He defends the formulation from *Predigten* 14 and 15 at *Proc. Col.* I, n.135 (LW V 298,4-8), where he states that this "power over God" is rightly spoken when understood with reference to the humble who receive grace, "who want nothing other than what God wants." In *Proc. Col.* II, nn.29-30 (LW V 324,19-325,9), he indicates that these kinds of statements belong to the rhetorical category of *locutio emphatica*, on which see below.

42. Eckhart, *Rede*, c.1 (DW V 187,1-188,2; EE 247-248).

43. W. Senner, "Die *Rede der unterscheidung* als Dokument dominikanischer Spiritualität," eds A. Speer, L. Wegener, *Meister Eckhart in Erfurt* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), 109-121, at 113, 120.

44. W. Senner, "Die *Rede der unterscheidung*," 114-115.

He begins explaining the way to true obedience by focusing on the life of prayer. Our habitual relation to God is perhaps most evident in this part of our lives, where it becomes clear what we want God to be for us. To pray “Thy will be done” in true obedience, however, is not to ask God to grant this or that particular outcome or thing. Prayer must be “a pure going-out from what is yours,” an emptying of oneself:

The most powerful prayer, and almost the strongest of all to obtain everything, and the most honourable of all works, is that which proceeds from an empty spirit [*ledige gemüete*]. [...] What is an empty spirit? An empty spirit is one that is confused by nothing, attached to nothing, has not attached its best to any fixed way of acting, and has no concern whatever in anything for its own gain, for it is all sunk deep down into God’s dearest will and has forsaken its own.⁴⁵

Over against the instability of petitionary prayer, Eckhart presents a view of Lord’s Prayer which grounds it in necessity. If we go out of our will entirely, our will is necessarily fulfilled, for it has become God’s will. Too easily we make our relationship to God depend on a fixed way of acting, living in a certain place or according to a certain mode of life: “This is all about yourself, and nothing else at all.”⁴⁶ Our restlessness is only exacerbated by this kind of willing, for we are not addressing the root of the problem: “It is what you are in these things that causes the trouble.” Go to the root, and you have the beginning and the ending all at once; “make a start with yourself, and abandon yourself,” and then you have left everything.⁴⁷ According to Eckhart, when we endeavour to think this divine necessity, we must resist worrying about whether it is nature or grace that is at work.⁴⁸

45.Eckhart, *Rede*, c.2 (DW V 190,3-12; EE 248, modified). *Gemüete* is a notoriously difficult term to translate. Eckhart will use it to translate the Latin *mens*, but it has the added signification of a disposition.

46.Eckhart, *Rede*, c.3 (DW V 192,3; EE 249).

47.Eckhart, *Rede*, c.3 (DW V 193,1-3; EE 249).

48.Eckhart, *Rede*, c.23 (DW V 308,1-3; EE 285): “And so anyone is quite wrong who worries about the means through which God is working his works in you, whether it be nature or grace. Just let him work [*lâz in wûrken*], and just be at peace.”

Eckhart's reference to the mind or spirit as "empty" should be understood in relation to the word *eigenschaft*, which can be translated as property, attribute or "possessiveness."⁴⁹ The spirit is empty to the extent that it does not have any property, anything of its own, but has purely gone out of itself to God.⁵⁰ This way of speaking is prone to misunderstanding. An empty mind is not achieved by idleness. Eckhart regularly speaks in terms of a strenuous journey out of oneself,⁵¹ which never reaches an end in time.⁵² Alongside the necessary fullness of God's presence in every act of self-denial and of the abnegation of the will, there is an on-going growth in holiness. Temporality must become constantly directed to the eternal present. To pray with an empty spirit, we must put "our two eyes and ears, mouth, heart and all our senses to work [...] until we find that we wish to be one with him who is present to us."⁵³

If one becomes too fixated on particular practices to establish a constant disposition towards God, even these efforts can become hindrances. This point is made in chapter 6 of the *Discourses*, where Eckhart coins the term detachment (*abegescheidenheit*) or separatedness, which is a kind of accompaniment to the language of "abandonment" and "letting go" (*gelâzenheit*) used up to this point.⁵⁴ As soon as he introduces the notion, he addresses a question from his listeners and clarifies that detachment is not equivalent to an outward withdrawal into cloistered seclusion:

49.Eckhart, *Rede*, c.10 (DW V 218,9-11; EE 257, modified): "The will is complete and just when it is without any possessiveness [*eigenschaft*], and when it has gone out of itself itself, and has been formed and shaped into God's will."

50.Cf. Eckhart, *Predigt* 29 (DW II 80,1-3; TP 288): "The person who has abandoned himself and all things, who seeks nothing for himself in things and performs all his works without a why and out of love, such a person is dead to the whole world and lives in God and God in him."

51.The self who journeys is the "nobleman," the "inner man" in whom Christ is always present. See Eckhart, *Liber "Benedictus," On the Nobleman* (DW V 109-119; EE 240-247).

52.Eckhart, *Rede*, c.4 (DW V 196,7-8; EE 250): "You should know that there was never any man in this life who forsook himself so much that he could not still find more in himself to forsake."

53.Eckhart, *Rede*, c.2 (DW V 191,1-4; EE 249).

54.Eckhart, *Rede*, c.21 (DW V 283,8; EE 277) presents the terms as a pair.

Whoever really and truly has God has him everywhere, in the street and in company with everyone, just as much as in church or in solitary places or in his cell. [...] That man carries God in his every work and in every place, and it is God alone who performs all the man's works. For whoever causes the work, to him it belongs more properly and truly than it does to the one who performs it. Then let our intention be purely and only for God, and then truly he must perform all our works, and no person, no crowds, no places can hinder him in all his works.⁵⁵

The point is not to obliterate all value in things; praying is still better than weaving and being in church is better than being on the street. One must rather take the intention toward God which one has in church and "keep the same disposition" (*gemüete*) in the uproar of the street. In other words, one should not attempt to contemplate God "in an unchanging manner," for that not only is impossible according to our nature, but it is "not the best thing either."⁵⁶ Instead, one should form within oneself a God who is present, not a God that is the figment of our unstable thoughts.

The man who has God essentially present to him grasps God divinely, and to him God shines in all things; for everything tastes to him of God and God forms himself for the man out of all things.⁵⁷

Eckhart compares this to being thirsty, which occupies a person no matter where they are and what they are doing. So too, detachment is constantly increasing in love for God. But unlike thirst, in detachment the privation itself can be turned into possession of its end. For Aristotle, in the highest activities of living being, the end is always complete at every moment of its activity. Eckhart presents detachment instead as a full reflection of divine life. As he says, "The same knowledge in which God knows himself is the knowledge of every detached spirit and nothing else."⁵⁸ The detached person, accordingly, "does not seek rest, because no unrest hinders him":

Such a man finds far greater merit with God because he grasps everything as divine and greater than things in themselves are. Truly, to this belong zeal and love and a clear apprehension of his own inwardness, and a lively, true, prudent and real knowledge of what his disposition [*gemüete*] is concerned with amid things and persons.

55.Eckhart, *Rede*, c.6 (DW V 201,5-9; EE 251-252).

56.Eckhart, *Rede*, c.6 (DW V 205,2-9; EE 252-253).

57.Eckhart, *Rede*, c.6 (DW V 205,10-12; EE 253).

58.Eckhart, *Predigt* 10 (DW I 162,2-4; TP 261).

A man cannot learn this by running away, by shunning things and shutting himself up in an external solitude; but he must practice an inner solitude [*ein innerlich einoede lernen*], wherever and with whomever he is. He must learn to break through things and to grasp his God in them and to form him in himself powerfully in an essential manner.⁵⁹

God is essentially present to one who has abandoned even his consolations. One of the exemplars of this standpoint for Eckhart is Saint Paul: "For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren" (Rom. 9:3, RSV). According to Eckhart, these are the words of a perfect heart.⁶⁰ His German translations often contain modifications which are instructive for his view about the disposition of detachment: "to be eternally separated from God for my friend's sake and for God," or "to be separated from God, for the love of God, by the will of God, and to the glory of God."⁶¹ This relation to God is immediate, infinite and non-instrumental:

The noblest and the ultimate thing a person can forsake is that he forsakes God for God's sake. Now Saint Paul forsook God for God's sake; he left everything that he was able to take from God and left everything that God was able to give him and everything that he was able to receive from God. When he had left all this, he left God for God's sake, and there remained for him God as God exists in himself, not as one might receive something of him or as one might attain something of him; rather, as in the isness [*istikeit*] that he is in himself.⁶² He never gave God anything nor did he ever receive anything from God. It is a oneness and a pure union. In this state a person is a true human being, and such a man experiences no suffering, just as the divine being cannot experience it.⁶³

As these final lines affirm, for Eckhart this union cannot amount to a dissolution or annihilation of the human, it is rather the perfection and truth of the human being. Somehow it must

59. Eckhart, *Rede*, c.6 (DW V 207,1-9; EE 253, modified).

60. Eckhart, *Liber "Benedictus"* (DW V 40,7-14; EE 226).

61. Eckhart, *Predigt 12* (DW I 195,14-15; TP 268) and *Liber "Benedictus"* (DW V 20,19-21,14; EE 216). Cf. *Rede*, c.10 (DW V 222,1-224,6; EE 258-259).

62. On *istikeit* in Eckhart and its intrinsic connection with divine reflexivity, see A. Beccarisi, "Philosophische Neologismen zwischen Latein und Volkssprache: 'istic' und 'istische' bei Meister Eckhart," *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales* 70 (2003), 97-126.

63. Eckhart, *Predigt 12* (DW I 195,14-197,8; TP 268-269).

be the case, as the *Discourses* state, that if a person intends God alone, God becomes the principle of their actions and “forms himself” for them “out of all things.” Yet, at the same time, this must be intrinsic to the person, who finds “merit with God” because they grasp “everything as divine and greater than the things in themselves are,” breaking through them, back to God. Resuming with *Predigt* 12, we find Eckhart immediately speaking of “something in the soul” that is so closely related to God that it is “one and not just united,” and that “if a person were completely like this, he would be completely uncreated and uncreateable.”⁶⁴ This “something,” ambiguously intellect, unity and union all at once, must be the truth of both perspectives.

This is a good moment to make a short foray into the role of the metaphor of the ground (*grund/grunt*) in Meister Eckhart. In the *Discourses* we have the first use of the term in his writings, though a relatively innocuous one. Just before introducing the notion of detachment, he writes: “A man’s being and ground – from which his works derive their goodness – is good when his intention [*gemüete*] is wholly directed to God.”⁶⁵

The only other significant appearance of the term in the *Discourses* refers to God being “hidden in the soul’s ground.”⁶⁶ In light of what we have read in the talks so far, it seems all the pieces are there for Eckhart’s strong use of the term in his later sermons. God is there in the ground, willing and knowing himself hiddenly through the humble and detached soul. But, more than this, God is not present simply extrinsically; God must give himself as the soul’s own:

Whoever wants to receive everything must also renounce everything. That is a fair bargain and an equal return, as I said a while ago. Therefore, because God wants to give us himself and all things as our own free possessions [*einem vrien eigene*], so he wants to deprive us, utterly and completely of all possessiveness [*eigenschaft*].⁶⁷

64. Eckhart, *Predigt* 12 (DW I 197,8-198,2; TP 269), cf. note 7, above.

65. Eckhart, *Rede*, c.5 (DW V 199,2-4; EE 251).

66. Eckhart, *Rede*, c.10 (DW V 219,6-8; EE 258).

67. Eckhart, *Rede*, c.23 (DW V 295,2-5; EE 281). Cf. *Rede*, c.4 (DW V 197,1-3; EE 250): “This is indeed a fair exchange and an honest deal: By as much as you go out in forsaking all things, by so much, neither less nor more, does God go in,

God is the metaphysical principle of good action and, at the same time, it is meritorious for a person to break through things and elevate them to their status in the divine mind. If these acts are meritorious, they must arise from within the soul:

If God is to make anything in you or with you, you must first have become nothing. Hence go into your own ground and work there, and the works that you work there will all be living. [...] If it happens that anything from without moves you to work, the works are really all dead. And if it happens that God moves you from without to work, these works are all dead. If your works are to live, God must move you from within, in the innermost of the soul, if they really are to live.⁶⁸

Here is a typical example, where “innermost source” is once again clearly synonymous for the ground:

The Father gives his Son birth in the soul in the same way as he gives him birth in eternity, and not otherwise. He must do it whether he likes it or not. The Father gives birth to his Son without ceasing; and I say more: He gives me birth, me, his Son and the same Son. I say more: He gives birth not only to me, his Son, but gives birth to me as himself and himself as me and to me as his being and nature. In the innermost source, there I spring out in the Holy Spirit, where there is one life and one being and one work.⁶⁹

The vocabulary of the ground is a central feature particularly of Eckhart’s sermons. It does not, of course, feature in his Latin writings or, apart from the *Discourses*, in his German treatises. However, in a set of four sermons on the Nativity and Epiphany, likely delivered between 1298 and 1305, the word appears 33 times.⁷⁰ There the emphasis falls on the identity of the birth of the eternal Word from the Father with the birth of the Son in the soul, where it is often deliberately ambiguous whether Eckhart is speaking of God’s ground or the soul’s ground.⁷¹ The ground is the “place,” so to speak, of this birth. It is the realm of immediacy,

with all that is his, as you entirely forsake everything that is yours.”

68. Eckhart, *Predigt* 39 (DW II 256,2-5; TP 297). Cf. *Predigt* 14 (DW I 237,9-12; TP 273): “You shall be united of yourself into yourself so that he is within you. Not that we take something from that which is above us; we must take into ourselves and take from ourselves into ourselves.”

69. Eckhart, *Predigt* 6 (DW I 109,7-11; EE 187).

70. B. McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart: The Man from Whom God Hid Nothing* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2001), 54.

71. B. McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 37-38.

into which no images, no powers, can look.⁷² Our lives in time must become totally adjusted to pursuing the glimmers of light that radiate outward from this interior.⁷³ We become aware of this birth when all things speak to the soul of God, all things turn to face the birth, to face their interiority within the soul.⁷⁴

The ground is therefore the possibility of an “ours” that is at once human and divine.⁷⁵ Accordingly, the ground features prominently in Eckhart’s reflections on human nature in general – what has been made in the image of God and what has been assumed by Christ – when he says that we should strive to rid ourselves of all distinction and possessiveness in us by which we separate ourselves by this common human nature.⁷⁶ The *grund* is the simple One that remains when the human and the divine go out of themselves into one another.⁷⁷

The ground is not something that can be defined. It is better thought of as a technique, used almost exclusively in the context of preaching to achieve a transformative effect, a momentary

72.Eckhart, *Predigt* 101 (DW IV 335,2-353,106; W 30-33).

73.Eckhart, *Predigt* 101 (DW IV 354,107-367,225; W 33-37); *Predigt* 103 (DW IV 488,126-489,140; W 59).

74.Cf. Eckhart, *Predigt* 4 (DW I 66,5-8; TP 249): “It lives actually in the innermost of the soul. There all things are present to you, are living within and seeking, and are in their best and highest. Why do you not notice any of this? Because you are not at home there.”

75.Eckhart, *Predigt* 5b (DW I 90,6-9; EE 183): “As truly as the Father in his simple nature gives his Son birth naturally, so truly does he give him birth in the most inward part of the spirit, and that is the inner world. Here God’s ground is my ground, and my ground is God’s ground. Here I live from what is my own, as God lives from what is his own.”

76.Cf. Eckhart, *Predigt* 24 (DW I 414-423; TP 284-286); *Predigt* 5b (DW I 87,6-8; EE 182): “Where the Father gives birth to his Son in the innermost ground, there this [human] nature is suspended. This nature is one and simple. Something may well look forth from it and somehow depend on it, but that is not this, which is one.” See also the discussion of the thesis in *Proc. Col.* II, n.65 (LW V 333).

77.Eckhart, *Predigt* 5b (DW I 93,6-94,1; EE 184): “Go completely out of yourself for God’s love, and God comes completely out of himself for love of you. And when these two have gone out, what remains there is a simplified One [*ein einvaltigez ein*]. In this One the Father brings his Son to birth in the innermost source. Then the Holy Spirit blossoms forth [...].”

glimpse of the eternal, a new mode of knowing.⁷⁸ Some of Eckhart's own reflections about his rhetorical strategies are instructive here. When defending the proposition once spoken in the schools in Paris about the unity of the humble person and God, and the ability of the former to "command" the latter who responds "by necessity," Eckhart declares the statement to be "true, moral and devout." He cites it as an instance of the rhetorical technique of "emphatic utterance" (*locutio emphatica*) which, he says, is used regularly by "Scripture, the saints and preachers."⁷⁹ His definition of an emphatic utterance appears relative to another article defended only shortly before this:

Whoever seeks or aims at something is seeking and aiming at nothing, and he who prays for something will get nothing. But he who seeks nothing and aims at nothing but God alone, to him God will reveal and give everything He has concealed in His divine heart, so that it becomes his own just as it is God's own, neither less nor more, provided his aim is God alone, without means.⁸⁰

That everything in God will become the soul's own just as it is God's own brings us very close to the ambiguity present already in the *Discourses*.⁸¹ This sense of God belonging to the "divine human" (*homo divinus*), Eckhart claims, is an emphatic utterance

78.B. McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 38: "While explosive metaphors such as *grunt* are based on and embrace deep philosophical and theological speculation, their function is both theoretical and practical, or better, pragmatic: they are meant to transform, or overturn, ordinary limited forms of consciousness through the process of making the inner meaning of the metaphor one's own in everyday life."

79. *Acta Echardiana*, *Proc. Col. II*, nn.29-30 (LW V 324,19-325,9). For a more complete analysis of these passages, with bibliography, see L. Sturlese, "Introduzione," in Meister Eckhart, *Le 64 prediche sul tempo liturgico* (Milan: Bompiani, 2014), xxxvi-xlv.

80. Eckhart, *Predigt 11* (DW I 187,1-7; W 350); *Proc. Col. II*, n.23 (LW V 323,13-19).

81. Eckhart, *Rede*, c.23 (DW V 298,1-10; EE 282): "If we strip ourselves of everything that is external, in return God wishes to give us as our own everything that is in heaven, and heaven itself with all its powers, yes, everything that ever flowed out from him and all the angels and saints possess, that it may be our own as much as it is theirs, and more our own than any external thing can be. In return for my going out of myself for love of him, God will wholly become my own, with all that he is and all that he can bestow, as much my own as his own, neither less nor more [...]. Nothing was ever owned so much as God will be my own, with everything he can do and is."

comparable to the “*deus meus*” of Psalm 62[63]:2, “God, my God, to you I look from the break of day.” The explanation follows:

God’s works in us will not be ours unless God is ours in us. For no activity is ours, unless the principle of activity is ours and is in us. And it is said in Isaiah, “Thou hast wrought for us all our works” [Is. 26:12]. “Ours,” he says, and “for us.”⁸²

Along with these two passages, there is a third mention of emphatic utterance relative to the passage from *Predigt* 6, cited above, on the Father giving birth to the Son in the soul in the same way he does in eternity, by necessity (“he must do it”).⁸³

This is also an emphatic utterance, entrusting goodness and love to God, who is himself entirely and essentially good. This goodness does not allow him to be sterile, as Dionysius says. Because of this, he gives himself and everything he has, as it is said: “with him he gave us all things” [Rom. 8:32], provided that we would be prepared to receive it; [and] Revelation 3, “I stand at the door and knock” [3:20],⁸⁴ and Isaiah 30: “the Lord waits, that he may have mercy upon you” [30:18]. Giving, for God, is essential and *per se*, as it is said: “the First is rich through itself.”⁸⁵

82. *Acta Echardiana*, Proc. Col. II, n.24 (LW V 324,1-4): *Alioquin non essent opera dei in nobis nostra, nisi deus noster in nobis esset. Nulla enim operatio nostra est, nisi principium operationis nostrum sit, in nobis sit. Nunc autem Is. dicitur: ‘omnia opera nostra nobis operatus es’. ‘Nostra’ ait et ‘nobis’.*

83. *Acta Echardiana*, Proc. Col. II, nn.95-97 (LW V 340,25-341,10), see note 69, above.

84. Eckhart, *Rede*, c.17 (DW V 249,9-250,5; EE 266): “No man ought ever under any circumstances to think himself far away from God, not because of his sins or his weakness or anything else. [...] For a man does himself great harm in considering that God is far away from him; wherever a man may go, far or near, God never goes far off. He is always close at hand, and even if he cannot remain under your roof, still he goes no further away than outside the door, where he stands.” Cf. *Predigt* 14 (DW I 239,10-240,3; TP 274): “A person can turn away from God; but no matter how far a person goes from God, God stands there on the lookout for him and runs out to meet him unawares. If you want God to be your own, you should be his own just as my tongue or my hand [is my own], so that I can do with him what I will.”

85. *Acta Echardiana*, Proc. Col. II, n.97 (LW V 341,3-10): *Est tamen locutio emphatica, commendans dei bonitatem et amorem, qui se toto bonus est per essentiam, quae bonitas non sinit ipsum sine germine esse, ut dicit Dionysius. Propter quod et se ipsum dat et omne quod habet, secundum illud: ‘cum illo omnia nobis donavit’, Rom. 8, dummodo nos simus apti recipere, Apoc. 3: ‘ego sto ad ostium et pulso’, et Is. 30: ‘expectat dominus, ut misereatur vestri’. Ipsi enim dare est per essentiam et per se, secundum illud: primum est dives per se’. Citing Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus* 4.13; *Liber de causis*, prop. 21.*

Emphatic utterances are meant to exhort and arouse the soul toward a greater love of virtue and of God, to desire the perfection that seems so lofty and yet is always immediately at hand. Yet they are not purely affective.⁸⁶ According to Eckhart, these theses can and, in some cases, should be explained using natural philosophical arguments.⁸⁷ Although in principle it is available to reason, it does not befall everyone to understand this but only to believe it.⁸⁸ For the novices attending the evening *Discourses*, it might be important to ask why an empty spirit draws God into itself. To answer this, Eckhart would need to explain the nature of the spirit (*gemüete*) which the *Discourses* presuppose. And yet he avoids teaching natural philosophy to the novices before they have been formed in the life of prayer. In a sense, all of the essential points are there already.⁸⁹ At that particular moment, he is preparing friars who, one day, may study Aristotle's *De anima* and there learn about the nature of intellect.⁹⁰ There they will

86.L. Sturlese, "Introduzione," xxxix-xli.

87.Eckhart, *In Ioh.*, n.2 (LW III 4,4-9; EE 122-123): "In interpreting this Word and everything else that follows my intention is the same as in all my works – to explain what the holy Christian faith and the two Testaments maintain through the help of the natural arguments of the philosophers;" *Liber "Benedictus"* (DW V 11,20-22; EE 211): "From all this teaching, which is written in the holy gospel and is recognized with certainty in the natural light of the rational soul, we find true consolation in all our sufferings."

88.Eckhart, *Predigt* 39 (DW II 252,4-253,3, 262,4-6; TP 296, 298): "In every virtue of the just man God is born, and he is filled with joy by every virtue of the just man. But not just by every virtue, rather, by every work of the just man, however small it may be, if it is performed by the just man in justice, it fills God with joy. He is delighted through and through because nothing remains in his ground that is not animated by joy. This fact is for the less discerning to believe and for the enlightened to know. [...] Thus a man who is above time in eternity works together with God whatever God worked a thousand years ago or a thousand years hence. And this is for wise people to know and for the less wise to believe."

89.Eckhart, *Predigt* 101 (DW IV 336,6-7, 342,33-34; W 29): "We shall therefore speak of this birth, of how it may take place in us and be consummated in the virtuous soul, whenever God the Father speaks his eternal Word in the perfect soul. [...] In what I am about to say I shall make use of natural proofs, so that you yourselves can grasp that it is so, for though I put more faith in the scriptures than in myself, yet it is easier and better for you to learn by means of arguments that can be verified."

90.See the comments in Meister Eckhart, *Discours du discernement*, trad. A.-J.

read that the intellect has “nothing in common with anything” and thus can become all things. Intellect is ground-like in its capacity to make its own something that remains indistinct and common.⁹¹ This indistinction makes the intellect akin to God and capable of receiving him.⁹² It can do this only by emptying itself of determinate creaturely images.⁹³ Then it receives the perfections and attributes of God, always depending on God, to be sure, but also receiving them as its own and from its own inwardness. The ground is the dynamic unity of this intellectual life. To think the nature of this intellect, one must leave behind the familiar categories of the external world, of the this and the that,⁹⁴ and it is clear from Eckhart’s remarks about his critics in the *Liber “Benedictus”* and elsewhere in his *Commentary on John* that he was aware of the inherent difficulty of this task.⁹⁵ In his emphatic statements of divine necessity and the innermost ground, Eckhart is thus aiming for an affective and transformative effect, a new

Festugière (Orbey: Arfuyen, 2003), 25-27.

91. Eckhart, *Predigt* 76 (DW III 319,2-320,1; TP 328): “In the kingdom of heaven all is in all, all is one, and all is ours. [...] [W]hatever one person has the other has it, too, but not as *from* the other or *in* the other but as in oneself in such a way that the grace in one person is just as completely in the other person as his own grace is in him. This is the way that spirit is in spirit.”

92. Eckhart, *In Ioh.*, n.318 (LW III 265,4-266,2), which relates *homo* to both humility and intellect, as does *Liber “Benedictus,” On the Nobleman* (DW V 115,20-116,7). For an important reflection on the relationship between human and divine intellect, see *Liber “Benedictus”* (DW V 11,5-13; EE 211): “By ‘the will of man’ [John 1:13] Saint John means the highest powers of the soul, whose nature and works are unmixed with the flesh, residing in the soul’s purity, separated [*abegescheiden*] from time and place and all that, which have nothing in common with anything, and in which man is formed after God’s image, in which man is one of God’s family and of his kin. And yet, because these powers are not themselves God, and are created in the soul and with the soul, they must lose their own image, and be transformed above themselves into the image of God alone, and be born in God and from God.”

93. Key texts are *In Ioh.*, nn.14-39 (LW III 13,1-33,9; EE 126-135) and *Sermo XLIX.2-3*, nn.509-512 (LW IV 424,1-428,4; TP 236-237).

94. See for example K. Flasch, *Meister Eckhart: Philosopher of Christianity*, 88-99, 148-151, 178-182, 210-214, 276-279.

95. Eckhart, *In Ioh.*, n.514 (LW III 445,12-14): *Aliter autem loquendum est omnino de rerum rationibus et cognitione ipsarum, aliter de rebus extra in natura, sicut etiam aliter loquendum est de substantia et aliter de accidente. Quod non considerantes frequenter incidunt in errorem.*

way of relating to the dignity that belongs to the soul as an image of God and to God's abiding presence. But it is also a statement that can be understood through the metaphysics of the image of God, which itself entirely belongs in the domain of the speculative ethics announced in another early sermon on Saint Augustine.⁹⁶

Eckhart and his inquisitors recognise that subtleties preached to the unlearned are at the centre of his project. We have a sense now how these are a mixture of discursivity and non-discursivity. As Eckhart's conclusion to the *Book of Divine Consolation* suggests, this is above all the right understanding of eternity and time.⁹⁷ When Eckhart encourages preachers to use arguments from natural philosophy (to illustrate, for example, the birth of the eternal Word), often these involve simple examples like wood and fire, as a sign of a generation or birth occurring in a timeless instant. Similarly, in another case, after reflecting on how the interior work of the spirit that intends God is like God "whom neither time nor place confine," he states amusingly, "of this teaching we have a clear example in stones."⁹⁸ Emphatic statements about obedience, humility, detachment and the ground operate on another level. Eckhart regularly says, almost tauntingly, that one must be like the truth he is speaking to understand it. Philosophy begins with wonder. These non-discursive statements, though capable of rational explication, are lures to draw his hearers into a godly life.⁹⁹ But the path remains profoundly simple:

96.Eckhart, *Predigt* 16b (DW I 270,6-271,2; TP 277): "I am not just talking about things that one should discuss at the university. One can certainly discuss them for instruction from the pulpit as well. [...] You often ask how you should live. Now please pay careful attention to this. In the same way as I have spoken about image, so you should live."

97.Cf. Eckhart, *Liber "Benedictus"* (DW V 43,7-14; EE 228): "And this is what I always complain about, that crude men, empty of the Spirit of God and not possessing it, want to judge according to their crude human understanding what they hear or read in holy scripture, which was spoken and written by and in the Holy Spirit, and that they forget what was written: That what is impossible to man is possible to God (Mt. 19:26). That is also true in common things and in the natural order: What is impossible to our lower nature is commonplace and natural to our higher nature."

98.Eckhart, *Liber "Benedictus"* (DW V 39,1; EE 225).

99.Eckhart, *Predigt* 52 (DW II 487,5-7; EE 199): "Now I beg you to be disposed

The person who has abandoned himself and all things, who seeks nothing for himself in things and performs all his works without a why and out of love, such a person is dead to the whole world and lives in God and God in him. Now some people say, "These are beautiful words you are speaking, but we don't notice any of it [taking place]." This is my complaint, too. This way of being is so noble and yet so common that you do not have to spend a nickel or a penny on it. Just keep your intention proper and your will free, and you have it.¹⁰⁰

to what I say; for I say to you in everlasting truth that if you are unlike this truth of which we want to speak, you cannot understand me." Cf. *Parab. Gen.*, n.149 (LW I 618,4-619,5; EE 114).

100. Eckhart, *Predigt* 29 (DW II 80,1-81,1; TP 288-289). Cf. *Predigt* 66 (DW III 113,8-114,3, 118,13-119,5; W 301, 303).