

# Doing and Seeing in Meister Eckhart and Michel Henry<sup>1</sup>

*Peter Bullerwell*

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

Though placing medieval thinkers, whose enterprise is generally one of concordance, in one camp or another is generally a risky business, calling Meister Eckhart a practitioner of the “inner way” would probably cause little offense among the German Dominican’s readers. Such teachings as the uncreated ground of the soul—which is also the ground of God—and the non-existence of the creature describe a union between Man and God which is established prior to man’s activity in time and space. In Eckhart’s more instructive writings he preaches an ethic of detachment (*abgescheidenheit*, *gelâzenheit*), a state in which one wants nothing, knows nothing and has nothing, as a means towards a deeper mode of this union. Thus, on a preliminary reading of Eckhart’s most characteristic doctrines, one might suspect Eckhart of promoting “quietism.” However, this would be a great error. A withdrawal from the world is certainly not what Eckhart had in mind, as plainly is evident in a number of places in the Eckhartian corpus. Perhaps the most famous of these is the difficult eighty-sixth German sermon<sup>2</sup> (hereafter referred to as Pr.86), taken from the gospel story of Jesus’ visit with Mary and Martha. Traditionally this narrative has been used to illustrate the superiority of the contemplative life, or *theoria*, represented by Mary, over the active life, or *praxis*, represented by Martha. In this sermon, however, Eckhart inverts the standard reading of the story. Here he interprets Christ’s words not to be chastising Martha but comforting her with the assurance that Mary will one day become like her. In other words, according to Eckhart, Jesus considers Martha to have chosen the better part, though he does not say so literally.

1. I am grateful to Dr. Wayne Hankey, the members of his 2010–11 Neoplatonism seminar at Dalhousie University, and an audience at the 2011 meeting of the Canadian Association of Classics in Halifax for their helpful criticisms of this paper.

2. I am following the numbering of Eckhart’s sermons in *Meister Eckhart: Die deutschen und lateinischen Werke*. Herausgegeben im Auftrage der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft (Stuttgart and Berlin: Kohlhammer, 1936– ) as it is the one used in Bernard McGinn’s editions from which I shall be quoting. Sermon 86 corresponds to pages 481–92 in *DW* III.

This sermon is widely anthologized and is referred to in introductions and overviews as an example of an unexpected and important practical element in Eckhart's ethics, as we have just done. Though the eccentricity of Pr.86 is rarely ignored, it is equally rarely dealt with sufficiently. Most often Pr.86 is pointed to to demonstrate the "compatibility" of practical activity and Eckhart's detachment or else it is considered to teach that one's interior life should overflow or blossom into good works.<sup>3</sup> According to these interpretations, an active life is either compatible with one's union with God or, at best, the natural consequence of it. To the mind of the present author these interpretations of the sermon, while not striking a false note, do not account for all of what we find in Pr.86. For example, Eckhart explicitly states, "One kind [of means] (without which I cannot come to God) is work and activity in time."<sup>4</sup> To complicate matters further, it is not altogether clear whether Pr.86 is in fact a genuine work of German preacher.<sup>5</sup> Though my intention here is not to prove that Pr.86 comes, beyond a doubt, from Eckhart's hand, I hope to show that its fundamental teaching stems from well-known Eckhartian doctrines.

In the present paper I will attempt to work out in a more detailed manner the precise relationship between the immediacy of union and the necessity of practical activity in the Meister's thought. For this task I have chosen to rely heavily on the aid of a thinker who is separated from Eckhart by several centuries. The twentieth-century French philosopher Michel Henry, like Eckhart, holds together a radically inward anthropology with an ethic of activity, and he makes no secret of the fact that Eckhart's insights allow him to do so. At the heart of Henry's philosophy of Christianity in his book *I Am the Truth* is Eckhart's definition of man as the Son of God. Here Henry quotes and expounds Eckhart from his sixth German sermon: "[God] gives birth to me as himself and himself as me."<sup>6</sup> Henry considers this bewildering statement from Eckhart's sermon to express one of the central ideas of his phenomenology of life: the so-called "self-affection" of the individual self. This notion that "what affects me is no longer anything foreign or external

3. These two interpretations are suggested, for example, by John Caputo in "Fundamental Themes in Meister Eckhart's Mysticism," *The Thomist* 42 (1978): 197–225 and *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1978).

4. *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher*, ed. Bernard McGinn, trans. Frank Tobin (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 340. Hereafter I will refer to this volume as *TP*.

5. See, for example, Günter Stachel, "Stammt Predigt 86 'Intravit Jesus in quoddam castellum' von Meister Eckhart?" *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 125.4 (1996): 392–403.

6. *Meister Eckhart: the Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises and Defence*, ed. Bernard McGinn, trans. Edmund Colledge (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 187. Hereafter I will refer to this volume as *EE*.

to me who am affected"<sup>7</sup> is key to Henry's discussion of activity and its role in an individual's salvation. Thus, I hope to illuminate an aspect of Eckhart's thought that remains largely obscure by reading his influence on Henry, who has dealt with the issue in greater detail, back into the Meister's German sermons. The first half of this paper will deal with Man's condition as Son of God, and the second half will deal with the ethic which is appropriate for Man perceived as such.

Eckhart begins his sixth vernacular sermon,<sup>8</sup> taken from the Book of Wisdom's "The just shall live forever," by displaying a characteristic anticipated above, namely by offering two *viae* by which one might become just. The first, which we might call the positive way, involves "giv[ing] everyone what belongs to him" (*EE*, 185). Though giving to God what is owed to him involves little of what might be called affirmation, our reasonable offering to the angels and saints are good works, which require "good will and aspiration" (*EE*, 185). Finally, to our brothers and sisters, both those living and those in purgatory, we owe "improvement and edification" (*EE*, 185). In other words, in this first way, justice entails the proper relation to each type of substance in the cosmos and the utilization of the faculties required in each case.

"Such a man is just in one way," says Eckhart, "and so in another sense are all those who accept all things alike from God, whatever it may be, great or small, joy or sorrow, all of it alike, less or more one like the other" (*EE*, 185, 186). In typical Eckhartian fashion, after briefly acknowledging the generally accepted positive way in which man is appropriated to his object, the preacher shifts his attention to the much favoured negative way, with which Pr.6 is primarily concerned. This way is marked by detachment, speed, unqualified receptivity, and, above all, the suspension of one's particular will. Those who are just in this way "have no will at all; what God wills is all the same to them, however great distress that may be" (*EE*, 186).

It seems that Eckhart rejects a form of justice in which man engages all his faculties in a positive interaction with every level of reality for a form in which man is a passive recipient, unaffected by his encounters in the world, an unresponsive and inanimate object. On the contrary, Pr.6 declares that the just, those who receive all things equally from God, will live. Thus, whoever is not just and to whom "one thing gives ... joy and another sorrow" is dead (*EE*, 186). What Eckhart means by life in the present sermon is apparently very different from what we generally mean by the word in ordinary conversation, in which case life is a sort of place where things affect you, or in modern science, where life is evident when a subject interacts with

7. Michel Henry, *I Am The Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 105.

8. *DWI*, pp. 99–115.

its environment in an organized way. In our usual use of the word, it seems, life is either practically homogenous with the world or else something which happens within it. Eckhart, on the other hand, has used the word to signify a sort of detachment from the world.

In the philosophy of Michel Henry we find a comparable use of the term life. Henry's point of departure in *I Am the Truth* is the distinction between two kinds of truth: that of the world and that of life. That something is true simply means that it appears, that it shows itself. However, what shows itself does not account for the very fact of self-showing: "The fact of self-showing is as indifferent to what shows itself as is the light to what it illuminates" (13). Since this light does not belong to the things that show themselves in it, it shows things in an external way. This is how things appear in the world. Henry then explains a second kind of truth which "in no way differs from what it makes true" (24). While the world's truth shows things outside themselves, in this other kind of truth, "[w]hat reveals itself is revelation itself" (25). Henry calls this act of pure revelation God and the interiority in which it reveals itself to itself Life (25–27).

A similar idea is expressed by Eckhart when he says, "For just men, the pursuit of justice is so imperative that if God were not just, they would not give a fig for God" (*EE*, 186). It is the very fact of being just, and not the particular instances of justice, with which the just man is concerned. Furthermore, justice reveals itself only to the just man: "Anyone who has discernment in justice and in just men, he understands everything I am saying" (*EE*, 186). As justice reveals itself to itself, so living, which is what justice does (the just will live), is valuable in itself. "[W]hy do you live?" Eckhart asks. "So as to live" (*EE*, 186). This is true not only of absolute life but even those souls in hell, to whom "life flows without any medium [*sunder allez mitel*] from God" (*EE*, 187).

Since we are asking the question "who is man" so as to better answer the question "what should he do," we must now inquire into the relationship of absolute life to the individual living self. The immediacy with which Eckhart expresses this relationship brings several possibilities to mind. Does the living belong to Life as a drop of water to the ocean? Does the latter participate in the former in some diminished way? Or do the two make a simple tautology? None of these possibilities satisfy the language of the following passages in Eckhart's sermon. The Meister speaks not of emersion, subordination or numerical unity, but of equality. This equality is described as "being with" God in such a way that one is neither "above [n]or beneath" (*EE*, 187). Nevertheless the terms in this equality are not simply interchangeable, for one term is responsible for the equality of the other: "Whatever the Father can achieve, that he gives equally to the soul" (*EE*, 187). This bringing to

equality is expressed by the metaphor of birth. The emanation—Eckhart would say the boiling (*bulitio*)—of the Son from the Father in the Trinity and the equality between them is a fundamental teaching of Christianity, but since what follows is very obscure, we must consider how the notion of generated equality fits in with what we have said about Life.

Michel Henry criticizes what he calls the Romantic conception of Life for its impersonal and chaotic nature. He notes that such a conception of life fails to account for individual living beings, for “this generation of the living can be accomplished by Life only insofar as it is capable of engendering itself” (51). Life which has no self-relation is no Life at all, and therefore that by which Life relates to itself is essential to Life itself and does not act on Life from without. Thus, the “Ipseity” by which Life’s self-relation takes place is “generated” by Life on the inside as the essence of Life’s self-generation. We might just as well say, “The Father gives birth to the Son in eternity [that is in himself], equal to himself” (*EE*, 187).

Eckhart continues: “He has given birth to him in my soul” (*EE*, 187). Since absolute Life is self-related in its essential Ipsieity, or the Father is self-related in his co-eternal Son, so this Son is present in any living insofar as it is self-related and thus a self. But is there then no difference between me and God? This is not quite Henry’s contention. He distinguishes between the strong self-affection of God and the weak self-affection of the self (106). The living really is in possession of itself, is self-related, touches itself at every point and thus has power of all its faculties. However, it in fact has no power over the very fact of its having power. It is not in possession of itself by anything it has done; it is not self-generating but has been brought to life. That which gives life to itself is the Son. Therefore it is in the Son that the self is self-related and is a self. In experiencing myself in the absolute before, I experience the Son at work in my soul.

The mystery, however, is deeper than this. Eckhart continues, “He gives me birth, me, his Son and the same Son” (*EE*, 187). In other words, the self is nothing but the work of the Son in the Life of the Father. In the pure fact of my self-affecting there is nothing added to God’s self-affecting: “Everything God performs is one; therefore he gives me, his Son, birth without any distinction” (*EE*, 187, 188). Hence it is not just that the Son is born *in* me, but the Son is born *as* me, or I am born as the Son. Further, since the Son is generated in the Father’s self-generation, so am I in this absolute experience of myself. Thus, what I experience as myself is the Son, which the Father engenders in his self-engendering: “I go into God in loving” (*EE*, 188). However, it is the Self which gives life to itself so that it may affect itself: “I accept God into me in knowing”; “God and I, we are one” (*EE*, 188). This statement does not refer to a tautology but, to use Henry’s words, a “reciprocal interiority” (67). God and I, Life and the Self, are two sides of the same coin.

We have seen how, for Eckhart and Henry, the particular living self is a self-affective moment in Life's absolute self-affection. We have identified man in his immediate and interior self-relation to the exclusion of all his other relations, and thus placed all the weight of his definition on the side of Man's invisible essence. However, Eckhart's ethics prescribe a life of activity with visible consequences in the external world. This ethic is nowhere in the corpus more evident than in Pr.86.

Eckhart's eighty-sixth vernacular sermon is one of his most difficult. With its digressions and repetitive nature Pr.86 is longer and less elegant than other sermons (though it does not lack any of their rhetorical flair). What is most challenging, though, is the very proposition that Martha is more spiritually advanced than Mary. With this surprising interpretation Eckhart not only reverses the literal meaning of Christ's words but also breaks with the tradition of Biblical exegesis. As Caputo notes,<sup>9</sup> the Dominicans followed Aristotle in the ranking of *theoria* over *praxis*, and Thomas Aquinas, among others, pointed to the Biblical story of Mary and Martha as confirmation of the Philosopher's teaching. Assuming that Eckhart applies these categories to the Gospel story in the usual way, however, would be a great error. We need only to read Eckhart's introduction to the sermon to find that the Meister is up to something different. It is not Mary, who "longed for" and "wanted she knew not what," (TP, 338) that Eckhart describes as intellectually engaged, but Martha, whose "ground very rich in experience" (TP, 338) (*wol geübeter grunt*) and "wise understanding"<sup>10</sup> (*wisiu verstantnisse*) enabled her to do her work. So, in the next paragraph where Eckhart distinguishes sensory satisfaction from intellectual satisfaction it seems likely that he has Mary in mind. The preacher even hints that Mary may be one of those who are "pampered with regard to the lower senses," something that does not happen to "God's dear friends" (TP, 338).

So far it seems that Eckhart has simply reversed the standard roles of the sisters, promoting Martha to the role of a contemplative and doubly demoting Mary to that of a sensualist! However, we must note what Eckhart means by intellectual satisfaction. Here Eckhart reserves the term intellect for only the "highest part of the soul" (TP, 338), which is not pulled down by any creature. Eckhart also thinks it necessary to qualify "creature" as anything that "one feels and sees lower than God" (TP, 338). To be clear, the distinction

9. In *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought*, 137.

10. This translation is supplied by McGinn in his *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 158. I prefer it to Frank Tobin's "mature power of reflection" in *Teach and Preacher* (338) for reasons which will become clear. Anyway, the former's is a more literal translation of "*wisiu verstantnisse*."

Eckhart has set up with Mary and Martha is not between practical activity (which takes temporal objects) and theoretical activity (which takes eternal ones) but rather between that which takes any created object whatever and that which remains steadfast in the uncreated. Thus, the mystery which Pr.86 poses is not why Eckhart orders practical activity above theoretical, but rather why our blessedness consists in doing rather than seeing.

We have set out in this paper to approach Eckhart's ethics by way of his anthropology, based on the principle that how a being returns to God depends on its place in the cosmic hierarchy. Since we have located man nowhere other than Life's self-affection and defined Man as the Son of God, it follows that our approach to God ought to be unmediated. Thus, if activity is to be the Son's proper approach to the Father, then it must take on a very different meaning than it generally carries. Michel Henry is explicit about this point and with it we will return to our comparison of him and Eckhart. Henry paraphrases how activity has generally been understood in the Western philosophic tradition as "to take some interior design, some subjective project, some desire of wish or will (whether or not explicit or conscious), and give it an exterior realization" (172). Of course, Henry's criticism of this common understanding of activity depends on his criticism of the common understanding of reality. If truth does not lie in the world of representation but in the self-revelation of Life, then neither does activity. Henry avoids the reduction of human activity to physical processes and the embarrassing question of how the leap from subjectivity to objectivity happens by placing the ontological weight of activity on the subjective side and reducing the objectivity of activity to a mere representation, an "empty shell" (241). Thus, to act really means "to make an effort, take pains, suffer to the point that the suffering of this effort is changed into the joy of satisfaction" (241). Whether these efforts are represented to the faculties in the horizon of the world's truth adds nothing to their value. Activity takes place only in the living agent and thus in Life and therefore manifests itself only in Life's truth.

The accidentality of the exterior act is a well-known teaching of Eckhart that gained much attention in his life. Articles sixteen through nineteen of the Bull *in agro dominico* express this idea, namely that "God does not properly command an exterior act" (*EE*, 79). This article is taken from the Meister's *Commentary on John* in which the reasons given are more observational, but in another treatise Eckhart unpacks this idea more clearly. In his *Book of Divine Consolation* Eckhart describes the difference between the internal and external acts and expounds the verse from the Psalms, "Whatever he pleased, he has already done and made," using an example from the physical world:

Of this teaching we have a clear example in stones, the external function of which is to fall down and to lie on the ground. This function can be prevented, and a stone does not

keep on falling all the time. There is another function, more essential to the stone, and that is its propensity to fall, and that was made with it; neither God nor his creatures can take that away. (*EE*, 245)

It is the inner deliberation which counts, not its translation into the external world:

just as all created beings, even if there were a thousand worlds, are not one hair's breadth better than is God alone, ... this external work does not at all add, not in its quantity of size or length or breadth, to the goodness of the interior work, which possesses its goodness in itself. (*EE*, 226)

As the creature is radically dependent (to the point of non-existence) on God, so is the external manifestation of activity to its internal reality. But what we do with this lesser manifestation of activity is important.

If activity no longer means a translation from inner potentiality to outer realization, and the whole of its value remains on the side of subjectivity, the objective manifestation may seem to be a very awkward remainder with which one would no doubt feel uncomfortable. It is at this point in the spiritual journey that the immature soul is at risk of going astray. If the world we experience via the senses is a parade of meaningless images, the most reasonable thing to do would be, presumably, to pay it as little attention as possible. Eckhart refers to those who, along these lines, think that perfection lies in "bring[ing] things to a point where their senses are utterly unaffected by the presence of sensible objects" (*TP*, 344), a state he considers impossible or at any rate undesirable.<sup>11</sup> If this is the case, and the external world is not going away, ignoring may turn to fleeing and quietism to pursuit of ecstatic experience. This is one of the roads (though perhaps not Mary's) that Eckhart is warning his hearers and readers of in Pr.86 where he supplies the example of Christ's suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane as evidence that perfection does not involve a separation from the faculties by which we are aware of the external world (*TP*, 343).

Michel Henry follows Eckhart on this point with his notion of "the duplicity of appearing" which he explains as follows: "*Because the way of appearing is double, what appears, even if it is the same, nevertheless appears to us in two different ways, in a dual aspect*" (195). For Henry the duplicity of appearing is a fact from which we have no escape. Furthermore, its effects are dangerous to the life of the soul. Bleakly put, "In instituting the permanent possibility of the trap and the lie, the duplicity of appearance unfolds a universe whose

11. Eckhart is suspicious of religious ecstasy though he does not condemn it. He seems to admit that these states of unawareness of ordinary life are granted sometimes as divine favours, but he clearly finds them less valuable than the in-ecstatic union he finds in Martha.



principle is hypocrisy" (195). Likewise, in Eckhart's eighty-sixth sermon, it is the joy and sorrow, which even Christ in perfect union feels, that "pull the highest part of the soul down" (*TP*, 338). However, it is not because the universe is really dual that we are bound to experience it as such. We do not experience the world doubly *despite* our soul's union with the Divine but rather *because* of it. Of Christ's suffering Eckhart explains, "This was due to the nobility of his nature and to the sacred union of divine and human nature" (*TP*, 343). The reason, simply put, is that all activity, even that of a living's perceiving itself in the world's truth can only happen in the living's self-giveness. What is more, it happens *because of* the living's self-giveness: "Experiencing itself in Life's Ipseity, it [the 'me']<sup>12</sup> enters into possession of itself at the same time as it enters into possession of each of its powers. Entering into possession of these powers, it is able to exercise them" (136). Thus, the world's mode of appearing only happens in Life's mode of appearing, or, better, the world only happens in Life. More specifically, the world happens only in the living self insofar as its faculties produce the latter. Eckhart expresses this in another sermon: "In my birth all things were born and I was the cause of myself and of all things" (*EE*, 203 [Pr. 53]). Activity in its affecting affects only itself and therefore it is self-affective.

We have just seen that activity is the last self-affective moment within Life's self-affection within which, and on account of which, the world appears and Man appears within it. Therefore, activity is the crucial point at which two opposed conceptions of Man (Man as Son of God and Man as being-in-the-world) meet. Therefore activity is also the site of our salvation or its opposite. On the one hand, all activity is self-affective and thus ultimately divine. On the other hand, in its exteriorizing of itself and seeing itself in the world it invents, activity lets Man forget the divinity which is his. This condition is the inescapable conclusion of being what we are, particular living selves, and thus it is just as true for Martha as it is for Mary. We have said above that, in Pr. 86, Eckhart does not set up a distinction between mental activity and practical activity, but between doing and seeing. Thus, Mary and Martha embody two moments contained within activity's self-affection. Yet this is not a distinction between two mutually exclusive terms; we have seen that seeing is a function of doing. Thus, that "Martha knew Mary better than Mary Martha" (*TP*, 338) does not mean that Martha was once a seer, as if a seer becomes a doer. On the contrary, one sees by virtue of doing.

This interpretation of what Eckhart is doing with Mary and Martha in Pr. 86 is posed by a serious problem which we must now address. If doing

12. Henry uses the objective first person pronoun to express the self as experienced passively in Life's self-affection, while the subjective pronoun, on the other hand, represents the self as actively possessing itself and thus in control of itself.

necessarily results in seeing and seeing in forgetting, then Martha ought to be on her way to becoming a Mary, but we find just the opposite in the text. How does Martha overcome her forgetting of her condition as Son while she is constantly moving in the wrong direction? If it is by our blessed state that we forget our blessed state, by what means are we to remember it? What other means could there be? And how would this memory manifest itself to us? To answer these questions, we must now consider Eckhart's very obscure discussion of means (*mittel*).

As there are two requirements for our salvation, namely our Sonship and the overcoming of our forgetting of the latter, likewise, "[t]here are two kinds of means" (*TP*, 340). Further, since the first requirement brings about the need for the second, these two means in a sense exclude one another: "One kind (without which I cannot come to God) is work and activity in time... The other kind of means is to be rid of this" (*TP*, 340). Thus, in a certain sense, our Sonship cannot lead us back to itself but only farther away. The self-givenness of the ego is always, through the power of the faculties, creating the world in which we forget ourselves. This explains one mystery of Pr.86, namely why the ecstatic, who rids himself of means, finds himself all the more within them. Hence, Mary, who is withdrawn from ordinary life, approaches sensualism, and St. Peter, who uses the "pathless path," was "addressed from above in tones *created*<sup>13</sup> and sweet" and "was not seeing God in unity as he is in his 'ownness'" (*TP*, 341). On the other hand, to "seek God in all creatures" (*TP*, 341) is even more absurd, for as we have seen the external world is a counterfeit in which none of the truth of the original is carried over.

Having dismissed the two traditional ways of the soul to God, Eckhart offers a third, which "is called a path and yet is a being-at-home" (*TP*, 341). Here Eckhart discloses very little about this "path" save that it is best expressed by paradox. Accordingly, it apparently utilizes both of the other means which exclude one another (and after all lead to the same conclusion!). On this path there are no creatures, yet they are "bordering it ... acting as means" (*TP*, 341). In this passage Eckhart does not tell us how creatures act as means on this path but we can deduce from the image of the border that they are being used negatively. This path is not composed of creatures, but they do indicate where the path is and keep its travelers from straying off it. This is just what we find earlier:

Life<sup>14</sup> knows better than pleasure or light what one can get under God in this life, and in some ways life gives us a purer knowledge than what eternal light can bestow. Eternal light gives us knowledge of self *and* God, but not knowledge of self apart from God.

13. My italics.

14. Note that Eckhart is not using "life" as we have been all along but as it is generally used, i.e., everyday existence.

Life, on the other hand, gives knowledge of self apart from God. Seeing oneself alone makes it easier to recognize what is like or unlike. (*TP*, 339)

And: "If there were no night, there would not be day nor would one use the word. It would all be one light ..." (*TP*, 340). Thus, Eckhart paradoxically expresses how creatures mediate an immediate union between man and God by virtue of their non-existence. For Eckhart, then, the active life is neither a retroactive and temporary descent of the contemplative to the world below out of duty or necessity, nor is it the beginning of a journey to God through the ranks of creatures. On the contrary, the active life is in fact the negative way to God.

But how is knowledge of self apart from God more valuable than knowledge of "God and self in God in the manner of the spirit" (*TP*, 339), if the former is at least in a sense truer than the latter? After all, we have argued all along that Man resides in God and is in fact his equal. To answer this question we must go back to the very beginning and source of our investigation, the distinction between two forms of truth: that of the world and that of Life. So long as the knowledge of the contemplative presents itself as an object, as phenomenon, it belongs to the world's truth. Thus, the knowledge of the contemplative is not wrong in content but in form, or, more accurately, its form is unsuited to convey its content. The unity of man and God can only be known in the unity of man and God. The problem is that this truth is always casting itself outside of itself and becoming false. The statement, "God and Man are one," carries none of the truth of the unity it pretends to portray. Like any other exterior manifestation of truth, it is deceptive and false; it is a creature and must be used as a negative means to God. Knowing, in the sense of a subject perceiving an object, is useless in discerning the truth or falsity of what it sees. Seeing is only the opening of the world (and thus the world's truth) through the faculties. Therefore, all it sees it sees as truth and all it sees is false.

The only means we have of discerning the hypocrisy of the world is to skip the step of seeing, as it were, and apply our activity to it directly. Though God does not *properly* command the exterior act, it is, like the creature, required in a negative way? In his *Commentary on John*, Eckhart explains that the exterior work cannot be commanded by God "because it can be hindered" (*EE*, 121); it is "heavy and oppressive" (*EE*, 121). The interior work, which God does command, on the other hand, is light, for God "gives what he commands [and] commands the latter" (*EE*, 121). The interior act is given since it is in Life's self-giveness. However, it is precisely the oppressive nature of work that is of value in the negative way. Henry explains that in suffering there "is always revealed ... another life, the 'to suffer' and 'to rejoice' of absolute Life" (204). The ego with all its power in Life's self-giveness discovers that

it is “*absolutely powerless ... with respect to the fact that it finds itself in possession of this power*” (137) and must bear the burden of itself. In straining to observe an objective law which it cannot obey, the self discovers an inner law which it cannot but obey: to live, “to be this living person generated in absolute Life’s self-generation ...” (184). With this discovery “the suffering of this effort is changed into the joy of satisfaction” (172). In Eckhart’s words, “whatever a person has to obtain by great struggle and toil turns into heartfelt joy ...” (*TP*, 344).

This paper began with a warning against making general statements about complex thinkers. I hope to have justified this warning in one instance by now. However, I will now run the risk of making a few myself. Michel Henry’s philosophy is, generally speaking, concerned with getting beyond representational thinking, a form which, according to him, has dominated the West since its beginnings in Greece. Nevertheless Henry’s project does involve a retrieval of a figure who was very firmly rooted in Western metaphysics. That Meister Eckhart conceived of a non-representational form of thought should not surprise us; a pre-conscious form of apprehension in the One is standard doctrine among all the Neoplatonists. Though Eckhart’s casualness of approach is a bit shocking, I have taken as my point of departure the assumption that Henry does find Eckhart promoting a non-representational form of perceiving in his sermons, and that in Pr.86 Eckhart is not contrasting practical and theoretical activity but representational and non-representational forms of grasping God. Since the unity of man and God is immediate, we must grasp its truth where we perceive immediately, and for Eckhart this is in doing more than of seeing. This is why Martha’s way is better than Mary’s and why Christ must have meant that Martha had chosen the better part, though he literally says the opposite. Had Eckhart not thought that representation was the origin of hypocrisy, he surely would not have applied this principle to Christ’s words.