

BONUM NON EST IN DEO: ON THE INDISTINCTION OF THE ONE AND THE EXCLUSION OF THE
GOOD IN MEISTER ECKHART

by

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ABSTRACT

Meister Eckhart exhibits an unprecedented confidence in the transcendental way of thought in medieval philosophy. Eckhart, unlike his predecessors, identifies being as such (*ens commune*) and God, allowing the most primary determinations metaphysics – ‘being,’ ‘one,’ ‘true,’ ‘good,’ – to function as both metaphysical and theological first principles. Eckhart placed them at the head of his projected *Tripartite Opus*, a vast work of *quaestiones* and commentaries whose intelligibility, he insists, requires the prior foundation of a supposed series of a thousand axioms. The table of contents remains, the *opus propositionum* does not.

This thesis argues that what enables Eckhart to pursue the direct application of the transcendentals to the divine also makes it unrealizable. His determination of unity is twofold: as (i) indivisibility, and the standard transcendental conception of unity as a negation of the given positive content of being (*ens*); as (ii) indistinction, comprehending both the negation of otherness which produces the indivisible *and* the otherness that is negated. There is an inherent tension between Peripatetic metaphysics and Procline henology.

Consequently, the Good is devalued when the Procline One appears within the transcendental perspective. Metaphysics, theology and, *a fortiori* for Eckhart, ethics, take no consideration of Goodness. I show how this tension gives rise to Eckhart’s association of the divine essence with the Neoplatonic One, while the Peripatetic One and the transcendental “true” function as the *explanans* of the Trinitarian intellectual self-return. This, in turn, gives rise to the constitutive function of the *imago dei*, and every *imago* as such, within that self-relation. Ultimately, this produces a standpoint wherein every essence, only as idea, contains the divine uniform infinity.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

LW	<i>Die lateinischen Werke</i> , hrsg. im Auftrage der Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1936-).	
<i>Tabula</i>	<i>Tabula prologorum</i>	LW I
<i>Prolog. gen.</i>	<i>Prologus generalis in opus tripartitum</i>	
<i>Prolog. op. prop.</i>	<i>Prologus in opus propositionum</i>	
<i>In Gen.</i>	<i>Expositio Libri Genesis</i>	
<i>In Gen. II</i>	<i>Liber parabolarum Genesis</i>	
<i>In Exod.</i>	<i>Expositio Libri Exodi</i>	LW II
<i>In Ecc.</i>	<i>Sermones et Lectiones super Ecclesiastici</i>	
<i>In Sap.</i>	<i>Expositio Libri Sapientiae</i>	
<i>In Ioh.</i>	<i>Expositio sancti Evangelii secundum Iohannem</i>	LW III
<i>Sermo</i>	<i>Sermones</i>	LW IV
<i>Quaest. paris. I</i>	<i>Utrum in deo sit idem esse et intelligere</i>	LW V
<i>Quaest. paris. II</i>	<i>Utrum intelligere angeli sit suum esse</i>	
<i>Quaest. paris. V</i>	<i>Utrum in corpore Christi morientis in cruce remanserint formae elementorum</i>	
<i>Proc. Col.</i>	<i>Processus Coloniensis</i>	
DW	<i>Die deutschen werke</i> , hrsg. von J. Quint (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1936-).	
OLME I	<i>L'Oeuvre latine de Maître Eckhart</i> , vol. I, <i>Commentaire de la Genèse précédé des Prologues</i> , texte latin, introduction, traduction et notes par F. Brunner, A. de Libera, É. Wéber, É. Zum Brunn (Paris: Cerf, 1984).	
OLME VI	<i>L'Oeuvre latine de Maître Eckhart</i> , vol. VI, <i>Commentaire sur le Prologue de Jean</i> , texte latin, avant-propos, traduction et notes par	

A. de Libera, É. Wéber, É. Zum Brunn (Paris: Cerf, 1989).

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Chapter One: Introduction

Theology and Metaphysics: the Method of the *Principium*

*Every good and perfection, indeed the very being of a creature, is from without, from another, not in the creature itself nor in any part of itself, nor even from something in which it inheres formally.*¹

Meister Eckhart's theological-philosophical method and his understanding of the soul mutually inform one another. The aim of this introduction is to outline their correlation. In so doing, I situate myself within an approach to Eckhart's work, exemplified in the scholarship of Kurt Flasch, Alain de Libera and Loris Sturlese, that refuses to acknowledge any distinction between his “scholastic” Latin writings and the so-called “mystical” standpoint of his vernacular sermons and treatises.² A one-sided emphasis, either way, betrays the anachronisms of our time, attempting to understand Eckhart (rarely) as an exemplar of the scholastic rationalism or, worse, the irrational and, finally – and worst of all because it is so near the truth – as a thinker of “paradox”. Breathing a sigh of relief, we can now agree with Flasch that “the decades of discussion concerning the concept of mysticism are behind us”.³ Aside from those who knew Eckhart personally, and those like Nicholas of Strasbourg who, once summoned by Pope John XXII as the external “visitor” for the inquisition of Eckhart was eventually charged with “obstructing” the proceedings when he found no fault with the Preacher,⁴ the Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa (+1464) stands alone as the first known *reader* of Meister Eckhart. Where others saw heresy, the irrational, or paradox, Cusanus saw coincidence.⁵ It is from the library at Kues that Heinrich Denifle established some of the very first editions of Eckhart's Latin works in 1886, albeit long after the Meister's reputation as a “mystic” had

¹ *Sermo XIX*, n.188 (LW IV, 175,10-12): 'bonum omne et perfectio, adhuc autem et esse sit creaturae ab extra, ab alio, non a se ipsa nec ab aliquo sui aut etiam ab aliquo habituali formaliter inhaerente.'
Translations are my own, except when otherwise indicated.

² For the history of this opposition regarding Meister Eckhart, see K. Flasch, *D'Averroès à Maître Eckhart*, pp.14-23; *Maître Eckhart*, pp.29-45.

³ K. Flasch, *Maître Eckhart*, p.185.

⁴ *Proc. Col.* I, n.44 (LW V, 190-192).

⁵ On Cusa's awareness that one must not regard “distinction” and “indistinction” in Meister Eckhart as two contraries, but “as anteriorly present in their most simple principle, where distinction is not other than indistinction,” see Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia*, E. Hoffmann, R. Klibansky (eds.), *Opera Omnia*, vol. I (Leipzig: Meiner, 1932), I, c.19, pp.38-39. The editors include references to Cusanus' marginal notes in his editions of Eckhart's Latin commentaries and sermons.

been thoroughly entrenched in the minds of historians on the basis of his vernacular sermons. Now, however, scholars have begun to rescue Eckhart from our imaginations and have woven him into a tapestry of the Upper Rhine in the fourteen-century, drawing together university disputes and vernacular poems in which he and his confratres appear equally “masters of life” (*Lebmeistern*) and “masters of study” (*Lesmeistern*).¹

This unified standpoint Eckhart never ceased pursuing and teaching; he gave voice to his conviction with every resource he could muster from his education in Albert's *studium* and in Paris, he learned and adapted to the anti-institutional quietism and speculations of spiritual communities under his charge. His conviction is simply this: the blessed life can be led fully from the very Ground of the soul, without remainder, here and now, through participating in the grace of the Incarnate Word who is “the truth of life, of justice, and of doctrine”.²

The purpose of this introduction is to give the reader a sense of what assumptions enable Eckhart to unite so thoroughly the Greco-Arabic Peripatetic tradition with the Christian faith. For this, he earned a place alongside the luminaries of his Order who had gone before him, Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas. Preceded only by Aquinas, Eckhart had the rare distinction of twice (1302-1303/1311-1313) obtaining the chair in Theology at the University of Paris reserved for foreign Dominicans; his final position, until his death, would be as head of the *studium* in Cologne (1324) established by Albert in 1248. Unlike Albert and Aquinas, however, Eckhart shows no interest in philosophical history or, like Aquinas in particular, in establishing the accord of Plato and Aristotle.³ Eckhart presents the philosophical tradition as already reconciled to itself.⁴ This ancient scholastic exercise, it is certain, did not hold Eckhart's attention. As he explains at the outset of his *Opus tripartitum* – a vast work which never neared completion – his interest

¹ Above all, see the work of A. de Libera, *La mystique rhénane. D'Albert le Grand à Maître Eckhart* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1994). This is not to say, however, that the Dominican Order, even within Teutonia, was in one accord with itself as constituting a unified a school of thought with which a distinctive set of adherents self-consciously identified themselves. See N. Largier, “Die ‚deutsche Dominikanerschule‘. Zur Problematik eines historiographischen Konzepts,” pp.202-214.

² *In Ioh.*, n.184 (LW III, 153,11-12): ‘Et sic breviter omnia, quae perfectionis sunt et quae perfecta sunt, puta gratia, veritas vitae, iustitiae et doctrinae, ad Christum pertinet.’ Cf. *Proc. Col.* I, 77 (LW V, 275,21-22): ‘Patienter tamen mihi ferendum est, quia ‘beati qui patiuntur propter iustitiam’ et ‘deus flagellat omnem filium quem recipit’; these are Eckhart's opening words to his accusers in Cologne.

³ For Aquinas, see W. Hankey, “Thomas’ Neoplatonic Histories: His Following of Simplicius,” *Dionysius* 20 (2002), pp.153-178; for Albert, see *Metaphysica* I, tr.5, c.15 (ed. Coloniensis, v. XVI/1, 89b), where he explains that Plato and Aristotle alone are sufficient for a perfect philosophical education.

⁴ Thanks to Ben Manson for pointing this out nearly two years ago.

is to offer “new, brief and simple statements” regarding “diverse questions,” and to provide “rare commentaries” on the sacred Canon and Scriptures, because “the new and rare more sweetly stimulates the soul than the familiar”.¹ His university work, then, is put at the service of eliciting a transformation in the soul, in arming his fellow Preachers with many simple points which can be used in sermons or in their own Scriptural commentaries. The interpreter's hermeneutical task has been made more difficult given that the foundation of these “new and rare commentaries”, namely the *Work of Propositions* (*Opus propositionum*) is extant in only a skeletal form. I return to this below and in Chapter Two.

Another hermeneutical key is laid out in the *Expositio secundum sancti Johanni evangelium*. Beginning his commentary, Eckhart introduces the *intentio* guiding his “entire work” (*in omnibus suis editionibus*): the three discourses of divinity, physics and ethics fundamentally coincide, and mutually illumine one another, insofar as each can be explained through natural truths (*per illa naturalia exponuntur*) – exclusively, he adds, “for those who have ears to hear”.² So now the approach of enquiry into his theological method, in which all metaphysical, divine and ethical truths could be unfolded from the Gospel, seems narrower than before; an elusive standard needs be met before the coincidence of philosophy and revealed truth can be grasped adequately. One must be first in the truth to know the truth. It seems our passageway is entirely blocked off. Let us return to the foundation.

Eckhart's *Opus tripartitum* is triply divided into an *opus propositionum* of about “a thousand axioms or more”, an *opus quaestionum* meant to imitate the order and structure of the *Summa theologiae* of “the venerable brother Thomas,” and finally the *opus expositionum*, containing one part of commentary on Scriptural *auctoritates* and a collection of *sermones*.³ What remains are the Table of Prologues, the General Prologue, a Prologue to the *opus propositionum*, which contains the first axiom, *Esse est Deus*, the first corresponding *quaestio* ('Utrum Deus est') and the first Scriptural *expositio* treating Genesis 1.1. Additionally, his Latin sermons, most of which have come down only in an annotated form, belong to but a half of the third *opus*. Every serious analysis of Eckhart's

¹ *Prologus generalis*, n.2 (LW I, 148,10-149,2): 'adhuc autem tertio quantum ad auctoritatem plurimam sacri canonis utriusque testamenti raras expositiones, in his potissime quae se legisse alias non recolunt vel audisse, praesertim quia dulcius irritant animum nova et rara quam usitat.'

² *In Ioh.*, nn.2-3 (LW III, 4,4-17). See also nn.6, 125, 137, 142, 185-186, 361, 441, 486, 509.

³ *Prologus generalis*, nn.3-6 (LW I, 149,3-151,12).

thought must confront the foundation that the *propositiones* are meant to provide; the second and third parts of the work, Eckhart writes, “are so dependent on the first, namely the *opus propositionum*, that without it they are of little use” since they “are usually founded (*fundantur*) on one of the propositions.”¹

As meagre as these partial materials are in comparison to the intended whole, they nevertheless provide crucial insights into Eckhart's thought, such as can be taken, for example, from the table of contents provided in the General Prologue, which gives a sense of the overall structure which the thousand-plus axioms would have:²

- Tractatus I: De esse et ente, et eius opposito quod est nihil.
- Tr. II: De unitate et uno, et eius opposito quod est multum.
- Tr. III: De veritate et vero, et eius opposito quod est falsum.
- Tr. IV: De bonitate et bono, et malo eius opposito.
- Tr. V: De amore et caritate, et peccato eius opposito.
- Tr. VI: De honesto, virtute et recto, et eorum oppositis, puta turpi, vitio, obliquo.
- Tr. VII: De toto, et parte eius opposito.
- Tr. VIII: De communi et indistincto, et horum oppositis, proprio et distincto.
- Tr. IX: De natura superioris, et inferioris eius oppositi.
- Tr. X: De primo et novissimo.
- Tr. XI: De idea et ratione, et horum oppositis, puta de informi et privatione.
- Tr. XII: De 'quo est', et 'quod est', ei condiviso.
- Tr. XIII: De ipso deo, summo esse, quod contrarium non habet nisi non esse, ut ait Augustinus.
- Tr. XIV: De substantia, et accidente.

The axiomatic method, of course, brings to mind the *Liber de causis* and its model the *Elements of Theology*, as well as the *De hebdomadibus* of Boethius and the *Regulae theologicae* of Alan de Lille from the twelfth-century. Above all, however, there is the mysterious *Liber XXIV philosophorum*, some of which is adapted into Alan's *Regulae*, but appears for the first time in its original form in Eckhart's works. One cannot be certain which precursor Eckhart may have had in mind: unlike the *Elements*, he does not begin from the manifold; and, unlike the *Liber*, one begins definitively with Being. The last Treatise could be directly inspired by the *Liber XXIV philosophorum*.³ The analogy of substance and accidents for the relation of God and creatures is central to Eckhart, and in

¹ *Prologus generalis*, n.11 (LW I, 156,4-7).

² *Prologus generalis*, n.4 (LW I, 150,1-151,1). The editor of the *Prologus*, K. Weiss, suggests rightly that the tenth tractate, which is not accompanied by an opposite, *De primo et novissimo*, is identical to the treatise *De fine* to which Eckhart will occasionally refer.

³ Cf. *Liber XXIV philosophorum*, prop.6 (ed. Hudry, 12): 'Deus est cuius comparatione substantia accidens est et accidens nihil.'

a sense summarizes Chapter Two of this thesis.

Eckhart's high esteem of the *Liber* is apparent, given that he cites eleven of its propositions in his Latin work, and six more in his German sermons.¹ In one of his earliest extant works, an Easter sermon from 1294, Eckhart adapts a saying from the second proposition of the *Liber*, "God is an unknowable and inconceivable sphere whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere," regarding the presence of God in the consecrated host.² Given the variety of forms in which it appears in Eckhart's later writings, it is clear that he had access to another text than Alan's "intelligible sphere" (*sphaera intelligibilis*), which was the source for Bonaventure and Aquinas' awareness of the phrase.³ The most important of these changes is when Eckhart cites the proposition in its original form, that God is an "infinite intellectual sphere" (*sphaera intellectualis infinita*), whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere⁴ - a shift observable between the accounts of the Real Presence in the *Sermo Paschalis* and in *In Exodum*, nn.91-92, separated by about 10 years. The intelligible, rather than material, omnipresence of the divine being becomes with Eckhart the infinite presence of the divine unity in each thing, precisely *in virtue of its intellectuality*. Chapters Two and Three of this thesis set out Eckhart's articulation of the logic behind this laconic phrase.

A glance at the movement of the treatises in the *Tabula* could call to mind Aquinas' famous differentiation between the theological and philosophical methods, insofar as the former begins from the First and descend to creatures, while the latter moves from creatures to their First Cause.⁵ However, despite holding the *Summa* as its

¹ E. Brient, *The Immanence of the Infinite*, p.152, n.17.

² *Sermo Paschalis a. 1294 Parisius habitus*, n.1 (LW V, 137,3-5): 'item sunt incredibilia, cum summe sint mirabilia, quia »deus«, qui est »sphaera intelligibilis« et incomprehensibilis, »cuius centrum ubique et circumferentia nusquam«, sub specie panis sumendus proponitur.'

³ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium* V.8 (ed. Quaracchi, 100); Aquinas, *De veritate*, q.2, a.3, obj.11. Formerly, the *Liber* was thought to have been composed within the pseudo-Hermetic tradition, given its attribution in several medieval manuscripts and citations (like Aquinas') to Hermes Trismegistus. From its appearance of propositions 1 and 2 in the *Regulae* of Alan de Lille (Rules 3 and 7), it was then thought to have been composed by anonymous author from the school of Chartres. Hudry, however, has shown that it has a much earlier origin in the third century; see citations in Hudry's Introduction to the Brepols edition, pp.v-vi. Citations from the *Liber* are taken from the Brepols edition, although, when indicated, I refer to her notes in the more recent Vrin edition.

⁴ *In Exod.*, n.91 (LW II, 94,17-95,3); *In Ecc.*, n.20 (LW II, 248,2-4). For "infinite sphere" (*sphaera infinita*), see *In Gen.*, n.155 (LW I, 305,3-8). For Alan's formulation, see *In Ioh.*, n.604 (LW III, 527,4); *Sermo XLV*, n.458 (LW IV, 379,13); *Sermo LV.3*, n.546 (LW IV, 457,5). All of these were present in Cusanus' codices of Eckhart's work.

⁵ Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* IV, 1; idem, *ST* Ia.1.1, ad.1-2 and Ia.1.7. Cf. W. J. Hankey, *God in Himself*, Endnote 1, pp.162-3.

pattern, the *Opus* cannot imitate its form. Rather, Eckhart's procedure consists in opposing a divine attribute and a creaturely one at each stage, with the intention of finally arriving to the standpoint where there is no longer any opposition at all – arriving to God and... nothing. Indeed God only emerges as “God” in Treatise XIII, once all otherness and opposition has been negated. What follows from this monism, namely, the “opposition” of substance and accidents, brings us to a distinct determination of creatures. They are no longer something that can be understood to stand over and against the First, to be sure, but these accidents would now appear in their non-otherness to substance, insofar as they exist at all. An accident in reality cannot be opposed to substance in any way; to the extent that it is – that is, to the extent that it can be considered in its distinct notion or *ratio*, as Eckhart will say – it is a pure nothing, unable to subsist on its own; to the extent that it is not opposed to substance, it is simply a determination or mode of substance.

Given the anticipated association of creatures with accidents, Eckhart's final words on the project he is about to undertake come as a surprise: “So, by saying this, we neither destroy nor remove the being of things and the being for things, but we constitute it [*Hoc tamen dicendo non destruimus nec tollimus esse rerum aut esse rebus, sed constituimus*]”.¹ To begin in any other fashion, Eckhart contends, would give way outright to imagination, which is limited to conceiving of creatures as somehow external to their creator, or a manifold apart from unity.² Almost 25 years later, defending himself against charges of heresy before the tribunal in Cologne, Eckhart will respond to the ignorant malevolence of his accusers: if one is to understand what he has taught, “it will be necessary to centre oneself intellectually with divine things, and not be scattered into imaginations”.³ The vain imaginations of the heart are addressed by the dialectical opposite of the “constitution” of the being of beings in the *Opus*, which can be found in his contemporaneous *Sermones et lectiones super Ecclesiastici* (~1302-1305).⁴ These are a group of four sermons and commentaries related to the verses from Jesus Ben Sirach,

¹ *Tabula prologorum*, n.4 (LW I, 132,10-11).

² *Prologus generalis*, n.17: 'Non ergo falso imaginandum est quasi deus proiecerit creaturas vel creaverit extra se in quodam infinito seu vacuo.'

³ *Proc. Col.* I.4, n. 125 (LW V, 293,9-10): 'in divinis intellectualiter versari oportebit, neque diduci ad ymaginationes.'

⁴ For the dating of Eckhart's work, see L. Sturlese, *Meister Eckhart. Ein Porträt* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1993).

commenting on the words from Wisdom as she is sent by God to the congregation in Jerusalem. Concluding his commentary on Ecc. 24.29, *Qui edunt me, adhuc esurient*, “Those who feed on me shall yet hunger,” Eckhart announces that the entire purpose of “these commentaries,” wherein he has just provided his definitive account of the analogy of Being, consists in exhibiting “the weakness of creatures in respect to God or, better, their nothingness in themselves”.¹

Chapter Two of this thesis concerns this dialectical thought and the doctrine of analogy that is articulated within it. Creatures, or accidents, relate to God's being as merely one of its aspects or “modes”. For analogates, Eckhart writes,²

are not distinguished through the primary term, neither through differences in themselves, but through modes of one and the same basic thing. [...] Therefore every created being has being, life and intelligence from God and in God, not fundamentally or positively in itself, as a created being.

Health, he continues, is said primarily of an organism, and though it is said of a diet or of urine, it is in them no more than in a stone. These are accidental and extrinsic modes of one thing merely appearing in as a manifold.³ The comparison of these accidents with the *circulus vini*, the placard hanging above the inn showing that there is wine for sale within the tavern, is suggestive. Recourse to such a comparison was not uncommon among logicians, where it appears especially in semantic theory.⁴ Eckhart's association of semantics with an analogy of accidents and an extrinsic Being, however, is completely without precedent. Therefore the standpoint that constitutes the being of things from a derivation from absolute Being is equal to that which apprehends creatures as signs which “feed on” determination that is “wholly within and wholly without” them.⁵

¹ *In Ecc.*, n.61 (LW II, 290,7-8): 'et docent creaturam infirmitatem respectu dei aut potius in se ipsis nullicitatem.'

² *In Ecc.*, n.52 (LW II, 280,7-9; 282,3-5): 'analogia vero non distinguuntur per res, sed nec per rerum differentias, sed per modos unius eiusdemque rei simpliciter. [...] Igitur omne ens creatum habet a deo et in deo, non in se ipso ente creato, esse, vivere, sapere positive et radicaliter.'

³ *In Ecc.*, (LW II, 280,11-281,1): 'sed hoc solo dicitur urina sana, quia significat illam sanitatem eandem numero quae est in animali, sicut circulus vinum, qui nihil vini in se habet.'

⁴ See the discussion of the *circulus vini* in A. de Libera, *Le problème de l'être chez Maître Eckhart*, pp.10-11. De Libera makes the helpful remark that such signs were considered to be natural, not conventional. That is, the wood that surrounded the depicted *circulus* was thought to convey something of the relationship between the barrel and the wine, for instance. Therefore the analogous “modes” of the one *res* are somehow revelatory of its own nature.

⁵ Cf. *In Ecc.*, n.54 (LW II, 282,13-283,3): 'deus est rebus omnibus intimus, utpote esse, et sic ipsum edit omne ens; est et extimus, quia super omnia et sic extra omnia. Ipsum igitur edunt omnia, quia intimus,

This standpoint must also be identical to that which “has ears to hear”, and which can find the coincidence of divine, ethical and natural truths in all things. In comparison to his various analogous modes, divine being has a unique relation to mind: “God is in all things, but as God is divine [*götlich*] and as God is intellectual [*vernünftig*], so God is nowhere as properly [*eigenliche*] as in the soul and in an angel, if you will, in the innermost [part] of the soul”.¹ In fact, the entirety of creation has for its end that this unfolding might be returned to itself in the human: “for this reason, God has created the world and all angelic natures, that God would be born in the soul and the soul might be born in God”.²

Since, therefore, creation cannot imaginatively be conceived as occurring “outside” of God, or literally *ad extra*, the diversity of creation that is at once fully within and fully without God must take place within Intellect or the Word. Eckhart's earliest commentary, the *Expositio in Genesis*, makes this abundantly clear.³ Thus, the movement of these axioms in the *opus propositionum* reflects something central of the intellectual constitution of the manifold. According to Dietrich, fellow Dominican, perhaps 10 years older than Eckhart, and provincial of Teutonia from 1293-1296, the procession of intellect is the same as its conversion.⁴ In those years, Dietrich and Eckhart worked together, at least administratively, and would have likely shared their enthusiasm for the noetic theories of Proclus and the *Liber de causis*, for the theorems regarding causality and the essential self-return of intellectual being, which both of them employ with profound results. Their intellectual exchange, despite the lack of any explicit references, is undeniable; I shall frequently establish Eckhart's thought through readings of the treatises of Dietrich, whose more scientific approach complements the point-form commentaries and sermons of Eckhart.⁵

Kurt Flasch has explained how scholarly interest in Eckhart's Latin work,

esuriunt, quia extimus; edunt, quia intus totus, esuriunt, quia extra totus.¹

¹ *Predigt* 30 (DW II, 94,9-95,3).

² *Predigt* 38 (DW II, 228,1-3): 'dar umbe hât got die werlt geschaffen und alle engelische natûre, daz got geborn werde in der sêle und diu sêle in gote geborn werde.'

³ *In Gen.*, n.3 (LW I, 186,13-14): 'principium, in quo creavit deus caelum et terram, est ratio idealis'; *ibid.*, n.5 (LW I, 188,9-10): 'sancti communiter exponunt deum creasse caelum et terram in principio, id est in filio, qui est imago et ratio idealis omnium'; *ibid.*, n.7 (LW I, 190,11-12): 'Simul enim et semel quo deus fuit, quo filium sibi coaeternum per omnia coaequalem deum genuit, etiam mundum creavit.'

⁴ Dietrich of Freiberg, *De intellectu et intelligibili* III.36.2 (ed. Führer, 121).

⁵ The importance of Dietrich of Freiberg for Eckhart has been underscored repeatedly by Flasch (*D'Averroès à Maître Eckhart*, pp.91-123).

beginning with Heinrich Denifle in the late nineteenth-century, and continuing with Otto Karrer and Martin Grabmann after World War I, arose largely from the Catholic reaction to the Protestant appropriation of Eckhart the “father of German speculation,” or Eckhart the “German mystic,” which founded itself on the few editions of his German work then available.¹ After Denifle’s final verdict of Eckhart as a “confused spirit,” Otto Karrer in the 1920s underwent the unfortunate task of re-evaluating the condemnation of John XXII, by measuring Eckhart with the gold standard of orthodoxy of the day, Thomas Aquinas. The answer is in the question. Finally, Grabmann, in his edition of Eckhart’s Parisian disputations, concluded with Denifle that Eckhart’s thought contains merely “confused and distorted conceptions of doctrines of Aristotelian metaphysics”.

Flasch has shown that the fundamental non-Thomistic features of Eckhart’s thought – the non-existence of accidents, the uncreated spark of intellect in the soul, the doctrine of analogy – are anticipated and worked out by Dietrich of Freiberg (+ c.1310). As I explain below, Dietrich and Eckhart were working out some of their respective positions simultaneously, and possibly in tandem. Despite the important influence of the virulently anti-Thomistic Dietrich, however, Eckhart himself shows no indication of an intention to depart from the thought of Thomas. Eckhart’s attempt to follow these inherently opposed sources produces certain tensions in his thought which shall become clear in Chapter Two. It is ultimately a theory of Unity and causality inherited from Proclus and Dietrich that enables him to surpass this opposition, as will be shown in Chapter Three.

Eckhart's confidence in the metaphysics of *Esse* in Aquinas, moreover, is clear from what follows for him from the truth of the first proposition, *Esse est deus*, alone:²

Finally, notice that through the first proposition all, or almost all, questions concerning God are easily solved, [...] and most texts about him, even obscure and difficult ones, are clearly explained by natural reason [*naturali ratione clare exponuntur*].

What Eckhart does with that metaphysic is, however, un-Thomistic, insofar as the determinations of metaphysics are thought to apply to God directly. First philosophy and theology are deeply united by Eckhart, and in particular, a form of metaphysics that had

¹ K. Flasch, *D’Averroès à Maître Eckhart*, pp.87-90, for what follows.

² *Prologus generalis*, n.22 (LW I, 165,9-12).

emerged in Eckhart's years as a student in Paris which, too, began from the work of Aquinas but moved in profoundly new directions.

In a recent monograph that sets in place a neglected cornerstone of medieval thought, namely the doctrine of the *transcendentia* (being, one, true, good) as the highest and first determinations of existence, Jan Aertsen expands on an earlier remark of Josef Koch, the editor of most of Eckhart's Latin *corpus*, that the Meister develops a “metaphysics of the transcendentals”; Aertsen adds, “in no other medieval writing do these notions have such a prominent place”.¹ Indeed Eckhart combines the appropriation of the transcendentals to the Persons of the Trinity, which is a characteristic of the Franciscan school, with the logic of Aquinas' canonical deduction of the transcendentals as the “first concepts” and determinations of being (*ens*) in *De veritate*, q.1, a.1 and q.21., a.1. Generally speaking in medieval philosophy, the transcendentals are said to be “convertible” insofar as each term is one in reality (*in re*) while appearing distinct in its notion (*in ratione*). For Aquinas, however, these determinations belong to *ens commune* as an abstraction that must not be conflated with causal, divine *esse* as such. Eckhart's metaphysics takes up the Avicennian approach in a unique way. With Avicenna, God is not strictly speaking the “subject” of metaphysics; He appears within it only insofar as He is its end, or what is “sought-after” (*quaesitum*).² For, Avicenna says, following Aristotle, it is not the concern of a particular science to demonstrate the existence of its proper object. So too Eckhart also establishes that *esse* must always already be presupposed in any finite act of speech or thought.³ In equating this common being with the divine being as such, Eckhart inaugurates a very particular form of metaphysics wherein the first logical determinations of being coincide entirely with theological doctrine.

Eckhart's self-conscious attempt to unify life and doctrine comes through clearly in an early sermon (~1293-1294) preached in Paris on the Feast of St. Augustine. He recounts the three theoretical sciences outlined by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics*

¹ J. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, p.334.

² Avicenna latinus, *Liber de philosophia prima* I, c.1 (ed. Van Reit, 4,64-68): 'Sed non potest concedi quod Deus sit in hac scientia ut subiectum, immo est quaesitum in ea, scilicet quoniam, si ita non est, tunc non potest esse quin sit vel concessum in hac scientia et quaesitum in alia, vel concessum in ista et non quaesitum in alia.'

³ *In Exod.*, n.169 (LW II, 147,11-15): 'Propter quod etiam primus philosophus tractans de primis entibus et primis rerum principiis praesupponit ens. Et ipsum ob hoc est et dicitur eius subiectum, eo quod subicitur et praesupponitur omni, etiam primae cognitioni et apprehensioni. Nomen autem sive verbum omne nota est et signum praecedentis apprehensionis.'

(VI.1026a23-32): “physics, mathematics, and theology or ethics” (*theologia sive ethica*).¹ The extent to which Aristotle's account of first philosophy as the science of separate substances in Book VI can be identified with the science of “being as being” in Book IV (1003a21-32) is for Eckhart answered in the unity of theology and ethics: one must be detached and indistinguished from all externality to know the Indistinct.

Thus the form of this method is required by its content: the immediacy of the *principium* to all things or, in other words, the precise way in which the beginning or Unity is immediately present to the interiority of all mediation. For the standpoint which can sustain that perspective, every particular essence takes on an infinite expression of the internal life of the Trinity. Since this standpoint also requires that the knower be taken up into that same life, Eckhart's metaphysics of being absorbs and presupposes his ethics. Alain de Libera and Émilie Zum Brunn account for this as the interrelation of the “metaphysics of Exodus”, which aims to think the opposition of finite and infinite through a doctrine of analogy, and a “metaphysics of the Word” which corresponds to “the return of the creature, to its regeneration in Christ, which has for its primary concern the unity of creature and creator where Eckhart's analogy only poses their difference.”² Their hermeneutic illustrates well the tension in the Meister's thought between the vast ontological difference of creature and creator on the one hand, and their intellectual unity on the other, at which point the intellectual creature emerges as the mediation of that opposition.

This complete interrelation of Christian theology and philosophy clearly cannot be reduced to the formerly dominant historical categories of either a “Christian philosophy” (Gilson),³ nor a strictly integral “philosophy” that ceases to be philosophical the moment it becomes Christian (Van Steenberghe); revelation does not appear as something super-added to an integral philosophy for Eckhart. Kurt Flasch's revival of the term “philosophy of Christianity” from nineteenth-century German philosophy, on the other hand, captures it rather well: “the intellect must not obey [the particular contents of

¹ *Sermo die b. Augustini Parisius habitus*, n.2 (LW V, 90,1).

² É. Zum Brunn, A. de Libera, *Métaphysique du Verbe et théologie négative*, pp.71-2.

³ For Gilson's early view, see the opening two chapters of *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* (London, 1950), and for his increasing conviction in the inseparability of Thomas' philosophy from revealed dogma, see idem., *The Philosopher and Theology* (New York, 1962) and idem., *Le Thomisme. Introduction à la philosophie de Saint Thomas d'Aquin*, 6th edn. (Paris, 1965).

revelation], but it must think them, and think the world and God according to its own standards”; it “signifies the strict and methodical treatment of the contents of faith by the light of pure reason”.¹

Eckhart's position in this regard arises directly from Albert the Great, whose estimation of the state of psychological science in his own day, as seen through the eyes of the Greco-Arabic tradition, still resounds: “I absolutely abhor the discussions which the Latin masters hold”.² The Latins, crucially, have failed to grasp the meaning of the “possible intellect” and that in which its perfection consists.³ Characteristic of Albert and Eckhart alike, then, is their strong use of the Peripatetic notion of intellectual felicity as the gradual conjunction or assimilation of the human “acquired” intellect (*intellectus adeptus*) with the divine thinking.⁴ This is what underlies Eckhart's methodological assumptions, and what enables him to state so baldly that “*ideo ergo est quod docet Moyses, Christus et philosophus, solum quantum ad modum differens*”;⁵ it is the same emphasis on the continuity of the intellectual ascent and union with the First, the history of which Albert received largely through the *Great Commentary* of Averroes on the *De anima*. It is, moreover, the same condemned by Jean Gerson in 1427-28, to whom we owe the distinction of “mystical” and “scholastic” theology, for asserting that there can be a “natural felicity” of the created intellect.⁶

According to Albert, the possible intellect, in itself nothing at all and therefore able to become all things, which Eckhart consistently equates with the humble man, traverses a path leading away from sensible particulars, moving ever toward both its own essential self-identity and its assimilation to God. Through this gradual ascent in the speculative sciences and gathering of intelligibles, *de die in diem*, the possible intellect becomes adequate to the content of the agent and finally is assimilated to it.

In addition to this Avicennian influence, there is the undeniable authority of the

¹ K. Flasch, *Maître Eckhart*, pp. 39 and 30. This brings to mind the dictum of Eriugena, “true authority is nothing other than reason in its undemonstrated form” (*Periphyseon* I, 513B).

² Albertus Magnus, *De anima* III, tr.2, c.1 (ed. Coloniensis, v. VII/1, 177,59-60).

³ Albertus Magnus, *De anima* III, tr.2, c.3 (ed. Coloniensis, v. VII/1, 179,88-180,2). Cf. K. Flasch, *D'Averroès à Maître Eckhart*, pp.64-75.

⁴ R.-A. Gauthier, “Trois commentaires averroïstes sur l'*Éthique à Nicomaque*,” *AHDLMA* 16 (1947/1948), pp.187-336 at p.279.

⁵ *In Ioh.*, n.185 (LW III, 155,5-7).

⁶ Z. Kaluza, “Gerson critique d'Albert le Grand,” in F. Cheneval, R. Imbach, Th. Ricklin (eds.), *Albert le Grand et sa réception au Moyen Âge. Hommage à Zénon Kaluza*, *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 45 (1998), pp.169-205.

theocentric anthropology of Dionysius, which places the unification (*henôsis*) and deification (*theôsis*) of the intellectual creature at the incomprehensible completion of divine providence.¹ For, at the outset of the ascent, argues Albert interpreting Dionysius, it is God's communication of faith that instills in the believer a “tension” toward the first truth: *fides (...) est lumen informans intellectum*.² This tension instills in the intellect the urge to unfold the universal content that it carries latent within itself; philosophy for Albert, as for Plato, is the recollection of the “universality” within oneself that is one's self.³ The henadic logic latent within this notion of a communicated “tension,” where it is derived from Proclus, will be important to grasping identity of *ens commune* and the divine *esse* in Meister Eckhart.

Now, although for Albert this is decidedly the movement of the intellect “in love”, it is not for that reason directed toward the first truth as “good”. On the contrary, Albert continues, to subsume the truth under the aspect of the good (*in verum per modum boni*) would remove from faith its foundation in the first truth “considered for itself”.⁴ Faith is intrinsically oriented toward infinite truth and that truth it receives, for according to Averroes the possible intellect is capable of an infinite object.⁵ Recognizing this, one must forgo any facile distinction, bequeathed to our imaginations by Gerson, between an 'experiential' mysticism and scholasticism, since here we have a theory of mystical union that occurs only in and through philosophical speculation. This is, furthermore, the destiny of intellect in its very nature, to know the separate intellects *per seipsum*; for his doctrine of divine filiation, of the deified human who is “*optimus in scientiis et virtutibus*”, Albert's authorities do not include the Evangelist, but Homer, Avicenna, and Hermes Trismegistus.⁶

The various articulations of this “continuity of experience and the experience of

¹ A. de Libera, *La mystique rhénane*, p.54, citing Dionysius, *The Divine Names* IX, 5 (PG 3, 912D).

² Albertus Magnus, *In III Sent.*, d.23, a.10, sol. (ed. Borgnet, v. 28, 424b); *ibid.*, a.8, sol., (419b). Cf. A. de Libera, *La mystique*, pp.53-6.

³ Cf. K. Flasch, *Maître Eckhart*, p.38.

⁴ É.-H. Wéber, “La relation de la philosophie et de la théologie selon Albert le Grand,” *Archives de Philosophie* 43 (1980), 559-588, at p.578, citing Albert, *In III Sent.*, d.23, a.2, ad.3 (ed. Borgnet, v. 28, 408).

⁵ Albertus Magnus, *Super Dionysium De div. nom.*, c.7, n.25 (ed. Coloniensis, v. XXXVII/1, 357,8). Cf. É. Wéber, “Eckhart et l'ontothéologisme: histoire et conditions d'une rupture,” in *Maître Eckhart à Paris. Une critique médiévale de l'ontothéologie*, eds. É. Zum Brunn, Z. Kaluza, A. de Libera, P. Vignaux, É. Wéber (Paris: PUF, 1984), p.63.

⁶ Albertus Magnus, *De intellectu et intelligibili*, II, tr. unicus (ed. Borgnet, v. 9, 517). See K. Flasch, *D'Averroès à Maître Eckhart*, pp.77-81.

continuity” in the mind's ascent to God,¹ and of God's operation in the mind can be subsumed within the “sapiential heritage of Albert”.² Eckhart follows Albert's notion of *veritas affectiva* and *intellectus affectivus* as the ascent of intellect enflamed by faith in love.³ A crucial passage in Eckhart's commentary on John (nn.47-50) employs the language of affectivity to describe the movement of soul from the reception of revelation toward union. It occurs through asking four questions in sequence, derived from “Aristotle,” “whether”, “what sort”, “what” and “why”. According to Eckhart, these questions are answered in sequence by the first two verses of John's Prologue.⁴ Presumably, they form the basic form of scientific enquiry as such, and even map on to the sequential ordering of the transcendentals. The transition from knowing the bare “that” of justice – simply hearing its definition, “a certain rectitude by which any one thing receives its due” – to asking “what sort” it is, already presupposes the presence of justice already “affecting” the mind and “soothing the heart”. The unity of affectivity and reason coincides with the “what”: Eckhart resorts to a passage from Hugh of St.-Victor, where the soul marvels at the sudden sweetness when the “awareness is exhilarated, and comes to forgetfulness of every misery”.⁵

Is this, after all, the mystical theology of Jean Gerson, which seeks to articulate systematically an “experience” of the divine that is already given? A capacity to know the First requires that the first is somehow already present within some 'faculty' of the soul, in the tension of the light of faith, as Dionysius taught. How this is expressed by the derivative place of the *modus boni*, however, is what interests us most, since it is this aspect of the collapse of theology and ethics that Eckhart pushes to its limit: the movement of humility, or the ceaseless negation of mediation and images toward perfect conformity with the Father, remains external to that end so long as it takes God as Good, where goodness can only stand for difference and a desire unconsummated.⁶ Even the tiniest creaturely image for Eckhart completely forecloses the advent of God in the soul.

¹ B. Mojsisch, “La psychologie philosophique d'Albert le Grand et la théorie de l'intellect de Dietrich de Freiberg,” *Archives de Philosophie* 43 (1980), 675-693, at pp.683-5. For the progression of the possible intellect toward its assimilation to God, see Albert, *De anima*, III, tr.3, c.11, (ed. Coloniensis v. VII/1, 222,91-94); idem, *Super Diony. myst. theo.*, c.1 (ed. Coloniensis, v. XXXVII/2, 463,73seqq).

² A. de Libera, *La mystique rhénane*, p.237 and p.12, citing L. Sturlese, “Alle origini della mistica speculativa tedesca. Antichi testi su Teodorico di Freiberg,” *Medioevo* 3 (1977), pp.21-87, at p.22.

³ Albertus Magnus, *In III Sent.*, d.23, a.17, sol., ed. Borgnet 28, p.434 and *ibid.*, a.2, ad.4, p.408.

⁴ *In Ioh.*, n.47 (LW III, 39,3-8). Eckhart is actually deriving this series of questions from Avicbron.

⁵ *In Ioh.*, n.49 (LW III, 40,11-5).

⁶ See, e.g., *Predigt* 71 (DW III, 159-180).

Thus his substantial departure from Albert's vision occurs in the loss of angelic mediation and most of the spiritual host of the Neoplatonic cosmology of which Albert is heir.

Rather than supernaturalizing all philosophy and subsuming metaphysics within sacred doctrine (Milbank),¹ Eckhart in fact presents the same notion of the natural felicity of intellect found in Albert the Great as the truth of the Christian standpoint. The humble man becomes the natural *locus* wherein God works. A Thomistic framework is inadequate. If we accept with Mark Jordan that Aquinas reserved the title of “philosophers” for those whom he regarded as unbelievers, he nonetheless establishes for philosophy its own sphere which the perfecting work of grace must not compromise;² like human nature, philosophy in its integrity must be preserved, which follows from its mediate role in the hierarchy of knowing. Aquinas recognized that the agreement of revealed and natural knowledge is imperfect in this life, while always assuming and pursuing their reconciliation. Since our knowing is sense-bound and therefore not angelic, we cannot now enjoy the perfect intuition of either God or singulars. Against this, Eckhart's total and ahistorical agreement of philosophy and revelation makes its demand: angelic mediation is completely subordinate to the immediacy and equality of the birth of the Word within the soul. For knowledge, he says, “runs ahead, leading the way and breaking through so that God's only-begotten Son is born there.”³ It is the angels who 'lead the way' to this end, since knowledge “arises from similarity” and they, he continues, are most “like” God. But the intellect is only satisfied with equality and “never rests until it comes to the first image where all things are one” and therefore must intrinsically surpass even the angelic host. Augustine, Avicenna and the *Liber de Causis* are in agreement that the “height of the soul” or “the noble soul” and God share “a mutual glance [...] founded in the root and source of all good, namely order”.⁴ Since “being and knowing are completely one”, this equality – according to Eckhart's doctrine of the *imago Dei*, for which see below – brings the soul back to the source of all names and intelligibility: the purely undifferentiated font of personhood and the equal diversity of the Word which he calls the Ground, logically prior to Trinitarian relations.

Lesemeister and *Lebemeister*, Eckhart transposes Thomas' heavenly accord of

¹ J. Milbank, “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics,” *New Blackfriars*, 76 (1995), pp.49-59.

² See W.J. Hankey, “Why Philosophy Abides for Aquinas,” *The Heythrop Journal* 42:3 (2001), pp.329-348.

³ *Predigt 3* (DW I, 48,8-49,2). The following quotations are taken from this sermon.

⁴ *In Gen.* II, n.139 (LW I, 606,11-607,2).

revelation and natural reason to our present life. But rather than “evacuating” metaphysics of philosophy in the name of *sacra doctrina*, as a “philosopher of Christianity”, Eckhart only more completely assumes the independence of philosophy in its full accord with revelation. It all depends on what Eckhart himself regards as 'pure reason'. This brings us back to the impasse at the beginning of the commentary on John.

Eckhart explains his own method and intention at several points in the *Expositio in Iohannem*: following Romans 1.20, he purposes to show how the articles of the Christian faith can be expounded (*exponere*) by arguments taken from the natural philosophers.¹ When Aquinas gives his own view on the harmony of faith and reason, he qualifies those arguments as *similitudines* of their theological reality.² Ontologically, this is reflected in Thomas' account of participation, where God is not said to communicate his essence fully to creatures but is rather participated by them *per similitudinem* so that, essentially, he remains unparticipated.³ These for Aquinas are also the means (if one may say) of God's knowing creatures in themselves insofar as he knows himself as imitable.⁴ But the participation of creatures in their perfection and God's knowledge of them are two sides of the same coin: the divine ideas for Thomas are simply God's knowledge of how his essence can be imitated in a determinate way, and it belongs to that knowledge to produce both a participated likeness and a composite difference from itself.⁵ The point is that it belongs to this similitude as such to be something distinct and therefore composite – a difference that occurs within the common being which is the first effect of God's willed activity.⁶ *Esse* as subsistent intellect and will remains above the determinations which it causes.

Eckhart, however, simplifies Aquinas' ontology: *Est quidem deus in quolibet, ut*

¹ *In Ioh.*, nn.2-3.96.124-5 (LW III, 4,9; 83,5-7; 108,3-109,2).

² Aquinas, *Super Boetium de Trinitate*, q.2, a.3 (ed. Leonine v. 50, 98,118-99,130).

³ Aquinas, *In librum beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio* [henceforth: *In De div. nom.*], cap. II, lect.3, n.158 (ed. Pera, 51).

⁴ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [henceforth: *ST*], Ia.14.5: 'Alia autem a se videt non in ipsis sed in seipso, in quantum essentia sua continet similitudinem aliorum ab ipso.'

⁵ *Ibid.*, Ia.15.2: 'Ipse enim essentiam suam perfecte cognoscit: unde cognoscit eam secundum omnes modum quo cognoscibilis est. Potest autem cognosci non solum secundum quod in se est, sed secundum quod est participabilis secundum aliquem modum similitudinis a creaturis.'

⁶ See W.J. Hankey, *God in Himself*, pp.97-102 and R. A. Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp.113-116, who cites *De potentia*, q.3, a.16, ad 4: '...illud quod est causa entis in quantum est ens, esse causam omnium differentiarum entis, et per consequens totius multitudinis entium'.

*illud ens est, in nullo autem, ut illud est hoc ens.*¹ God is “without distinction” and “without the *propria*” which distinguish creatures from him, and therefore is present to them immediately as what is indistinctly common to them all. Whereas Thomas, against Platonist tendencies, insists on separating the abstract, or common, from the actual,² Eckhart collapses them and so unites the ideal, the causal and the actual. Therefore the divine mysteries are no longer veiled by the separation of common being and the subsisting divine essence, but “for those with ears to hear,” are present as the metaphysical foundation of the other sciences. The Trinity and Incarnation are, moreover, fully articulated in the doctrine of the transcendentals.

The passageway into this standpoint of the *principium* becomes clearer when one considers Eckhart's correction of Augustine. In each passage from *In Iohannem* where Eckhart repeats his methodological intention, he includes the same correction of Augustine's verdict in *Confessiones* VII, concerning what the bishop found and had not found of John's Prologue in the *libri Platoniorum*.³ What was lacking, Augustine maintains, is any notion that God “came into his own” -- that is, the doctrines of inhabitation and the Incarnation.⁴ Augustine's criticism of the Platonists had been often an authority in Eckhart's time for positing the separation of natural and mystical knowledge.⁵

Eckhart's correction of Augustine is enabled by his inheritance of a more developed Platonism, primarily through the Peripatetic tradition, the *Liber de causis* and a first-hand reading of Proclus.⁶ This allows Eckhart to preserve the Augustinian

¹ *In Ioh.*, n.206 (LW III, 174,4-5).

² J. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas. From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington: CUA Press, 2000), p.122.

³ Augustine, *Confessions* VII.ix.13-14 (BA 13, 608ff.).

⁴ *In Ioh.*, nn.2-3.96.124-5 (LW III, 4, 9; 83, 5-7; 108, 3-109, 2).

⁵ B. Mojsisch, *Meister Eckhart: Analogy, Univocity and Unity*, trans. O. Summerell (Philadelphia: B.R. Gruner, 2001), 7-8, note 17.

⁶ It is clear that Eckhart had read Proclus' *Elements of Theology*. Lacking any direct citation or other evidence of the *In Parmenidem* of Proclus, Carlos Steel and Josef Koch both reject its influence (see citations in A. de Libera, *La mystique rhénane*, p.64, n.30). Raymond Klibansky, however, (*The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition*, p.26) finds a clear precedent for Eckhart's notion of the *negatio negationis* – a phrase which Proclus never used – in Book VII of *In Parmenidem*, 1172 (trans. Morrow-Dillon, 523-524), where the One is said to be “the cause of so-called transcendent negations [that is, a double-negative indicating a positive], yet does not participate in any of them, nor is any of them”. The influence of this notion on the *coincidentia oppositorum* of Cusanus and Bruno, Klibansky notes, is manifest. Cusanus, of course, developed this in part through his reading of Eckhart, as I shall explain. Ruedi Imbach, (“Le (Néo-)Platonisme médiéval,” p.433) also holds that the Eckhartian *negatio negationis* is a “speculative synthesis” of Aristotle's self-thinking thought, Exodus 3.14 and the One of

framework of philosophy as conversion, and the relation of interior and exterior – that is Augustine's doctrine of the ceaseless presence of the Word is found already within, hiddenly operating as the basis for our hearing the word spoken without (*foris*). The frame, however, as I set out in Chapter Three, is inhabited by a doctrine of “essential causality,” derived from Proclus by Dietrich. Eckhart, in turn, takes this theory and places it as the metaphysical first principles of John; according to Eckhart, the Gospel *is* the science of “being *qua* being,” identical with the science of first causes and “emanation” which, “in the proper, prior and preeminent sense takes place in generation” -- in the Father's begetting the Son, both *in divinis* and *in natura*.¹ Thus the Augustinian conception of philosophy as inherently theological, as the “essentially *amor* or *studium sapientiae*,” which seeks to know God and therein achieve blessedness,² is in fact *superceded* by Eckhart, precisely by finding Wisdom equally present in every causal process, “for those who have ears to hear.”

What Augustine did not find in the Platonists, Robert Crouse argues, is the doctrine of the “*intellectus fidei*,” a notion which captures the reform which Augustine strikes at the very foundation of philosophical method. What occurs between the Word *intus* and *foris* is essentially a “dialogue”.³ It is the same *Principium* or eternal Word in whom God created all things, who speaks to use outwardly in the Gospel, and who abides in the mind as its constant teacher and guide.⁴ As a consequence of the fall of man, the *principium* must appear outwardly to kindle the recollection of what is eternal within. All finite things are incapable of instilling in the soul its love for the infinite source of its being. Therefore, in *De trinitate*, this appears as the necessity of the externality of *fides*:

Proclus”. It is the intention of this thesis to show that Imbach and Klibansky are entirely correct; Eckhart develops a Procline understanding of unity *but presents it as if it is entirely in accord with the traditionally “Aristotelian” doctrine of the transcendentals* – whereas Nicholas distinguishes these two orders. Eckhart’s levelling of these two orders is absolutely essential to grasping the oft-misunderstood distinction between the divine Ground or essence and the Trinitarian Persons. On the coincidence of opposites in Bonaventure, see W. Hankey, “*Secundum rei vim vel secundum cognoscentium facultatem*: Knower and known in the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius and the Proslogion of Anselm,” in J. Inglis (ed.), *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition in Islam, Judaism and Christianity* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2001), pp.126-150.

¹ *In Ioh.*, nn. 444 and 8 (LW III, 380, 13-14 and 8, 10-13): ‘processio sive productio et emanatio, de quibus a loquimur, proprie, primo et maxime locum habet in generatione.’ On John the Evangelist as the second patron saint of the Dominican Order, and the cult that formed around him as the archetype of the deified human, see works of J. Hamburger cited in the bibliography.

² R. Crouse, “St. Augustine's *De Trinitate*: Philosophical Method,” ed. E. Livingstone, *Studia Patristica* 16 (1985), pp.501-510, citing G. Madec.

³ R. Crouse, “St. Augustine's *De Trinitate*,” p.504.

⁴ R. Crouse, “St. Augustine's *De Trinitate*,” p.505, citing Augustine, *Conf.*, XI.viii.10 (BA, v. 14, 288).

the light of the mind is too weak to apprehend the Blessed Trinity until it is “purged” and “strengthened” by the *iustitia fidei*.¹

The role of *iustitia* in Meister Eckhart coincides with that of truth, and truth with the *principium* in which the Father or the One makes all things equal to himself. To anticipate the analysis that follows, the equality of truth which Eckhart will continually insist upon means that the *principium* equally traverses all finite essences, and speaks through all of them. The justified soul (*iustus*) takes every created thing as the expression of the infinite.²

Therefore one who is seeking some such good, especially justice, equally and at the same time finds wisdom and the other gifts, which he had neither sought, reckoned or intended, according to Isaiah and Romans, “They found me who did not seek after me” [Is. 65.1; Rm. 10.20]. [...] Thus in any one thing he finds all things and all things come to him.

This inclusive, unified sense of justice has precedence over all others for Eckhart. He collapses Aquinas' distinction of *iustitia acquistia* (the 'moral' perfection of an individual considered in relation to their fellows)³ into *iustitia infusa* (the justice given by grace enabling the submission of man's highest faculties to God).⁴ This is hardly accidental, since he, following Aquinas,⁵ (*iustitia quae est apud Deum*) repeatedly equates justification with that which makes man “like” God:⁶

The happiness of the just man and God's happiness are one happiness because the just man is only happy where God is happy. St. John says, “The Word was with God”. He says “with” [*apud*], and this is why the just man is like God: God is justice. Therefore, whoever is in justice is in God and is God.

Theologia sive ethica: the unity of divine, natural and moral sciences in the Word is what

¹ R. Crouse, “St. Augustine's *De Trinitate*,” p.506, citing Augustine, *De Trinitate* I.i.3 and I.ii.4 (BA, v. 15, 90-92; 94).

² *In Sap.*, nn.106.108 (LW II, 442, 8-12; 444, 4-8): ‘Sic ergo quaerens tantum unum quodlibet bonum, praecipue iustitiam, invenit aequae sive pariter sapientiam et cetera dona, quae non quaesivit nec cogitavit, nec intendit, secundum illud Is. 64 et Rom. 10: invenerunt qui non quaesierunt me. [...] Sic ergo in uno quolibet invenit omnia et veniunt sibi omnia.’

³ Aquinas, *ST*, IIaIIae.58.5, IaIIae.113.1.

⁴ Aquinas, *ST*, IaIIae.113.1.

⁵ Aquinas, *ST*, IaIIae.100.12.

⁶ *Predigt* 39 (DW II, 252,1-253,3). cf. *In Ioh.*, n.48.

the *iustus* both knows and is.¹

What follows is in some ways merely an explication, and correction, of a remark made in passing by Robert Crouse noting the shift in the fourteenth-century, when “the traditional anthropology of the *imago trinitatis* could no longer carry conviction,” since “radically new and different directions of thought about human nature and human destiny” were afoot.² Putting Duns Scotus' *haecceitas* (thisness) side by side with Eckhart's heralding of an “absolute unitary ground of the self,” of “pure subjectivity, in the presence of the infinite,” Crouse sketches a striking portrait of a period in which an attentiveness to irreducible singularity meant the destruction of the “mutual co-inherence” of knowing and loving suspended in the notion of the *imago trinitatis*.

To say nothing about Scotus, I will show that Crouse is right to say that Eckhart is operating with a doctrine of unity that is “new” in relation to Latin Christianity: it is the tension displayed when the Procline henology is merged with the transcendental metaphysics of Avicenna and the noetic theories of Albert, Dietrich and Averroes. It belongs, moreover, to a more lengthy revelation of the theology of Proclus among the schools, which began essentially with Albert the Great – although he wasn't aware of this until his later years. It is not true, however, that Eckhart in any way saw himself as abandoning the theology of the *imago trinitatis*. For him, there is only one image, and this cannot have any foundation apart from the divine essence, whether this image is the Only-Begotten or an adopted son; the *imago* has no standing apart from its exemplar, its exemplar is nothing else than the manifestation in its image. The Ground is nothing but the Persons, although it is irreducible to any of them.

My intention, therefore, is to explore the tension of these two conceptions of unity in Eckhart's thought by illustrating its consequences in the devaluation of the transcendental Good beneath the Procline One.³ Overall, Eckhart conceives the Good in

¹ *Predigt* 39 (DW II, 258,5-6).

² R. Crouse, “Trinitarian Anthropology in the Latin Middle Ages,” pp.71-72.

³ *In Ioh.*, n.562 (LW III, 490,8-491,3): 'Unde secundum hoc bonum ipsum proprie principium est et fons creaturarum; eo enim, quod quid creatum est, bonum est, et quo bonum est, creatum est. Hinc est quod de singulis, ut creata sunt, Gen. 1 dicitur: *vidit deus quod esset bonum*. Et sub hoc sensu bene dicebant antiqui bonum non esse in deo, multo minus quam in mathematicis, sed ipsum nominari bonum pro

terms of its traditional transcendental determination; it is convertible with being *and adds the notion of an end which is not present*. That determination, Eckhart repeats following Averroes, does not belong in mathematics nor, *a fortiori*, in theology which cannot regard being from the standpoint of efficient and final causation, which physics knows, but only the final cause. The Ground indeed appears as the subjective side of an objective infinity, for what the subordination of the Good to the True entails, as I explain, is an understanding of essence in general as theophany – not simply of the divine being, but of all things caused by it. *Theologia sive ethica*: metaphysics belongs to the humble soul – that alone is the criterion. Its object, “being as such” or *ens commune*, is known only to the *iustus* who relates to all things uniformly and indistinctly, having become the word or image of the infinite Being which has sent him.

tanto, quia ipse est causa, ratio et principium boni'; *In Gen.* II, n.54 (LW I, 522,9-10): '»bonum enim non est in mathematicis«, ut ait philosophus, et multo minus in divinis, ubi nulla est factio, nihil factum'; *In Gen.* I, n.68 (LW I, 232,4-5): 'Propter quod in »mathematicis non est bonum«, ut ait philosophus, et multo minus in metaphysicis.'

Chapter Two: Dialectical Metaphysics in the *Tripartite Opus*

It holds that it [truth] pertains to cognitive being and to cognition, while the good pertains to extra-mental or to natural being. It is utterly one thing to speak about the reasons of things and the cognition thereof, and another to talk of external things in nature, just as it is one thing to speak about substance and another talk of an accident. Those who have not considered this often lapse into error.¹

In addition, it is the case that Parmenides and Melissus, in book 1 of the Physics, posited only one being; while of this- or that-being they posited a plurality, such as fire, earth, and the like, just as Avicenna attests in his Physics.²

The aim of this Chapter is to show that principles of Eckhart's philosophical theology place the finite, distinct creature and the infinite, indistinct *esse* in complete opposition; a comparison with the Angelic Doctor is most helpful here, which will be undertaken relative to their respective doctrines of analogy. For Thomas, "all things are formally created goods by goodness just as by an inherent form, and by uncreated goodness as by an exemplary form"; for Eckhart, "every good and perfection, furthermore the being of a creature would be from without, from another, nor from the creature itself nor from any part of it, or moreover from something formally inherently possessed."³ More than simply a difference of theological beginning points, it will be shown that this opposition is present in Eckhart's earliest Latin and vernacular writings and that, moreover, it forms the basis of a *dialectical* thought. Dialectical, that is, to the extent that this absolute opposition of common and the particular is played out within a variety of metaphysical perspectives, where being and non-being can be reciprocally posed of God and creature, depending on what standpoint is assumed. His difference from Aquinas is, therefore, the function of a different conception of unity that allows Eckhart to identify the common

¹ *In Ioh.*, n.514 (LW III, 445,9-14): 'Ex quo patet quod [verum] pertinet ad ens cognitivum et ad cognitionem, bonum autem pertinet ad ens reale sive ad ens naturale. 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.'

² *Prolog. op. prop.*, n.5 (LW I, 168,8-11): 'Ad hoc facit quod Parmenides et Melissus, I Physicorum, ponebat tantum unum ens; ens autem hoc et hoc ponebat plura, puta ignem et terram et huiusmodi, sicut testatur Avicenna in libro suo Physicorum.'

³ Aquinas, *De veritate*, q.21, a.4 (ed. Leonine, v.50, 601,146-149): 'omnia sunt bona creata bonitate formaliter sicut forma inhaerente, bonitate vero increata sicut forma exemplari'; Meister Eckhart, *Sermo XIX*, n.188 (LW IV, 175,10-10): 'bonum omne et perfectio, adhuc autem et esse sit creaturae ab extra, ab alio, non a se ipsa nec ab aliquo sui aut etiam ab aliquo habituali formaliter inhaerente.' For this opposition, see W. Goris, *Einheit als Prinzip und Ziel*, p.379.

and the divine.

To have a sense of this identity, consider the correspondence of *theologia sive ethica* as present in Eckhart's earliest works, such as the *Councils on Discernment (Die rede der unterscheidunge)*. These are conferences given to young Dominican novitiates either preparing for or having recently taken their vows, dating from 1294-1298. Obedience, he explains, is a "virtue above all virtues", as primarily belonging to "empty spirit [who] can do everything."¹ Through submission and passivity, the humble or poor spirit for Eckhart is thereby necessarily filled with divine grace. For such souls, once they have become empty of all finitude, "God must perform all [their] works":²

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.

The theological standpoint in Eckhart therefore coincides with an ethical one. To have God as the common intention of all one's actions coincides with a complete abandonment of self as the root of one's own as something distinct from God: "Take a look at yourself, and whenever you find yourself, deny yourself. That is the best of all."³

This denial is the means of securing the habit of "interiority" (*inwendicheit*) which has only God for its object, who is thereby found in the very inwardness all images once deprived of their externality.⁴ It turns out that what soul at first supposed to be her own in distinction is nothing at all; thus self-denial finds fullness and not annihilation, and comes to possess what is in truth most proper to soul:⁵

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 that 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.

¹ *Die rede der unterscheidunge*, c.2 (DW V, 190,6-9; trans. *Essential Eckhart*, 248).

² *Ibid.*, c.6 (DW V, 201,12-202,3; trans. *Essential Eckhart*, 252).

³ *Ibid.*, c.3 (DW V, 196,3-4; trans. *Essential Eckhart*, 250).

⁴ *Ibid.*, c.6 and c.21 (DW V, 207,1-2; 277,1-3; trans. *Essential Eckhart*, 253, 275). He is clear that this inwardness must be "practiced".

⁵ *Ibid.*, c.23 (DW V, 298,1-7; trans. *Essential Eckhart*, 282).

Everything inward, he continues, is then “as much my own as God's own”. This is the sense in which we are to understand the Thuringian's identification of the common and God: “whatever is common insofar as it is common is God, and whatever is not common insofar as it is not common is not God”.¹ So the common operation of God and soul is somehow what is most proper to each, but therefore must belong to a different order than the *propria* which are marks of finitude and multiplicity in all non-intellectual creatures.

The idea of “the common” brings us to the unifying feature of their spiritual life: concretely, they aimed to live the ideal of Christian perfection apart from the institutional forms of their day, which developed with theological views of the indistinguishable “identity” of the “perfect soul” with God as the “natural” perfection of the human. According to the Brethren of the Free Spirit, for example, such a deified individual would dwell in a freedom beyond the bond of sin, and without the need of the external grace offered through the sacraments.² Indeed the way Eckhart describes the necessity, immediacy and propriety with which God's grace must fill an “empty soul,” and the liberty this brings, flirts with the beguine spirituality of Marguerite Porète, who was executed in Paris in 1310, with whose work Eckhart was undoubtedly familiar.³ This inwardness which is the most proper to both soul and God is also most intimate to all essences, and Eckhart identifies it with God's act of being.⁴ We already have a sense of the consequences of the collapse of *esse* and *ens commune*, and have located it as one of his key presuppositions. Seeing how Eckhart's position cannot be reduced to that of the Brethren involves finding in his metaphysics a relation of cause and effect that is above and within the common being uniting God and the soul. In other words, more nuances must be given to the difference of the *generatio* that belongs to Christ by nature and the regeneration elevating the soul by grace.

¹ *Sermo VI*, n.53 (LW IV, 52,3-4; trans. *Teacher and Preacher*, 213): 'Secundo nota quod omne commune, in quantum commune, deus, et omne non commune, in quantum non commune, deus non est, sed creatum est.'

² For a general summary and bibliography regarding the many forms of conversion Northern Europe in this period, see J. Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life*, pp.11-44.

³ *Ibid.*, pp.25-26.

⁴ *In Ioh.*, n.304 (LW III, 253,7-8): 'Et hoc est quod deus solus dicitur illabi animae ab Augustino, sed et illabitur essentiis omnium'; *Ibid.*, n.238 (LW III, 199,4-5): 'Propter quod ipse solus illabitur rerum essentiis'. The attribution to Augustine is incorrect.

2.1: Efficient Causality and Intrinsic Denomination

In question 21, articles 4 and 5, of the *De veritate*, Aquinas asks how a creature can be called good in virtue of its essential being without thereby becoming identified with the first Good ('*utrum bonum creatum sit bonum per essentiam suam*'). The meaning of *per essentiam* for Thomas, explains Rudi Te Velde, can often be simply interchangeable with *per se* as opposed to *per aliud*, but especially indicates that something has a certain quality "in identity with its essence."¹ This distinction is crucial for the being and unity of a thing, which can be attributed to it *per se* and not *per essentiam*, which, of course, belongs to God alone. In the case of the Free Spirit, however, such an identity would be acceptable. While Aquinas is certainly opposed to that resolution of the dilemma, he is also adverse to the solution of its other horn which would have the creature extrinsically related to the Good.

Aquinas concludes with Boethius, in whose *De hebdomadibus* he first considered this particular issue, that the more feasible option is the second: creatures must somehow partake of the first Goodness without thereby becoming identical to it. But Aquinas' own solution to the dilemma requires that Boethius' doctrine of participation be expanded.² Its limitations emerge from the following reasoning. Goodness, while convertible with being, is not synonymous in meaning. Rather than developing a directly transcendental approach by considering this convertibility in itself above Aristotle's ten categories, Boethius asks what "good" signifies in the manner of any other accident: what does the determination of 'being good', like 'being round' or 'being blue', indicate about a substance? He argues that goodness belongs to a thing only insofar as it exists, and since composite entities cannot account for their own existence, we call a thing good insofar as it is created. It therefore derives its goodness from a relation to its principle. Thomas concludes that for Boethius a thing can be called good in a twofold sense: either in its disposition or relation to the first Good, or in that it receives a "superadded" *virtus* which bestows power to operate perfectly, and to exercise an abundant goodness upon its inferiors.³ But, for Thomas, neither of these kinds of participation do justice to the

¹ R. Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, p.27, italics removed.

² *Ibid.*, pp.8-20. See Boethius, *The Theological Tractates and the Consolation of Philosophy*, ed. and trans. H.F. Steward, E.K. Rand and S.J. Tester (Cambridge: Loeb, 1978), pp.42-46.

³ Aquinas, *In librum Boetii De hebdomadibus expositio* [henceforth: *In de hebdomadibus*], lect.4 (ed.

substantial goodness a thing intrinsically possesses in virtue of its own form. In the contemporaneous *quaestiones* in *De veritate*, he is more critical about the limits of Boethius' view and develops a third option, which takes us back to his transposition of the external *superior* in Augustine. Both Augustine and Boethius are grouped together with the Platonists: Augustine posits that changeable creature cannot intrinsically possess the changelessness that belongs to the creator but must always participate in its perfection as something external, while its essence remains in the changeable realm of degree, of the "more and less"; Boethius makes no separation of the goodness that belongs to a particular essence, its "formal goodness", and the first Good.¹ Participation is conceived extrinsically since both accept the "Platonic" assumption that what is separate in thought is also separate in being. If a quality is common to a manifold, it therefore abides changelessly above the variety of the variable.² So long as common forms are regarded as separate, creatures in themselves must always relate extrinsically to the common as an image to its exemplar. Such a relation to the Good, however, inadequately captures its nature as a self-diffusive communication of itself to its effects.

While Thomas preserves the notion of a separate idea of the Good, he embeds the Neoplatonic standpoint firmly within the four causes of Aristotle's *Physics*.³ The Platonists can only think participation as the exemplary relation of a cause to its effects, which yields the dilemma of either univocal identity or extrinsic denomination.⁴ But the

Leonine, v. 50, 280,155). See Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, pp.17-19

¹ Aquinas, *De veritate*, q.21, a.4, obj.2 (ed. Leonine, v. 22/3, 600,27-29): 'creatura non denominatur bona ab aliqua formali bonitate in ipsa existente, sed ipsa bonitate divina'.

² *Ibid.*, corp (ed. Leonine, 602,160-164): 'inveniebat [Plato] bonum esse commune omnibus bonis, et posse intelligi bonum non intelligendo hoc vel illud bonum. Unde et ponebat bonum esse separatum praeter omnia bona particularia'.

³ Aquinas, *ST*, Ia.5.4.

⁴ Denomination (*denominatio*) is the Latin equivalent to paronymous predication in Aristotle's *Categories*, where a certain (concrete) name of a qualified thing (white, *album*), is said to derive from its (abstract) corresponding quality (whiteness, *albedo*). With Boethius, this logical relation is re-Platonized; the application of Aristotle's *Categories* must "undergo a transformation" (*cuncta mutantur*) when they are applied *in divinis*, since the simplicity of God does not receive predicates like a divided creature (see Boethius, *De trinitate*, c.4). As with the *De hebdomadibus*, the question involves seeing a secondary good, which is good in virtue of its being, from the Good *per se*. In his commentaries on Boethius in the 12th century, Gilbert of Poitiers gives *denominatio* a causal and technical application. A work of art, for example, can be called "human" denominatively, because it is the effect of a human artificer. *Denominatio* therefore occupies the place that the *analogia entis* will hold in the late 13th century, in the bestowal of a divine goodness on a finite creature, and resolves the dilemma of the *De hebdomadibus* "onto-théo-logiquement", since it reverses Boethius' beginning-point in the *De trinitate*, and presumes that the semantic derivation mirrors the *fluxus* of the divine Good toward creatures. See Gilbert of Poitiers, *The Commentaries on Boethius*, ed. N. Häring (Toronto: PIMS, 1966), p.220, nn.150-151. Cf. A. de Libera, *Métaphysique et noétique. Albert le Grand* (Paris: Vrin, 2005), pp.144-

Good considered in itself, Aquinas maintains with Aristotle, has the *ratio* of an end or final cause, and therefore is primarily operative as an object of will. The Neoplatonic priority of Goodness over Being only extends as far as the priority of the final cause over the other three will allow. Aquinas insists that “actuality is a higher perspective than causation”;¹ so the causative priority of Goodness must actually depend on at least two prior moments. Even if we compare *ens* and *bonum* according to their idea alone, Aquinas insists that being is prior:² following the *De interpretatione* (I.2, 16a3), a *ratio* or idea that is signified by a name is that which intellect conceives about the thing. Since the first thing to come to intellect is the actuality of being, the idea of Goodness is posterior to that of *ens*. Likewise the causal priority of the Good even *in divinis* is conditioned by being. If the Good is to be genuinely self-diffusive, it must impart something of itself upon something similar to itself. And since it belongs to God as the first principle to contain all perfections in the highest mode, he must supremely exist, since something must actually exist before it can possess any perfection.³ Once Goodness is rooted in the priority of Being, Aquinas can reintroduce the Platonic exemplary relation between God and the ideal *similitudines* of creatures which are known to God as various proportioned imitations of his excellence. But this is not enough to secure the integral goodness of an essence. Since such essences are by nature finite and composite, they are not, like God, identical to their act of being, and therefore relate to him as an extrinsic source primarily of their being, and subsequently as their object of desire. This prior formal relation of idea to *esse* therefore establishes the basis for the efficient causation of the creature according to that idea, whereby it receives its intrinsic goodness flowing from the self-diffusive good. The formal moment is logical, not temporal, since it fulfills the similitude required by the axiom, derived from Aristotle (*Metaphysics* XII.3, 1070a4), that “every agent produces its like” (*omne agens agit sibi simile*); the essence has no existence apart from its *esse*, but is merely in a potential relation to its act of being.⁴ Only when an

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¹ W. Hankey, *God in Himself*, p.5.

² Aquinas, *ST*, Ia.5.2.

³ Aquinas, *In De div. nom.*, cap.V, lect.1, nn.634-639 (ed. Pera, 235-236) and *ST*, Ia.13.11 with Ia.12.1, ad.2.

⁴ See *In I Sent.*, d.36, q.2, a.3 (ed. Mandonnet, vol. 1, p.844) where Aquinas explicitly connects Aristotle's axiom (derived from natural and artificial causal processes) with the relation of creatures to the divine essence as their exemplary divine idea. Cf. J. Wippel, *Thomas Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, The Étienne Gilson Series 16 (Toronto: PIMS, 1993), pp.2-10.

essence participates in *esse* is it said to be good: *nihil bonum nisi ens*.¹

Thus, for Thomas, a creature can participate in the first goodness by way of its own substantial and intrinsic being, since that is communicated to it by God as an efficient cause. The modification of Aristotelian efficient causality, primarily understood as the explanation of motion, to mean the bestowal of being, is an innovation of Avicenna.² The connection of intrinsic perfection and efficient causality brings us to the heart of the matter separating Eckhart and Aquinas.

For Eckhart, the common finds its proper place in God and the soul, whereas it is contracted and becomes other than itself in divided creatures where they are opposed to one another. Being is not at home with, nor is “proper” to determinate beings as determinate. One finds this apparent contradiction intimated at the very outset of the prefatory remarks of Eckhart’s *Tripartite Opus*, as he sets out a basic semantic rule regarding the terms of a proposition. The first of the two *notanda* explains,³

It is one thing to speak and to speak of and notice general terms such as being, unity, truth and goodness, and those others similar to them which convert with being; it is another to speak concerning the others which are below these and are contracted to some genus, species or nature of being.

The difference between these two kinds of terms consists in their universality, not only in reason but also in reality, which reflects their relation to matter. Unlike accidents, which always inhere in a particular substance and are therefore always contracted according to a certain genus and category, there are general terms whose predication transcends all categories. We have seen already Aquinas’ opposition to reducing a thing’s goodness to an accident, since this dissociation of being and goodness, even at the level of the particular substance, and the subsequent need for a superadded good, would entail an infinite regress.⁴ There must be a sense in which goodness belongs both to God and to the inherent form without being reducible to either.

¹ Aquinas, *ST*, Ia.5.2, ad.4.

² Avicenna latinus, *Liber de philosophia prima* VI, c.1 (ed. Van Reit, 291,15-292,22): ‘...quoniam divini philosophi non intelligunt per agentem principium motionis tantum, sicut intelligunt naturales, sed principium essendi et datorem eius, sicut creator mundi’; VI, c.5 (ed. Van Reit, 347,91): ‘non enim omnis agens est principium motus, sicut dicitur [in VI, c.3].’

³ *Tabula prologum*, n.1 (LW I, 129,5-8): ‘Aliter loquendum est et sentiendum de terminis generalibus, puta de esse, unitate, veritate, bonitate et si quae sint huiusmodi quae cum ente convertuntur, aliter autem de aliis quae citra ista sunt et contracta ad aliquod genus, speciem aut naturam entis.’

⁴ R. Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality* pp.56-57, 62-63.

As Aristotle argues in *Ethics* I.6, the notion of a single subsistent Good to which all things are related is incoherent: assuming that all constituents relate to their genus univocally, if there is an idea of the Good, it can belong to only one of the categories, which is contrary to evidence. However, just as the limitations of the Aristotelian position for Aquinas are always felt when one considers divine things “in themselves”, so this criticism simply indicates that the separate Good cannot be *univocally* present among particular goods. The Platonists are right to assert a separate Good which is *bonum per se*, whereas they incorrectly posit separate species.¹

The key to Aquinas' response to Aristotle is therefore the “self-denomination” of Goodness.² Its universality is not the result of an abstraction falsely reified – an objection which would confuse the *id quo* (the abstract) with the *id quod* (concrete), and therefore turn the cause into a particular effect. As he already argued in his commentary on the *De hebdomadibus*, when Boethius distinguishes between the *esse* and the *id quod est* of composites, one must not take *ipsum esse* as the *subiectum essendi* – just as one would not take the abstract *currere* as the subject of *currens* – but rather the *id quod est* is the concrete subject of goodness.³ Therefore an infinite regress is obviated since a creature's similitude (its *id quo*) is a determinate and limited form of the first Goodness which subsists through itself, as God whose existence is his essence. Hence “the general form remains related to itself in any of its concrete instances”, as similitudes, analogates or modes, made concretely intrinsic through God's efficient causality.⁴ As will only be made explicit in John Duns Scotus, but which Eckhart and Aquinas assume, a term is transcendental insofar as it transcends every genus or category.⁵

While Aquinas' position here leaves him with the task of formulating a notion of analogy that will sustain the likeness of these various similitudes with their first principle in their proportional difference, Eckhart develops a more strict ontological separation. The difference between transcendental-common and special terms is so strong that they mutually exclude one another or, at least the proper excludes itself from the common

¹ Aquinas, *In de div. nom.*, cap.V, lect.1, n.634 (ed. Pera, 235); *ibid.*, cap. XIII, lect.2, n.981 (ed. Pera, 364).

² R. Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, pp.62-65.

³ Aquinas, *In De hebdomadibus*, lect.2 (ed. Leonine, 270,39-271,45).

⁴ R. Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, pp.64-65.

⁵ Cf. J. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, pp.383-384.

insofar as it “excludes something”.¹ Therefore the limitation of the Good in the participated likeness in Aquinas is unacceptable to Eckhart: the whole of existence is present to each thing that is.² Accordingly, in addition to the first *notandum* from the *Tabula prologorum* given above, the second states that inferior beings in no way affect their superiors, *sed e converso superiora imprimunt et afficiunt sua inferiora*. It is telling that when Eckhart repeats these two *notanda* in the *Prologus generalis* (nn.8-9), the *inferiora* are no longer simply the “special” terms contracted within a genus but are simply called accidents. Accidents, as he defines them, are said to be beings only “by analogy” in the sense that they refer *ad unum ens absolute quod est substantia*.³

To use Aristotle’s phrase, an accident is not a being, but “of being” (*Met.* VII.1, 1028a15). But Eckhart, as we have seen above, claims that one must “speak differently” about *communia* and accidents/species. He employs a semantic distinction to illustrate his point: take a *circulus vini*, a sign placed outside a tavern indicating that there is wine within. Just as urine can be called healthy, and thus can signify that there is health in an animal, so the *circulus* is merely a sign pointing to a single term which is entirely external.⁴ Accidents, like these signs, are their *analogum (ens)* only “*in obliquo*”. They have absolutely no ontological import aside from that external signification. According to Alain de Libera, Eckhart's innovation consists in his use of this commonplace semantic theory of paronyms in an analogical framework “which reduces creatures to accidents and accidents to signs and which therefore also reduces the ontological problem of the reality of analogates to the semantic problem of the semiotic status of sign and designation”.⁵ Eckhart's reduction however occurs in the context of more lengthy discourse on the Thomistic theory of unity of the substantial form as what alone “gives *esse*” whereby something is “intrinsicly” and “immediately” united to God.⁶ Since accidents, creatures and genus-species have all somehow been assimilated over against the *ens absolute* of substance, how is it that a creature as accident can on the one hand signify substance only as an *entia in obliquo* and on the other have as its “intrinsic cause”

¹ *In Sap.*, n.98 (LW II, 432,8): 'citra et praeter bonum, proprium est, non commune, aliquid excludit.'

² *In Exod.*, n.163 (LW II, 143,9-11): 'Pars enim esse non est esse nec per consequens dat esse, sicut nec pars hominis est homo'. Cf. *Sermo XXV.2*, n.267 (LW IV, 243,6-7): 'Praeterea esse commune est omnibus, non solum commune aut idem in omnibus.'

³ *In Exod.*, n.54 (LW II, 58,10).

⁴ *In Exod.*, n.54 (LW II, 58,10).

⁵ A. de Libera, *Le problème de l'être*, p.13.

⁶ *In Exod.*, nn.52-54 (LW II, 55,3-60,5).

a form uniting it immediately to God?

Analogy for Eckhart will thus differ significantly from Aquinas insofar as “Eckhart *immediately* relates the distinction between *ens* and *ens hoc aut hoc* to God and creature.”¹ The *transcendentia* are emphatically the *propria* of God, and merely “guests and strangers” in creatures.² Unlike Aquinas, then, goodness and justice are in creatures as “from something totally outside to which they are analogically ordered”, since they “have nothing of the form according to which they are analogically ordered rooted in positive fashion in themselves”.³ A creature is unable to “passively receive grace or any kind of perfection, especially a common one, insofar as it is a creature, or insofar as it is this and that; but only insofar as it is ordered to God”.⁴ This is precisely the extrinsic and accidental relation to God which Aquinas had determined to be the unsatisfactory solution of Boethius. This as the consequence of the excluded role of the Good in Eckhart's thought. This can be accounted for in large part by the stronger division of formal and efficient causality in his work, owing in part to the influence of Dietrich's anti-Thomistic treatise on *esse* and *essentia*. For Aquinas, who is aware of the tension between the good as relation and being as substance, what mediates the *ratio boni* to the *ratio entis* is the idea of perfection. Being is desirable (*appetibile*) to creatures insofar as it is their perfection, which is nothing else than their being in actuality (*in actu*); he therefore arrives in the *Summa* at the notion of intrinsic goodness (*ens perfectum*) where the *De veritate* regarded goodness strictly as a relation to a higher principle (*perfectivum alterius*).⁵ But for Eckhart, the *ratio veri* fulfills this role, which he regards simply as the purity of a thing from all admixture, in the unity of the concrete and abstract.⁶ This unity, only improperly achieved in composite beings, finds its perfection in intellect. As de Libera puts it:⁷

¹ J. Aertsens, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, p.343.

² See *Prol. op. Prop.*, nn.5-8 (LW I, 168,6-170,13); *In Ioh.*, n.99 (LW III, 85,13-15): 'dei proprium est esse indistinctum et ipse sola sua indistinctione distinguitur, creaturae vero proprium est esse distinctum. Distinctum autem proprie non recipit indistinctum.'

³ *In Ecc.*, nn.52-53 (LW II, 280,5-282,12).

⁴ *Sermo XXV.2*, n.266 (LW IV, 241,11-14).

⁵ R. Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, pp.51-53, citing *ST Ia.5.2*, ad.4.

⁶ *In Ioh.*, n.87 (LW III, 75,3-6): 'verum dicitur unumquodque ex duobus: primo si attingat formam substantialem illius naturae, secundo, si nihil alieni admixtum habent'; *In Exod.*, n.73 (LW II, 76,7): 'Veritas ergo est esse quod est'.

⁷ A. de Libera, *Le problème de l'être...*, p.20 (italics removed): “la logique de Thomas d'Aquin était une logique adaptée à un état de choses où aucune créature n'est son propre être, mais ayant l'être («nulla creatura est suum esse, sed est habens esse»), celle d'Eckhart sera une logique adaptée à un monde où

The logic of Thomas Aquinas was a logic adapted to a state of things where no creature is its own being, but has being (*'nulla creatura est suum esse, sed est habens esse'*), that of Eckhart will be a logic adapted to a world where no being is its proper being, but is without having being [...] (*'habens enim non habet et non habens habet'*).

Eckhart's result differs from Thomas', at least in part, because of their respective beginning points. Analogy for Eckhart assumes the identity of Being and God only to find that creatures receive God immediately as something infinitely beyond their finitude, while Aquinas moves from created perfections toward their source.

2.2: Essence and Existence in Creatures

The immediate relation of God and creature as *ens absolute* and *ens hoc aut hoc* displaces the mediating role of the *similitudo* and its intrinsic possession of being *via* the efficient cause in Aquinas. The formal cause contains the efficient cause in a higher and more perfect manner. Meister Eckhart will take up Aquinas' doctrine that *forma dat esse* and make this form, under its aspect of unity, the immediate presence of God to each thing. Every essential form simply is *esse* and gives *esse*, and it is this that metaphysics apprehends beyond all efficiency and finality.¹ But Eckhart's "monisme formel",² or in other words his association of God with the common and creatures as particular forms, however, avoids lapsing into pantheism. Creatures considered without God are accidents without a subject, and only exist insofar as they are "in God". But this apparently leaves us with the riddle of creatures losing themselves precisely to the extent that they are. As de Libera points out, the answer must come from an ontological understanding of the semiotics of sign and designation. Creatures possess some kind of reality precisely as signs, the being of which we must first account for, and the diversity of which we shall explain afterward.

aucun étant n'est son propre être, mais est sans avoir l'être [...] («habens enim non habet et non habens habet»)." De Libera is citing Aquinas, *Quodlibet* II, q.2, a.1 (ed. Leonine, v. 25/2, 214,37-38); Eckhart, *In Ioh.*, n.397 (LW III, 338,11-12).

¹ *In Exod.*, n.52 (LW II, 55,11); *In Ioh.*, n.338 (LW III, 287,1-4): 'quod in mathematicis non est efficiens neque finis, sed sola causa formalis speculatur, longe ergo fortius in divinis et metaphysicis solum esse considerat<ur>; esse autem omne est a forma vel forma est.'

² M. de Gandillac, *Maître Eckhart. Traités et sermons*, trad. J. Molitor, F. Aubier (Paris: Aubier, 1942), Introduction, p.18, n.25.

Whereas Eckhart's doctrine of analogy is explicitly constructed to show that creatures are in themselves a "pure nothing" apart from God, the principles set out (as in the first prefatory remarks to the *Opus tripartitum*) have the opposite intention: *non destruimus nec tollimus esse rerum aut esse rebus, sed constituimus*.¹ Turning to focus especially on this Prologues to the *Opus*, we can explain how Eckhart's dialectic of the common and distinct operates around the axis of the formal cause. He prefaces these Prologues with two logical principles.²

The first is that *ens* signifies *esse* alone, just as 'white signifies only the quality', as the Philosopher says.³ Similarly, one signifies only unity, true only truth, good only goodness.

The second is that it is one thing to speak and declare concerning being, and another concerning *this* being, and similarly of one-being and this-one-being, and so on. When something is called a being, one, true, or good, these are the only predicates of the proposition and are second adjacent. Yet when something is said to be a this-being, a this-one, and so on, such as man or stone or suchlike [i.e. *homo (est-ens) hoc*], then the 'this and that' are the predicate of the proposition, while the aforesaid common terms, such as being, are not the predicates nor are second adjacent, but are the copulae of the predicate with its subject.

The first remark is familiar and relates to this semantics of naming. Each concrete term, as we have seen, indicates primarily its abstract correlative. The general or transcendental extension of certain terms over others depends for Eckhart on whether or not they transcend being confined to a genus. If so, the separate abstract term can be said to cause the concrete instantiation. All other terms, *entia in obliquo*, depend on their inherence in those causes. C. Fabro correctly recognizes the formalizing tendency in Eckhart in this opening remark, insofar as it assumes the identity of the abstract and the concrete and does away with the correlative nature of Boethius' *id quod* and *id quo* which

¹ *Tabula prologorum*, n.4 (LW I, 132,10-11).

² *Tabula prologorum*, n.3 (LW I, 131,1-132,2): 'Primum est quod ens solum esse significat, sicut 'album solam qualitatem', ut ait philosophus, similiter unum solam unitatem, verum solam veritatem, bonum solam bonitatem. Secundum est quod aliter loquendum est et iudicandum de ente et aliter de ente hoc, similiter de uno et de uno hoc, de vero et de vero hoc, de bono hoc. Cum enim dicitur aliquid ens, unum, verum, bonum, tunc haec singula sunt praedicata propositionis et sunt secundum adiacens. Cum vero dicitur aliquid ens hoc, unum hoc, verum hoc, aut bonum hoc, puta homo vel lapis et huiusmodi, tunc li 'hoc et hoc' sunt praedicatum propositionis, et praemissa communia, puta esse, non sunt praedicata nec secundum adiacens, sed sunt copula praedicati cum subiecto.' Cf. *Prologus generalis* nn.8-10 (LW I, 152,8-156,3); *Prol. in op. prop.*, nn.2-8 (LW I, 166,2-170,13).

³ This reference here is ambiguous; it may be to either *Categories* V, 3b or *Metaphysics* VII.4, 1029b17.

Thomas had preserved.¹ A determination *x* simply is its abstraction, and that abstraction is only insofar as it is included in being which, for its part, signifies only the divine incommunicable *esse*. Indeed, Eckhart gives his definition of a name (what is “most proper to a thing which encompasses everything that belongs to it and is attributed to it”) in the context of the incommunicable Tetragrammaton.² Now God’s incommunicable supposit is in every way identical with his nature which, Eckhart concludes, does not exclude all names but is “common to all beings and names” as it is above them all.³ The incommunicable is the common; a substance is equally common to all of its accidents. Referring to the Psalms (33.4, 4.9), God’s name is *id ipsum*, where for Eckhart *id* refers to the nature, and *ipsum* to the supposit.⁴ Therefore “the Same” is incommunicable while “he”, some kind of unity, might have a more diverse signification.

Being is the most proper name of God since it includes all possible names as a superior cause contains its effects. But Eckhart places this Platonic maxim into a strictly Parmenidean framework. Being and names have been placed on the same level: “what does not participate in existence is not a being or a name” and therefore “what is without existence does not exist, is not a name, but a false, empty and phony name.”⁵ One cannot think nor say what is not, since “name is derived from knowledge” and all knowing, according to Avicenna, *praesupponit ens*.⁶ Just as “two contains one” so “*tale esse* contains *esse simpliciter*”.⁷ Thus a name itself is a being in virtue of its immediate relation to absolute, actual existence, which it presupposes and which, like unity, passes through all essences, founds the possibility of their being named, and can be reduced to none. We have already seen how the identification of *ens commune*, or *ens in quantum ens* with God (an amalgam of Avicenna and Averroes) in Eckhart produces his particular kind of theological-philosophical synthesis, but now we shall see how what is Parmenidean about this identity sets him apart from Aquinas in terms of their respective accounts of

¹ C. Fabro, *Participation et causalité selon s. Thomas d'Aquin* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1961), p.559.

² *In Exod.*, nn.163-165 (LW II, 142,11-146,2).

³ *In Exod.*, n.166 (LW II, 146,3-8): 'id, quod est super omne nomen, nullum nomen excludit, sed omne nomen generaliter includit et aequaliter indistincte, nec aliquod illorum per consequens est ipsi proprium praeter id, quod est super omne nomen, commune omnibus nominibus. Sed esse est commune omnibus entibus et nominibus. Per consequens igitur esse est nomen proprium dei solius.'

⁴ *In Exod.*, n.165 (LW II, 145,13-146,2).

⁵ *In Exod.*, n.167 (LW II, 146,15-16).

⁶ *In Exod.*, n.169 (LW II, 147,10-13), citing Avicenna, *Liber de philosophia prima* I, c.2 (ed. Van Reit, 12,30-32).

⁷ *In Exod.*, n.29 (LW II, 35,7-9), cf. A. de Libera, *Le problème de l'être*, pp.21-24.

essence and existence, which will account for the subordination of the efficient cause in Eckhart's thought.

The main paradox of Eckhart's Latin work emerges, according to de Libera, when he maintains that "la prédication «de tertio adiacente» n'a aucune valeur existentielle bien que tout nom, y compris le verb «est», signifie l'être".¹ We have an initial sense of the latter point, but the first reflects Eckhart's theory of predication, and stems from the second of the prefatory remarks given above. According to Aristotle in *De interpretatione* c.10 (19b19), the verb "is" can be used in two senses: either as part of the predicate (*homo est, homo [est] currens*) or as a copula indicating the coherence of two terms (*hoc est homo*). Aquinas would apply this to the two logical senses in which the (grammatical) infinitive "to be" is made determinate.² Now with Eckhart, predication *de secundo adiacente* involves the predication of the transcendentals, and therefore the thing as actually existing, while predicating a particular (*hoc*) of something has no existential value. We follow de Libera in illustrating Eckhart's theory as attempt to reconcile two rather opposed accounts of essence and existence, those of Aquinas (Avicenna) and Dietrich (Averroes).³

Aquinas' position reflects the importance of efficient causality in the constitution of creatures mentioned already. He argues that the names "ens homo," "homo" and "unus homo" each indicate the same reality but differ according to their *rationes*: "unus" reflects its indivision, "res" its bare quiddity, while "ens" is imposed according to its actual being (*ab ipso esse; ab actu essendi*).⁴ Therefore *est* has an existential value in both *secundo* and *tertio adiacens* propositions, attributing either actual existence (as copula) or existence with a certain determination (as predicate).⁵ Equally, regarding the name outside of the proposition, Aquinas posits a real distinction of essence and existence, which states that if existence is not implied in the logical definition of an essence, that essence can be conceived apart from its actual existence.⁶ The first

¹ A. de Libera, *Le problème de l'être*, p.19, also p.27.

² Aquinas, *In De hebdomadibus*, lect.2 (ed. Leonine, v.50, 270,19-26): 'Circa ens autem consideratur ipsum esse quasi quiddam commune et indeterminatum: quod quidem dupliciter determinatur; uno modo ex parte subiecti, quod esse habet; alio modo ex parte praedicati, utpote cum dicimus de homine, vel de quacumque alia re, non quidem quod sit simpliciter, sed quod sit aliquid, puta album vel nigrum.'

³ A. de Libera, *Le problème de l'être*, pp.16, 27, 46, 58.

⁴ Aquinas, *In IV Metaphysicorum*, lect.2, nn.550.553.558 (ed. Cathala-Spiazzi, 155).

⁵ A. de Libera, *Le problème de l'être*, pp.16-17.

⁶ Aquinas, *De ente et essentia*, c.4.

formulation of this belongs to Avicenna.¹ An essence's intrinsic certitude, to use Avicenna's term, considered apart from its concrete existence, sufficiently distinguishes the creature from the necessary existence of the divine essence, which Aquinas subsequently proves in ch.4 of *De ente et essentia*. According to Aquinas (and Eckhart), all predication *de tertio adiacente in divinis* (*deus bonum est*) is really predication *de secundo*, since every judgment about God includes his existence. One could say for Eckhart that all predication *de secundo* is simply *in divinis*. We will come back to this.

In his later work Thomas would qualify the extent to which an essence relates indifferently to its existence as an accident. For it is not simply absolute being (*esse tantum*) which accedes to an essence, as he says Avicenna taught; since “ens” is imposed *ab actu essendi*, it does not indicate a composition of essence and *esse* as two distinct entities, but the actuality of a determinate form as potential.² What is clear, at any rate, is that the accidentality or actuality of the *actus essendi* here is regarded as coming to a thing from without. Giles of Rome provided the most definitive, and most criticised, form of the real distinction in the late 13th century, claiming that both *esse* and *essentia* are things (*res*) but, more importantly for our purpose, defining existence as “a relation to God considered under the aspect of an efficient cause according to act” (*habitudinem ad Deum in ratione efficientis causae secundum actum*).³ This actual relation to God, for Aquinas at least, is therefore not a direct participation in his essence but only in the act of being appropriate to a certain similitude.⁴

¹ Avicenna latinus, *Liber de philosophia prima* V, c.2 (ed. Van Reit 239,68-70): ‘...naturae hominis, ex hoc quod est homo, accidit ut habeat esse, quamvis ex hoc quod habet esse non habet esse homo nec aliquid eius nec intrans in illum’.

² R. Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, pp.69-76. On p.75, he cites Aquinas, *Quodlibet* II, q.2, a.1, ad.2 (ed. Leonine, vol. 25/2, 215,88-90): ‘esse est accidens, non quasi per accidens se habens, sed quasi actualitas cuiuslibet substantiae.’ Aquinas also explains there that “accident” can be taken broadly as simply *non est pars essentiae*. In order to assess Aquinas' verdict that Avicenna's Necessary Existent only operates as an uniform efficient cause, see the texts supplied by R. Wisnovky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), p.187ff.

³ Giles of Rome, *Theoremata de esse et essentia*, theorem XIX. Cf. J. Wippel, “Essence and Existence”, pp.396-398.

⁴ See R. Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, pp.108-116 on the dangers of equating the twofold likeness between creatures and God (as a determinate idea; as having being, goodness) into two distinct kinds of participation. The twofold likeness of things to God are realized in one creative moment, which distinguishes the divine simplicity from creaturely complexity. Te Velde's reading of Aquinas on this makes him more palatable to a Neoplatonic Averroist like Dietrich than Giles of Rome. For an account of procession as reversion, see J. Trouillard, *La procession plotinienne* (Paris: PUF, 1955), pp.5-6: “L'essentiel de la procession est dans la conversion à multiples formes de l'être vers son origine. Là se trouve la synergie féconde de l'engendré et du générateur. *La procession plotinienne est avant tout ascendante*. C'est une accession, non un retour qui annule un aller.”

The Averroist response, either in Dietrich of Freiberg's criticism of Aquinas and others in his *De ente et essentia*, or in Averroes' account of Avicenna, generally regards the real distinction as an overextension of a merely logical difference which falsely reifies the essence as something apart from its actual existence.¹ He agrees that *ens* is imposed from the actual existence of the thing, and also denies that a creature's essence is identical with its being, but cannot admit that an essence has any intrinsic "certitude" apart from its actuality.² In other words, it is not true that "man is a rational animal", if no man exists.³ In the proposition *homo est homo*, the verb *est*, continues Dietrich, can be taken in two ways: either as the copula where it indicates merely the identity of two names, or *ex parte predicati*, as in *homo est-ratiocinatur* or *homo est-homo* – to which Dietrich applies the neologism *homo hominat*. The latter predicates the actuality of the form man to a potentiality, which is not to say that existence is here predicated of a potential essence, but that essence in its actual (verbal) mode is being predicated of its potentiality.⁴ The name itself is imposed from this "essentification" and it has no meaning apart from that actuality of the form.⁵

Dietrich's doctrine of participation corresponding to this standpoint agrees with the Avicennians that *participare* means *aliqua res habere aliquid et recipere ab extrinseco*, but does not see it as an efficient bestowal of existence to a limiting, determined essence. A creature not only participates *esse suum a primo et puro esse, quod est Deus, sed totam essentiam suam indifferentem ab esse suo*.⁶ The context for these disputes between those for or against the real distinction, it should be remembered, typically involves explaining how the separate intelligences or angels can be distinguished from God's absolute simplicity, without resorting to the hylomorphism of Avicenna or the Augustinians (matter seems to restrict the capacity of these intellects to

¹ For a summary of late medieval debates on the question, see J. Wippel, "Essence and Existence". Cf. R. Te Velde, *Participation*, p.74; K. Flasch, *D'Averroès à Maître Eckhart*, pp.28-29 and p.151, citing Averroes, *In IV Met.*, comm.3 (ed. Juntas, fol. 67vB): 'Avicenna autem peccavit multum in hoc quod existimavit, quod unum et ens significant dispositiones additas essentiae rei.'

² It is a hallmark of Avicennian metaphysics that the "certitude" (*certitudo*) or "quiddity" of a thing (*res*) is determined independently of its instantiation either in concrete singulars or in the universal existing in the mind. A triangle's "certitude" is simply that by which it is a triangle. This is distinct from its "affirmed being" (*esse affirmativum*), which designates that a *res* is a "something" (*aliquid*). See Avicenna latinus, *Liber de philosophia prima* I, c.5 (ed. Van Reit, 34-35).

³ Dietrich, *De ente et essentia* II.1.8, in A. de Libera, C. Michon (trans.), *L'Être et l'essence. Le vocabulaire médiéval de l'ontologie* (Paris: Seuil, 1996), pp.196-197.

⁴ A. de Libera, C. Michon, *L'Être et l'essence*, p.158.

⁵ *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

⁶ Dietrich, *De ente et essentia* II.2.2 (ed. De Libera-Michon, pp.198-199).

think, or risks making them corruptible). Generally, those who maintain the real distinction regard the potency as a determinate essence that receives and limits its act of existence, or what John Wippel has called a “subjective potency”. The Averroist response to this typically asserts that any separate intellect is simply a potential object, an “objective potency”, of God's creative act.¹ For Dietrich, following Averroes, *efficiens causa et finalis non sunt in separatis*.² Creation, production – these words are at best metaphorically applied to God and the separate intellects.³ According to Dietrich, the formal procession of an intellect from the first principle occurs by way of its own activity:⁴

Supposing in the first place what is known through itself – namely that one can admit that the divine essence is an intellect essentially in act – one can gather that every intellect, as intellect, has an essential relation to the divine essence which it thinks, as the Commentator says. And [every intellect] is not only [related] to it which it thinks as object, but moreso and more essentially is [related] to it, which it thinks as its principle from which it flows. I say 'more essentially' in the sense that, by thinking the principle of its substance and intellectually flowing from its principle, it grasps [*capit*]⁵ its essence. By this [anterior process] it thinks whatsoever it thinks objectively, in such a way that the act of intellection by which it thinks its principle is anterior in nature – or intellect – to the intellection by which it thinks anything under the aspect of object.

The dynamism of intellectual procession for Dietrich guards us from conceiving Wippel's “objective potency” in an imaginative or reified sense. Whereas procession and reversion appear as separate moments on the side of the real distinction of essence and existence

¹ J. Wippel, “Essence and Existence”, pp.407-408.

² K. Flasch, *D'Averroès à Maître Eckhart*, p.109 and p.96, citing Dietrich, *De animatione caeli*, 3.2 (ed. Sturlese, 14).

³ Flasch notes that precisely this metaphorical understanding of efficient causality was the 70th thesis condemned by bishop Tempier in 1277.

⁴ K. Flasch, *D'Averroès à Maître Eckhart*, p.110 and pp.114-115, cites Dietrich, *De visione beatifica* 1.1.3.11 (ed. Mojsisch, 59): 'Supposito igitur primo, quod et per se notum est, videlicet quod divina essentia est intellectus in actu essentialiter, sumatur iuxta hoc, quod omnis intellectus in eo, quod intellectus, essentialem respectum habet ad id, quod intelligitur, sicut dicit Commentator super VII *Metaphysicae*, et non solum ad id, quod intelligitur secundum rationem obiecti, sed magis et essentialius ad id, quod intelligitur secundum rationem sui principii, a quo fluit, et dico essentialius eo, quod intelligendo suae substantiae principium et intellectualiter fluens ab eo suam essentiam capit, qua intelligit, quidquid obiective intelligit, ita, ut intelligere suum principium prius natura seu intellectu est ea intellectione, qua intelligit quodcumque in ratione obiecti tantum.' For the reference to Averroes, see Flasch, pp.30-31 and pp.42-43.

⁵ See *De ente et essentia* II.2.3 (ed. De Libera-Michon, pp.198-199) for Dietrich's etymology of *participare* as *partem capere*.

(hence Geiger's doubling of participation),¹ for Dietrich the agency of a particular intellect's procession belongs to it insofar as it thinks itself as an idea in the essentially active divine mind by way of that very same active intellect, so that its own essential constitution is equally a *terminus* of God's creative act within it.² Intellectual procession and reversion, as for Proclus, Dionysius and Plotinus, form a single movement.³

The subject of metaphysics for Averroes and his followers like Dietrich and Eckhart reflects this ontology. Rather than conceiving of *ens inquantum ens* as something logically distinct from its actuality, form in its act is alone the proper object of intellect. In Aristotle's words, all philosophers have sought to know substance most of all. Here the basis for Eckhart's convertibility of ethics and first philosophy comes through, and its "object" as *generatio*: what is most of all substance, what truly subsists, is the divine essence as intellect in actuality which becomes the form of the human intellect insofar as its contents are created within it.

Thus, for Eckhart, i) every name and being, properly called and taken by themselves presupposes being, since *esse* can have nothing outside it and ii) predication *de tertio adiacente* has no existential value. In the first he follows Dietrich in that all names are imposed according to the actual essence of the thing, but employs in a way which Dietrich would have found unacceptable. Eckhart follows Avicenna, in maintaining that essences are eternal, and that the essence of a thing does not come "from another" (*ab alio*).⁴ The application of Avicenna's view to the question of divine ideas

¹ L.-B. Geiger, *La participation dans la philosophie de S. Thomas d'Aquin*, pp.60-61, n.3: "L'être, au sens plein, c'est le sujet concret: ens. Il est tel par son essence, il est réel par son existence. Et parce que l'essence, réellement distincte de l'existence, est le principe propre de la diversité et de l'inégalité dans l'être, le problème se pose de l'origine de cette inégalité, voire de sa possibilité. On ne peut évidemment expliquer cette limitation par une composition antérieure. Ce serait confondre les principes de l'être et l'être subsistant. Ce serait aller à l'infini dans la série des compositions sans rien expliquer. Il faut faire appel à la participation par hiérarchie formelle: l'essence qui participe à l'existence est elle-même une participation de la Perfection Première, dont elle ne dit qu'un aspect limité et fragmentaire."

² A. de Libera, *La mystique rhénane*, p.190: "D'une formule: en s'affectant lui-même, l'intellect agent (s') affecte son objet, et s'affectant son objet, il se pro-duit lui même." He contrasts Dietrich's position, in which intellects possessing agent intellects proceed "de l'essentia même de Dieu", with Augustine's, where they proceed and revert according to a determinate idea within the divine mind (p.223, n.73). For the *terminus*, see Wippel, "Essence and Existence", p.407, n.108.

³ Dietrich, *De visione beatifica* 1.5.6 (ed. Mojsisch, 63): 'etiam sua intellectuali operatione, quae est essentia eius, semper convertitur in Deum ita, ut eius emanatio, qua intellectualiter emanat per essentiam a suo principio, sit ipsius in ipsum principium intellectualis conversio. Non enim primo ab ipso procedit et postea alio respectu seu operatione in ipsum convertitur, sed eadem simplici intellectione, quae est essentia eius.' Cf. J. Trouillard, *La procession plotinienne*, p.44: "la procession est immanente. Elle n'est pas une cosmogonie, mais la formation de chaque esprit par lui-même."

⁴ *In Gen.* II, n.68 (LW I, 534,4-5): 'Avicenna etiam ponit quod quid sive quiditatem, quae et ratio est, non

will be taken up in the next Chapter. However, the sense in which a *tale esse* contains *esse simpliciter*, or as “two contains one”, indicates that the former is only conceivable as a being (*inquantum est ens*) unless it is regarded as having being “in a certain manner”, just as an accident “contains the exterior reality to which it is analogous”.¹ Thus the creature as accident is inseparably bound to its actual existence which it nevertheless receives from without. In his *De ente et essentia*, Dietrich allows that accidents can have an essence and existence, making their essential reality simply into “a disposition of substance”.² They are essentially *entia in obliquo*, and their essential actuality is to inhere in and receive something which they do not possess.³ Aquinas himself had also described accidents in this way, stating that it is the *ratio* of a quality to be a disposition of a substance, a quantity its measure, and so on.⁴ This unification of *ratio* and *essentia* will be crucial to Eckhart's own synthesis of Avicenna and Averroes, as we shall explain in the following Chapter. For the time being, we simply note how for Eckhart creatures are essentially an accidental disposition of the one divine substance, then we consider their relation to their cause. They that eat me, shall yet hunger (Ecc. 24.29); “they eat because they are, they hunger because they are from another”.⁵

For Eckhart a creature is a certain accidental “mode” of the single divine substance.⁶ They relate to that one substance only through their unique forms, since it is “the form alone that separates it from nothing”.⁷ Going back to the presuppositions of Boethius in the *De hebdomadibus*, a thing must first be good to desire the good, since a thing must be like the perfection it seeks.⁸ For Thomas – realizing that this very requirement placed actuality before causality, and Being in its *ratio* before the Good – this principle prompts recourse to an efficient cause to enable a creature's substantial

esse ab alio'; *Prologus generalis*, n.13 (LW I, 159,1) Cf. Avicenna latinus, *Liber de philosophia prima* V, c.1 (ed. Van Reit, 228 and 233,36-243,44): 'equinitas est equinitas tantum'.

¹ A. de Libera, *Le problème de l'être*, p.24, citing *In Exod.*, n.29 (LW II, 35,7).

² Dietrich, *De ente et essentia* I.1.6 (ed. De Libera-Michon, 166-169): 'Sed totum esse suum [accidenti] est, ut sit quaedam dispositio substantiae secundum Commentatorum'.

³ Dietrich, *De accidentibus*, ed. Wallace (*The Scientific Methodology of Theodor of Freiberg*, Fribourg, 1959), p.321, 58-61.

⁴ Aquinas, *In I Sent.*, d.8, q.4, a.3. See M. Henninger, *Relations. Medieval Theories 1250-1325* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p.19 for more citations from Aquinas.

⁵ *In Ecc.*, nn.53-54 (LW II, 282,1-283,4).

⁶ *In Ecc.*, n.52 (LW II, 280,7-9); *In Exod.*, n.54 (LW II, 60, 3-5); *In Exod.*, n.21 (LW II 28, 5-7): 'omnis perfectio eget ipso, qui est ipsum esse, tum quia singulum horum in se et ex se, id quod est, modus est ipsius esse, ipsi innititur, ipsi inhaeret'

⁷ *In Ecc.*, n.55 (LW II, 284,7).

⁸ R. Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, p.10

possession of the perfection which it participates according to its idea in God. Eckhart agrees with Aquinas against the Franciscans that the first effect of a creature's single substantial form (rather than a plurality of mediating forms) accounts for its determinacy, but does not accept Thomas' distinction of essence and existence.¹ Creatures exist only in their cause, which is actually expressed when *ens*, *unum* and the other transcendentals form part of the predicate: *solus deus ens proprie est*.² What form gives is therefore the immediacy of God to the creature. Accordingly, Eckhart teaches the eternal creation of things "in" God; not the efficient bestowal of common being to an ordered hierarchy *ex nihilo*, but a "*collatio esse*" - a gathering up into God.³

The non-existence of the copula *in tertio adiacens* signifies the creature's exclusion from God. The peculiarity of Eckhart's understanding of predication *de tertio*, as de Libera explains, consists in making *hoc* alone the predicate.⁴ Since the transcendentals when predicated of something indicate its immediate inherence in God, Eckhart must posit a difference between *aliquid est ens* and *aliquid est ens hoc* where other logicians regarded both as *de tertio*. Thus predication *de secundo* captures the inseparable relation of essence and existence for Dietrich but the actuality of that essence places the creature firmly within the divine substance, distinguished from all finite distinction by indistinction.⁵

A creature's end is in its beginning – *in principio*. With Dietrich, all things are named and all names are according to their actuality, which they receive only insofar as they are "collated" into their cause, or inhere in it as an accident: "every effect exists in its cause and there alone".⁶ For Eckhart the status of such a name/accident in its essential actuality is to be "with" the Word, or "with *esse*".⁷ Thomas' real distinction applies insofar as a creature is considered strictly in itself, without reference to *ens*, since it

¹ See F. Brunner's commentary to the *Prologues* in *OLME* I, pp.172-177.

² *Prol. op. prop.*, n.5 (LW I, 168,6).

³ *Prologus generalis*, nn.16-17 (LW I 160,7-8; 161,3-4): 'creatio est collatio esse, nec oportet addere 'ex nihilo' [...] omne quod deus creat, operatur vel agit, in se ipso operatur vel agit. Quod enim extra deum est et quod extra deum fit, extra esse est et fit.'

⁴ A. de Libera, *Le problème de l'être*, pp.30-31.

⁵ *Sermo* IV.1, n.28 (LW IV 27,10-28,3): 'omnia esse in deo, sicut ipse est indistinctus in sui natura et tamen distinctissimus ab omnibus, sic in ipso sunt omnia distinctissime et indistincta. Primo quidem, quia homo in deo deus est. Igitur sicut deus a leone indistinctus et distinctissimus, sic homo in deo a leone indistinctus et distinctissimus, et sic de aliis.'

⁶ *Quaestio parisiensis* V, n.4 (LW V, 80,2-5): 'Pars ergo ut pars nullum esse habet, sed quia habet respectum ad totum tamquam ad esse, habet esse. Ideo pars, ut caret toto, est non-ens, sed ut respicit totum, habet esse.'

⁷ *In Exod.*, n.29 (LW II, 35,12-36,6).

relates to being as something entirely extraneous accidental, though not in the sense that being is accidental to it, but it is accidental to being: *Deus est cuius comparatione substantia est accidens et accidens nihil*.¹ But since the efficiency that bestows existence in itself excludes the creature from God, we must now consider the formal relation of creatures to their cause.

2.3: Formal Causation and Extrinsic Denomination

As we have seen, Eckhart does not reduce all causality to God alone, but follows the *Liber de causis* by allowing forms to exercise secondary causality which yields *hoc esse*. In its finitude it presupposes the inclusivity of substance, *esse absolute*, which is therefore both “wholly within, wholly without”.² Looking back now to the second *notandum* in n. 10 the *Tabula prologorum* – that the superior is in no way affected by the accidents, species or genus subordinate to it – Eckhart’s assertion that the lower is contained undivided in the higher must now be taken to mean that the lower *only* exists in the higher. The *hoc* given by secondary causes taken in itself (*album solam qualitatem significant*) is a negation of that being and therefore is a pure nothing. Thus all predication *de secundo adiacens*, since it has been identified with predication *in divinis*, takes the form of a *negatio negationis*, a negation of the medium that distinguishes the effect from its cause.³ The actual essence of a creature taken *formaliter*, Eckhart often says, excludes it from the commonality of the divine being where the same abides *virtualiter*.⁴

Participation for Meister Eckhart has therefore an entirely different meaning than in Thomas, since a creature's only substantiality is under the mode of inherence in its cause. Eckhart employs the analogy of the soul and body to illustrate the relation of God to his creation, as a whole that penetrates equally each of its parts. Eckhart regards

¹ *Liber XXIV Philosophorum*, prop. 6 (ed. Hudry, 12)

² *In Exod.*, n.163 (LW II, 143,5-6).

³ *Prol. op. prop.*, n.12 (LW I, 172,6-7): 'enti sive de ente nihil negari potest sive nullum esse negari potest, sed competit ipsi negatio negationis esse', and n.13 (173,2-3): 'Quomodo enim esset, inter quod et esse medium caderet, et per consequens staret foris, quasi in latere, extra ipsum esse?'

⁴ *Quaestio parisiensis* I, n.8 (LW V, 45,1-2): 'in deo non est ens nec esse, quia nihil est formaliter in causa et causato, si causa sit vera causa'; *In Ioh.*, n.31 (LW III 25,8-10): 'tale agens, principium scilicet in quo est logos, ratio, est agens essentialiter nobiliori modo praehabens suum effectum, et est habens causalitatem super totam speciem sui effectus.'

accidents and parts similarly, for neither is able to subsist outside of its whole. God is the form of the whole, since it is the whole and not the parts which is said to become and to be.¹ The common and substantial participation are so far opposed insofar as the inherence of an accident can be opposed to the identity of substance, while that inherence is precisely enabled by a form where no mediation can be permitted. By this reasoning, “being itself is the formal actuality of every form and essence universally”.² Once God has been identified with the common, this is the logical result; all negations of God's substantial being place creatures in the *foris* of nullity, while any determination or contraction of the common risks turning God into a genus. Eckhart follows Maimonides' conclusion that any affirmative name of God adds such a disposition.³ Affirmative names can be identified with determinate negations of God's absolute being since they imply an added, accidental disposition to a substance. Only creatures, requiring this externality, can be positively denominated by their form: “every disposition by its nature is a certain medium between what it disposes and that to which it is disposed”.⁴ Therefore what is self-sufficient is above positive denomination; a thing is named by its actual perfection, and since creatures acquire their sufficiency from without, “denomination always acts as the form and perfection of its subject”.⁵ Thus these perfections are excluded from God to the extent that they are perfections *in nobis*.⁶

In one sense, Eckhart's doctrine that secondary form only exists insofar as it is in its cause is Thomistic, though his use of it is not. According to the Angelic Doctor, a single essential form immediately predisposes matter to its reception and confers being; whatever subordinate forms contribute to its constitution in generation are not intermediaries between the substantial form and the accidents, as the Franciscans held

¹ *Prolog. op. prop.*, n.14 (LW I, 173,14-15; 174,5-7): 'Rursus quia deus, se toto esse, simpliciter est unus sive unum est, necesse est, ut se toto immediate toti assit singulo [...]. Propter quod esse totius est et totum unum est. Propter hoc et totum dicitur fieri et esse, non partes, in VII Metaphysicae [1033b16].' Aquinas also uses the analogy of soul to body to illustrate the relation of God to the world (*ST* Ia.8.2, ad.3; Ia.93.3). It is Eckhart's emphasis on virtual precontainment that sets him on a different path than Thomas.

² *Prolog. op. prop.*, n.14 (LW I, 174,11-175,3): 'Igitur si forma omnis essentialis totam materiam essentiali penetratione immediate totam se tota investit et informat, potissime hoc verum erit de ipso esse, quod est actualitas formalis omnis formae universaliter et essentiae.' Aquinas describes the perfect actuality of God's existence similarly, cf. *ST*, Ia.4.1, ad.3.

³ *In Exod.*, n.47 (LW II, 51,11-13): 'omnia nomina affirmativa praedicant aut implicant aliquid additum'. Cf. Maimonides, *Dux neutrorum* I, c.50.

⁴ *In Exod.*, n.50 (LW II, 53,15-16).

⁵ *In Exod.*, n.19 (LW II, 25,14-15).

⁶ *In Exod.*, n.53 (LW II, 57,1-5).

(speaking of a *forma completiva* at the end of a succession of forms), but the totality of them are contained virtually (*in virtute*) by the substantial form.¹ Thus the form of man, the intellectual soul, virtually possesses the lower sensitive and nutritive soul which are for Aquinas contained more perfectly (*perfectior virtute continens*), for Eckhart are “precontained virtually more unified and more intimately (*praehabet in virtute et est unitior et intimior*).² The superior “is always first and is rich (*dives*) in all its inferiors, and is not divided in them, but it unites them in itself, affects them and is not affected by them.”³ As with his modification of Thomas’ (non-canonical) presentation of analogy according to kinds of division, adding that these are various modes of one and the same thing (*res*), likewise Eckhart here grounds the analogy of formal causation in the declension of the many from the one.⁴

Insofar as forms that are confined to a genus or species give a *tale esse*, or *esse hoc aut hoc*, Eckhart's interpretation of Aquinas can be classified among the proponents of an existential Thomism, who regard the form or essence of a thing as receptive to and limiting of the intensive act of God's *esse*, and thus in its potentiality a determinate negation of that actuality.⁵ Eckhart, like Thomas, wants to hold the determination and the actualization together in one creative act, but cannot follow his predecessor entirely insofar as their unity is restricted to a virtual one in the Word. The function of this virtual unity shall be explained further in Chapter Three.

2.4: Conclusion

With the diversity of *hoc aut hoc* excluded, and the existence of creatures transposed into their cause, it is clear that, while God is *intimior* to all things than they are to themselves

¹ A. de Libera, *Le problème de l'être...*, pp.50-55.

² *Quaestio parisiensis* V, n.8 (LW V, 83,6); cf. Aquinas, *ST*, Ia.76.6, ad.1 and *De mixtione elementorum*, cited by J. Koch at LW V, 83, note 3.

³ *In Ioh.*, n.555 (LW III, 484,14-485,2): 'Superius enim ut sic semper unum est, semper primum est et dives in omne suum inferius nec in illo dividitur, sed illud in se unit, illud afficit, but ab illo non afficitur.'

⁴ Cf. *In Ecc.*, n.52 (LW II, 280,7-9) with Aquinas, *In I Sent.*, d.22, q.1, a.3, ad.2. When establishing Aquinas' 'definitive' account of analogy, Thomists typically look to *Summa contra Gentiles*, I.34, *Summa theologiae* Ia.13 or (as Cajetan does) *In I Sent.*, d.19, q.5, a.2, ad.1.

⁵ C. Fabro, *Participation et causalité*, p.351, n.67: 'Ensuite *forma dat esse* parce que seule l'essence réelle, qu'elle détermine comme acte formel, est le véritable sujet de l'*esse-actus essendi*. La forme est pour ainsi dire transfigurée métaphysiquement dans le thomisme: elle donne à l'essence l'acte formel par conséquent en fait ensuite la puissance réceptive de l'*esse-actus essendi*'. Cf. R. Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, pp.221-224.

(with Augustine and the *Liber de causis*), the divine commonality which they all share cannot be formal or intrinsic. It is one thing to speak of the transcendentals and the common, and quite another to talk of accidents, species or the *hoc aut hoc*; it is one thing to speak of entities of reason, and another those in the external. Thus the realm of substantiality, virtual form and equality is in intellect alone – within the Word or in the metaphysician by the grace of adoption. The Spirit and those born of it “do not know whither it goes or how it came” (John 3.8), which is to say it knows neither *principium* or *finis*. The *homo divinus*, prohibited from having an earthly father or mother cleaves to his wife; he is “lover of the divine form” (*amator formae divinae*) and “does not know him or love him as efficient cause or as creator, and neither as end”, but only “insofar as efficiency and end are in God himself [as] form itself, and the being of God and one with him”.¹ The indeterminate simplicity of God is loved as the very form of the *homo divinus*, whereas when a particular (*album*) yearns only for its abstraction (*albedo*), its achievement can only confirm its accidentality.

Hoc (ens) is what secondary forms give, and so creatures as such are relegated to the standpoint of accidents in oblique relation to the divine substance. In this, Eckhart confirms the *Liber XXIV philosophorum*, “God is that in comparison to whom substance is an accident, and an accident is nothing”.²

Eckhart's philosophical work, as undertaken in Paris, is consistent with his councils to the Dominican novices in the *Reden*: the common can be proper to God and the *homo divinus* as their form, precisely to the extent that the Good is contained virtually in the intellect or *ratio veri*, and analogical difference exists causally in a higher equality. A soul which has emptied itself of all things can do all things in the sense that the common being can realize himself within it. Eckhart's dialectical metaphysics therefore centres on this fulcrum of the Word and the adopted sons.

¹ *In Ioh.*, n.336 (LW III, 284,6-285,9): 'Secundo notandum quod spiritus sanctus nescitur unde veniat aut quo vadat [John 3.8], quia deus et omne divinum, in quantum huiusmodi, nescit principium a quo nec finem ad quem. Si enim "in mathematicis non est bonum" et finis, sed solum causa formalis, ut ait philosophus, quanto magis in metaphysicis et divinis. Et hoc est quod homo divinus prohibetur habere patrem et matrem super terram, Matth.23. Et Christus venit 'separare hominem adversus patrem suum, Matth. 10 ... 'relinquet homo patrem et matrem et adhaerebit uxori suae'. In quibus verbis significatur quod opus divinum ut sic non habet, non curat nec cogitat nec intuetur principium nec finem, sed solum deum causam formalem, Sap.8: 'amator factus sum formae illius'; Ibid., n.338 (LW III, 287,5-8): 'Unde homo divinus, amator formae divinae, nescit nec amat ipsum deum, ut efficiens sive creator, nec ut finem, nisi in quantum efficiens et finis sunt in ipso deo ipsa forma et esse dei et unum cum illo.'

² *Liber XXIV philosophorum*, prop.6 (ed. Hudry, 12): 'Deus est cuius comparatione substantia est accidens, et accidens nihil.'

Chapter Three: From the Common to the Indistinct

Being in its cause is not being. Nothing univocal has the true character of a cause. The notion of being therefore descends from the cause. Therefore in descending, the notion of being is found. Likewise in God, from whom the totality of being descends, the notion of being is not found. Since furthermore our intellection is caused by being, it descends from being and consequently tends toward non-being, nor does it have being.¹

Although Meister Eckhart states plainly that *Deus communis est*, God is not simply present to all things as the communal sum of their being:²

God is common: He is every being and the whole existence of things. God is the best that can be thought or desired by each and every person – and more so! But the whole of what can be desired by all people in relation to the word 'more' is really nothing. Hence the axiom “God is the opposite of nothing by means of the mediation of being.”

The straightforward identification of God with *ens commune* considered as an abstraction from finite forms is clearly not what Eckhart has in mind.³ One cannot reach the infinite simply by adding more to the finite. That more is really 'nothing' because, like the denomination or sufficiency of a creature that it receives from without, a magnification of finitude only reaffirms the particularity of the formal perfection it creates. Secondary forms only give a *hoc aut hoc* determinacy, an *esse tale*. Whereas for Aquinas the self-differentiation of a creature, in its potentiality for its own act, possesses a certain perfection of being that is its own, with Meister Eckhart it is inconceivable how an efficient bestowal of being is possible within the total opposition of the *transcendentia* and the divided realm of genera and species. Eckhart's First principle, as Jan Aerten

¹ *Quaestio parisiensis* II, n.10 (LW V, 54,1-5): 'ens in causa sua non est ens. Nullum enim univocum habet vere rationem causae. Ratio ergo entis descendit a causa. Ergo in descendente ratio entis invenitur. Et ideo in deo, a quo totum ens descendit, ratio entis non invenitur. Cum igitur nostrum intelligere ab ente causetur, descendit ab ente et per consequens tendit in non-ens nec esse habet'.

² *Sermo* VI.1, n.53 (LW IV, 51,7-52,2; trans. *Teacher and Preacher*, 212-213): 'Primo, quod deus communis est: omne ens et omne omnium esse ipse est., 'in ipso, per ipsum, et ab ipso'. Sed nota quod deus est omne quod cogitari potest melius aut desiderari a quocumque et ab omnibus et adhuc amplius. Sed totum, quod potest desiderari ab omnibus, respectu li 'amplius' est quoddam nihil. Ubi dic illud: »deus est oppositio ad nihil mediatione entis«.' This axiom is taken from prop. 14 of the *Liber XXIV philosophorum* (ed. Hudry, 21; cf. notes in Vrin edition, pp.62-65).

³ That identification was already suggested by M. Galvano della Volpe, *Il misticismo speculativo di Maestro Eckhart nei suoi rapporti storici* (Bologne, 1930). Lossky (*Théologie négative*, 76, n.141) and de Libera (*Le problème de l'être*, 61) recognize that this view is overly simplistic.

explains, is “marked by the intertwinement of transcendence and transcendentalty”.¹ In other words, Eckhart identifies the criterion for the predication of the transcendentals with the divine transcendence of finite being. God cannot be like anything at all, and for that reason is indistinctly present to all things as what they have by not having.²

God is not simply the totality of what is actual. Following the *Liber de causis*, Eckhart at times speaks of *ens commune* as the first effect of God (*effectus dei*); God is both “common to all” just as his effect, *ens*, is common to all genera.³ Eckhart’s interpretation does not exactly follow Aquinas, who argues that metaphysics provides knowledge of being intrinsically understood as a participation in the First.⁴ The difference hinges on the relation of the universal and the causal.

Both Eckhart and Aquinas begin from Avicenna. At the outset of Avicenna’s *Metaphysics*, he explains that God is not included within the proper *subiectum* of metaphysics because it does not pertain to a science to demonstrate the existence of its subject matter. However, if he is not included as or within its subject, both remaining alternatives are equally unacceptable: God’s existence would either have to be assumed by the highest science, and therefore beyond the scope of demonstration, or else the divine science would be subordinate to another, higher science. Avicenna’s solution makes the subject of the science being *qua* being or *ens commune*, with its concomitant properties and attributes, so that God is included within metaphysical inquiry only insofar as He is sought (*quaesitum*) through it.⁵ Whether, or precisely to what extent, *ens commune* includes God is not made fully clear by Avicenna. What he does suggest is that, since it belongs to a science to consider the causes of its subject, and since God himself cannot have a principle, it cannot belong to metaphysics to consider the principles of “being absolutely”, which has no cause, “but the principles of some beings”.⁶ The knowledge of the causes of the subject or genus of a particular science is the goal, it is the

¹ J. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, p.344.

² For a similar view in Cusanus, which E. Cassirer argues breaks from the whole medieval tradition, see *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1927), pp.11-13.

³ *In Ioh.*, n.103 (LW III, 88,12-89,4): ‘Notandum quod creatum omne, cum sit hoc auc hoc, distinctum quid, proprium est alicui generi, speciei vel singulari. Deus autem non est quid distinctum aut proprium alicui naturae, sed commune omnibus. Est enim extra et super omne genus. Probat hoc ipsum ens, effectus dei, quod non est in genere hoc proprium alicui generi, sed commune omni generi.’

⁴ Aquinas, *In Librum de causis Expositio*, prop.4 (ed. Saffrey, 30,21-24).

⁵ Avicenna latinus, *Liber de philosophia prima* I, c.1 (ed. Van Reit, 4,57-68).

⁶ Avicenna latinus, *Liber de philosophia prima* I, c.2 (ed. Van Reit, 14,58-62): ‘Si enim omnium entium esset principium, tunc esset principium sui ipsius; ens autem in se absolute non habet principium; sed habet principium unumquodque esse quod scitur. Principium igitur est principium aliquibus entibus.’

quaesitum, of that science. Thus, for Avicenna, God is included among the field of *ens inquantum ens* insofar as knowledge of his being is the goal of metaphysics, and he therefore falls within the commonness of being in its universality.¹

For Aquinas, the community of being does not extend to God; he separates the twofold primacy of the common and the causal.² Commenting on the threefold division of the sciences inherited from Boethius, Thomas begins by noting that there is a class of divine beings who are really, and not only logically, separate from matter. The principles of any given field of enquiry can be considered in one or both of the following ways: either as complete natures in themselves, or as principles of other beings.³ The nature of divine being is such that its separateness from matter is more than an abstraction; therefore it both has a complete nature in itself and is a principle of other beings. This twofold aspect begets the division of metaphysics from sacred doctrine. Metaphysics regards the *divina* as principles of other things, and so begins its enquiry from their effects, while sacred doctrine is the knowledge of divine being in itself. The knowledge of God and the separate substances remains the goal of metaphysics, but, for that very reason, Aquinas denies that it falls within the subject. The proper subject of metaphysics, *ens commune*, is that which is only negatively immaterial, or in other words only possibly separate from matter, unlike God and the separate intellects who are positively, or actually, separate.⁴

In Meister Eckhart the common and causal are united, but in such a way that God's relation to creatures is not the univocal relation of a genus to a species: “nothing univocal has the true character of a cause”.⁵ In fact, because Eckhart poses the difference of *esse* and of (*ens*) *hoc aut hoc* so strongly, he must find a way of relating the creature to its cause beyond the mutual exclusion of God, as cause of being, and creature, as effect, that results from his extrinsic analogy. It has been explained how this difference centres on the distinction of the *formaliter* and *virtualiter*, where the latter alone is the identity of causal and common.

There is something operative in the background here, which constitutes the

¹ J. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, p.79.

² Aquinas, *De veritate*, q.10, a.11, ad.10 (ed. Leonine, v. 22/2, 337,306-338,316).

³ Aquinas, *In librum Boetii De Trinitate expositio*, q.5, a.4 (ed. Leonine, v.50, 153,80-107).

⁴ Aquinas, *In Metaphysicorum* (ed. Cathala-Spiazzi, 2), *proem*. Cf. J. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, p.19.

⁵ *Quaestio parisiensis* II, n.10 (LW V, 54,1-2).

analogical and exclusive relation of 'formal' being as the *effectus dei*. For those “formal” entities had the categorical nature of accidents, as “of a being” (*entis; entia in obliquo*) in their very essence. Intellectual being, on the other hand, is an exception to this logic; its essence is not to receive a determinate and finite nature, but to receive absolute being.

Usually in Eckhart, the notion of *ens commune* as *effectus dei proprie* is occurs alongside the consideration of the relation of *omnia* to God and, more specifically, the relation of all things to the divine *esse* as their “good”.¹ Avicenna generally appears as an authority: “That which is truly desired” and, Eckhart adds, desired “within being” (*in esse*), “and what every thing desires, is being and perfect being, insofar as it is being”.² All things yearn for their cause. We have noted already that for Eckhart the attainment of existence, whereby a creature is assimilated to God *qua* existent, is the moment of its procession and exclusion from its source as creature. Again, intellectual nature alone is the exception.

So the tension between the superperfect and perfect being in Avicenna does not disappear. Simply substitute “Unity” for “Goodness” as the principle of abundance – the difference is more than verbal, but points to the fundamental tension in Eckhart's thought. For while the superperfection of the Good in Avicenna is thought within a vertical relation of causality, in Eckhart for whom analogates cannot realize the positive content of their referent in any way within themselves, and for whom the Good is always relegated to the *foris*, there is instead a primarily “horizontal” and “univocal” causality *within* God as *intelligere*.³ Eckhart is fully aware that there is a difference of the perfect and superperfect in Avicenna, and states that the latter belongs to the “boiling over” of God as Goodness, but his interest is to get behind that external creativity to its source.⁴ All creatures desire to be made like their idea by which they are assimilated to God, but that idea is not fully realized in them, for those are incommensurable kinds of unity. For Meister Eckhart, in intellect alone there is equality and unity. All of this centres on the

¹ *In Sap.*, n.16 (LW II, 337,3-5): 'cum esse sit effectus dei proprie, ei cuius causa est deus influit et communicat esse. Esse autem impossibile est quod sit malum quodcumque aut qualecumque. Bonum enim et ens convertuntur.' Cf. *In Sap.*, nn.19 and 182 (LW II, 517,1-3): 'Sed illa operatio [sic esse ut effectus et actio dei] et ipsa sola dulcis est [...] in qua et per quam confertur optimum et radix sive medulla ipsa omnis boni'.

² *In Gen.* I, n.174 (LW I, 319,11-12): 'Id quod vere desideratur in esse et quod desiderat omnis res, est esse et perfectio esse, in quantum est esse'; *In Sap.*, n.177 (LW II, 512,10-513,3).

³ On the use of this metaphorical and spatial terms, see B. Mojsisch, *Analogy, Univocity and Unity*, p.67.

⁴ See *Sermo XLIX.3*, nn.511-512 (LW IV, 426,9-15; 428,1-4), where Eckhart twice cites Avicenna's *Liber de philosophia prima* VIII, c.6.

principle of Anaxagoras: intellect “according to its kind has nothing in common with anything” (*secundum genus suum nulli nihil habet commune*), for it is unmixed and separate from the pure relativity of the “*hic et nunc*”.¹ This for Eckhart is the truth of Boethius' reduction of all things to the good, the good to unity and the unity to being.² Intellect is the moment of fecundity that mediates the pure relationless essence of God to the purely divided realm of creaturely distinction.

The absorption of goodness into unity brings us to the principle of diversity. Only at the level of the whole universe (*omnia*) is the good of the part intelligible insofar as that part abandons its particularity. The *omnia* considered as “the equality that accompanies unity” is therefore the proper *effectus dei* and the “primary intention” of creation.³ Goodness only appears as the outcome of this derivation from unity. Eckhart applies the axiom inherited from Avicenna, al-Farabi and the *Liber de causis*, which is employed by Albert the Great, “From a simple One is nothing but a One”, *ab uno simplici non est nisi unum*, to the relation that the universe, multiple in parts and distinct things (*multiplex tamen in partibus et rebus distinctis*), has to God “who is one simplicity in being through all things, while multiple in reason”.⁴ *Ens commune* is the closest of all created things to the First cause in virtue of its unity as what entirely comprehends and causes the specific, partial perfections of its distended inferiors.

The unity and equality of the whole is what gives intelligibility to its inferiors, since every part receives being immediately and, *qua* being, equally from the one.⁵ These are precisely the terms used by Aquinas relative to the procession of the Son from the Father, prior to the coming forth of creatures and inequality.⁶ Therefore *ens commune* as

¹ *In Ioh.*, n.318 (LW III, 265,12-266,1); Aristotle, *De anima* III, c.4, 429b22-26.

² *In Sap.*, n.37 (LW II, 358,9-10) and n.177 (LW II, 513,2-3). Cf. Boethius, *De consolazione*, III, prose 12.

³ *In Sap.*, n.37 (LW II, 357,6-10): 'Constat enim ex dictis quod, sicut prima intentio et finis creationis est unum universum perfectum, cuius tamen perfectio et unitas consistit in multitudine et diversitate partium, sic aequalitas consequens unitatem est primus finis creationis, quam tamen consequitur rerum inaequalitas, sine qua non esset unum melius alio nec essent omnia'.

⁴ *In Sap.*, n.36 (LW II, 356,14-357,4): 'nam sicut deus est unum quid simplex per omnia in esse, *multiplex tamen ratione*'. His reference here is to Aquinas, *De pot.*, q.3, a.16, ad.13: 'forma intellectus divini sit una tantum secundum rem, est tamen multiplex ratione secundum diversos respectus ad creaturam, prout scilicet intelliguntur creaturae diversimode formam divini intellectus imitari.' Cf. Avicenna latinus, *Liber de philosophia prima* IX, c.4 (ed. Van Reit, 481,50-51).

⁵ *In Sap.*, n.72 (LW II, 401,9-402,3): 'sicut totum universum est primo intentum a causa prima, et esse ipsius universi unum, partes autem quaelibet et ipsarum esse secundario, accipiunt esse a causa universi mediante ipso uno esse universi, in ipso, per ipsum, et propter ipsum, et aequaliter necessario, eo quod in uno non sit inaequalitas'.

⁶ Aquinas, *ST Ia.47.2*, ad.2: 'primum quod procedit ab unitate, est aequalitas, et deinde procedit multiplicitas. Et ideo a Patre, cui, secundum Augustinum, appropriator unitas, processit Filius, cui

the first effect of God only has meaning insofar as it is the equality arising directly from unity, and falling subsequently into goodness. Even still the perfection which things desire remains beyond them insofar as they are incapable of receiving the one *ens commune* wherein perfection abides. In this way God remains above his effects as that which his effects, as either beings or names, “presuppose”. Eckharts calls this “name above all names” (*nomen quod est super omne nomen*),¹

that by which all creatures bless the Lord [...] who is above every one and who, consequently, contains every name. 'Contains all', I say, insofar as he is one. He contains all names insofar as he is above all names.

This One as the first effect of God is not the absolute First. Eckhart, like Thomas, has applied the axiom *ab uno* to the procession of the Son;² the major difference, however, is that Eckhart identifies this necessary procession of the Son with *ens commune*. The affirmative inclusivity of this *unum* is identified with the name given to Jesus, told in Philippians 2.9, when Christ emptied himself and descended from equality with the Father into the depths of finitude. If we go back to n.103 of *In Iohannem*, where *ens commune* as *primus effectus dei proprie* had first challenged us, we find Eckhart’s intended contrast is indeed between that which “is common in the most exalted rank” (*fastigio communis*) transcending all genera, and the inferior *propria*. For Eckhart this is the logic of the Incarnation: the descent of the most common into the most proper which is its effect.³ His account of *ens commune* as the equality passing through every part of the *omnia* is Christological. Eckhart’s interests, therefore, are in the differentiation *in ratione* that belongs to this immediate procession, rather than the external relation of Goodness *ad extra* which, for Aquinas, belongs to the free act of the divine self-will.⁴

appropriator aequalitas, et deinde creatura, cui competit inaequalitas.'

¹ *In Gen.* I, n.84 (LW I, 243,3-5): 'hoc modo omnis creatura ab aeterno benedicit domino et benedicit omni nomine, quia nomine, *quod est super omne nomen* et super omne nomen et per consequens praehabet omne nomen. Praehabet, inquam, omne, utpote unum; praehabet omne nomen, in quantum est super nomen.'

² For a fuller treatment of the history of the axiom and Aquinas’ application of it, see W. Hankey, “*Ab uno simplici non est nisi unum*: The Place of Natural and Necessary Emanation in Aquinas’ Doctrine of Creation”.

³ *In Ioh.*, n.103 (LW III, 89,4-8): 'Deus ergo in hunc mundum veniens, creaturam assumens, factus homo, quasi de fastigio communis venit in propria. Et hoc est quod hic manifeste dicitur: *erat lux vera quae illuminat omnem hominem*, utpote communis et superior omnibus; et sequitur, *in mundo erat, et mundus omne genus continens per ipsum factus est*.'

⁴ Aquinas, *ST Ia.45.3*; see W. Hankey, “*Ab uno simplici*,” p.331.

To illustrate this unique kind of commonness as what sustains and excludes the many, a comparison with Nicholas of Cusa is useful here.¹ In one of his last works, *De venatione sapientiae*, Nicholas sets forth ten “fields suitable for the pursuit of wisdom”, two of which are “learned ignorance” (*docta ignorantia*), “unity” (*unitas*); a third, the “non-other” (*non aliud*), is discussed below.² In the first field, he explains how the mind can transcend its own rationality and how “the incomprehensible is grasped incomprehensibly”.³ In *De docta ignorantia*, one finds the same point emphasized here by Eckhart, with only a slight difference in terminology: “the infinite is not proportionate to the finite, and from this it is most clear that, where something exceeding and exceeded is found, [one does] not come to the simple maximum, since exceeding and the exceeded are finite”.⁴ His “maximum” as the exclusion of finitude resembles the “common” in Eckhart. A more important similarity, however, is in Nicholas' characterization of the “absolute maximum” which is “unity,” free from “relation and contraction,” as “abundance”, which is taken from Eckhart's attribution of unity (and wisdom, which is important here, though Cusanus does not include it) to God.⁵ The abundance of the maximum, or the common as unity, consists in its ability, for Nicholas, to be both absolute maximum and minimum simultaneously, since it is entirely beyond all (*super omne*), as containing all that can be (*maximum*) and unable to be any less than that (*minimum*).⁶

What is explicit in Cusanus, which he actually derives from Eckhart, is a clearer sense of the Platonic conception of unity as the “abundance” prior to being, which Nicholas also calls the “nothing of everything” (*nihil omnium*).⁷ In Cusa, however, this reflects a subordination of the “Aristotelian” metaphysics of the transcendentals beneath

¹ This paragraph relies on materials assembled by Jan Aersten in his account of Cusanus, found in *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, pp.553-567.

² Nicholas of Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae*, R. Klibansky, I.G. Senger (eds.), *Opera omnia*, vol. XII (Hamburg: Meiner, 1982), c.11, p.30.

³ Nicholas of Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae* c.12 (ed. Klibansky-Senger, 31).

⁴ Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia*, I, c.3 (ed. Hoffmann-Klibansky, 8-9): 'Quoniam ex se manifestum est infiniti ad finitum proportionem non esse, est et ex hoc clarissimum, quod, ubi est reperire excedens et excessum, non deveniri ad maximum simpliciter, cum excedentia et excessa finita sunt.'

⁵ Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia*, I, c.2 (ed. Hoffmann-Klibansky, 7): 'Habundantia vero uni convenit'. Cf. *In Sap.*, n.147 (LW II, 485, 6-8), noted by J. Aertsens, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, p.556.

⁶ Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia*, I, c.4 (ed. Hoffmann-Klibansky, pp.10-11).

⁷ J. Aertsens, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, pp.560-562; citing Cusanus, *De venatione sapientiae*, c.21 (ed. Klibansky-Senger, 56-57).

a Neoplatonic henology; but for Eckhart, that metaphysics is accepted insofar as it subordinates the *external* face of the Good to the abundant super-perfection of the One.

Since Eckhart does not thoroughly subordinate being to this unity, creatures are indistinctly one with God in the Word as *ens commune*; in looking at that simple perfection, “one would see a single perfection and through it and in it would see all perfections, and not it through them.”¹ Names derived from creatures are inapplicable to the divine essence, but in the Word “*apud esse*”, which is the “omninameable” and the “omnipotent”,² there is a simultaneous distinction and indistinction. For the Word is the Reason (*ratio*) which is “the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of the whole creation”, the “first created” from the *Liber de causis*, which “proceeds from the Father under the property of intellect”:³

Reason pertains to intellect, whose property is to receive one thing under one reason or another [*sub alia et alia ratione*], to distinguish those things which are one in nature and in being, and to receive whatever [their] order [is], be it that by which one is prior to another, or that by which one is from another.

Thus, the tension which Wisnovsky had found in Avicenna between the perfect and the superperfect appears once again in Eckhart, but within the One’s self relation as True prior to external relation of creatures to God as Good. For *ens commune*, the Word, has the features of the *perfectum esse* that all things desire “*inquantum est esse.*” It is therefore as True that God’s name is *Shaddai*, “who is sufficient”, since all creatures are in their very essence insufficient and depend on God’s substance which “suffices for all things”; each creature “in and of itself is essentially a mode of existence itself”.⁴ Thus the the henology of the One belongs alongside its manifestation in the Word as True, which brings every intellect into an immediate, constitutive role in the self-sufficiency of the First.

The tension in Eckhart is not reducible to that in Avicenna because the Meister’s

¹ *In Exod.*, n.57 (LW II, 63,3-4): 'videret unicam perfectionem et per ipsam et in ipsa videret omnes perfectiones, non ipsam per illas.'

² Cf. *In Exod.*, n.29 (LW II, 34,9-36,6) and nn.167-169 (LW II 146,9-148,2).

³ *In Ioh.*, n.33 (LW III, 27,8-11): 'Ratio ad intellectum pertinet, cuius est accipere unum sub alia et alia ratione, et distinguere ea, quae unum sunt in natura et in esse, et ordinem accipere quomodolibet, sive quo unum prius est altero, sive quo unus ab alio.'

⁴ *In Exod.*, n.21 (LW II, 28,1-3 and 5-8): 'omnis perfectio eget ipso, qui est ipsum esse, tum quia singulum horum in se et ex se, id quod est, modus est ipsius esse, ipsi innitur, ipsi inhaeret, tum quia sine ipso esset nihil et non esset sapientia nec quidquam aliud, sed purum nihil'.

teaching of creation as the *collatio esse in principio* modifies and simplifies the Neoplatonic cosmology in the direction of Parmenides, where “creation in the principle is always (*mox simul*) perfect and finished”.¹ When Eckhart cites the twenty-first proposition from the *Liber de causis* that “the First is rich through itself” (*primum est dives per se*), he places it alongside Maimonides' interpretation of Exodus 3.14, where the *secundum adiacens* identity of subject and predicate indicates that God's essence is sufficient unto itself (*essentia sufficit sibi*).² What is Maimonidean in Eckhart's interpretation of *Ego sum qui sum*, and what enables him predicate the transcendentals directly of God, marks the crucial departure from Avicenna. For the Persian philosopher, “God has no quiddity other than his sole *anitas*, which *esse* signifies”.³ Generally speaking, *quidditas* and *anitas* correspond to the difference of *essentia* and *ens*, insofar as the former answers the question “*quid est*” and the latter “*an sit*”. For Avicenna, God cannot have a quiddity because it pertains to a quiddity, the intrinsic definitional properties of a thing, to be indifferent to the existence which accedes upon it through God's creative, efficient causality. In other words, a quiddity as such is inherently a subject which receives being as an accident; it always stands in relation to a cause.⁴ God's productivity is therefore, for Avicenna, prior to the perfection of essences and the self-sufficiency of separate intellects, for he is the simplicity of *anitas* which is beyond the contingency of quiddities which depend on the *Necesse esse* for their sufficiency.

Commenting on *Sermo XXV*, Vladimir Lossky finds the place where one can situate “l'aspect avicennien d'un Dieu sans quiddité ou essence dans la pensée complexe de Maître Eckhart”:⁵

Every time Eckhart speaks of the immediate relation of creatures to God, of effects to

¹ *Prologus generalis*, n.15 (LW I, 160,4-5): 'creatio et omne opus dei in ipso principio creationis mox simul est perfectum et terminatum.'

² *In Exod.*, n.20 (LW II, 26,2-5). Cf. Moses Maimonides, *Dux neutrorum* I, c.62 (ed. Justinianus, fol. 26).

³ *In Exod.*, n.15 (LW II, 21, 5-6): 'cuius quidditas est sua anitas, ut ait Avicenna, nec habet quidditatem praeter solam anitatem, quam esse significat'. Avicenna latinus, *Liber de philosophia prima* VIII, c.4 (ed. Van Reit, 398,78 et seqq.).

⁴ Avicenna latinus, *Liber de philosophia prima* VIII, c.4 (ed. Van Reit, 401,33-34): 'quicquid habet quidditatem praeter anitatem, causatum est'; (ibid., 402,44-47): 'Igitur omne habens quidditatem causatum est; et cetera alia, excepto necesse esse, habent quidditates quae sunt per se possibles esse, quibus non accidit esse nisi extrinsecus'.

⁵ V. Lossky, *Théologie négative*, p.102 : “Toutes les fois qu'il parle du rapport immédiat des créatures à Dieu, des effets à la Cause première, des *omnia* à *Unum*, des *entia* à *Esse*, Dieu n'est pas considéré en Lui-même, en tant qu'Essence ou *Quod est*. Dans cette perspective de causalité, Il apparaît uniquement comme *Esse omnium*, comme un *Quo est pur*.”

the First Cause, of the *omnia* to *Unum*, of *entia* to *esse*, God is not considered in himself, as Essence or as *Quod est*. [Rather] in this causal perspective, God appears uniquely as *Esse omnium*, as a pure *Quo est*.

As efficient or external, God appears to creatures as a pure *esse* or *quo est* and thus his quiddity remains hidden. Eckhart, however, still allows for a quidditative determination of God; although the indistinction of this essence, once identified with Unity, produces the most characteristic features of his thought. Most of all, it is in the immediacy of that One to all things in the Word, which alone manifests and knows the hidden essence.

This shift cannot be summarized briefly. It requires the rest of this thesis to explain. What it inaugurates, ultimately, is the intimate presence of the divine essence/indistinct Unity to each essence, in which every finite being becomes an expression of the divine infinite essence.

The coming forth of creatures, and the perspective of *esse*, is a subordinate moment. Eckhart more closely follows Maimonides for whom, in opposition to Avicenna, the unspeakable Tetragrammaton indicates something more than simply a “thatness” beyond essence: it signifies the identity of the divine essence with its predicate, being.¹ And it is that interpretation which enables the fundamental doctrine we are considering in this Chapter: the speculative interpretation of *Ego sum qui sum*, which finds in the very sequence of the name the reflexive process within God by which he constitutes himself as Sufficiency, as the negation of negation that founds the plenitude of his *esse*. The *Ego sum* indicates the identity of the divine essence with existence because, in contrast to creatures which are inherently *ab alio*, God cannot have a principle beyond himself that ensures his existence.² God is essentially pure substance, while creatures are like accidents essentially “of another” insofar as they are realized concretely.

Ego, sum, and qui are all “most proper” to God.³ The *ego* indicates the “pure substance” (*meram substantiam*), pure because it is “without any accident, anything foreign or any quality”, and stands for the singular divine essence. *Sum* is a “substantive verb”, denoting the actual existence of its subject for it is always a predicate “*de secundo adiacens*”. Finally, the pronoun *qui* signifies the infinity of the divine *esse*. Bringing together the infinity, singularity and substantivity, Eckhart clearly finds an anticipation of

¹ Maimonides, *Dux neutrorum* I, caps.61-63 (ed. Justinianus, fols. 25-26).

² *Prologus generalis*, n.12 (LW I, 156,15-158,4).

³ For what follows, see *In Exod*, nn.14-15 (LW II, 20,1-21,6).

the *QUI EST* as interpreted by John of Damascus, which signifies the infinite sea of the divine substance. But this affirmative and inclusive plenitude is grounded in the movement Eckhart outlines next:¹

Thirdly, note that the repetition, it says '*sum qui sum*', indicates the purity of affirmation by the exclusion of all negativity from God himself; moreover [it indicates] in God himself a reflexive conversion back upon himself, and the remaining or fixity of God within himself.

Eckhart describes this “boiling or engendering of itself” (*bullitio sive parturitionem sui*) with words burgeoning with the same fecundity they describe, speaking of what is “fervent in itself, liquifying and boiling in itself and into itself”, of a light “penetrating in light and into light by its total self and into its total self, and by its total self converting and reflecting itself”.² The Trinitarian determinations then start to emerge; this reflexivity is the process wherein “the monad generated (or begot) the monad and reflects love (or ardor) into itself”.³

Eckhart is applying to God the notion of the simple and complete self-return of intellect, derived from the *Liber de causis* and ultimately from the *Elements of Theology* of Proclus.⁴ The application of self-intellection to the First in the *Liber*, not to mention the Arabic paraphrase of the *Enneads*, is a significant departure from the two pagan sources of the *de causis*. For Plotinus, the One is beyond all reflexivity since all things, including intellectual activity, are “in need” of a good toward which they are striving (*epheisis*).⁵ Such an argument could be derived from Aristotle (*Nic. Eth.* 1.1, 1094a3), but for Plotinus, the activity of *Nous* is understood to actualize a potentiality for thinking; this is his doctrine of intellectual matter which, however, is always converted to its principle. The One is therefore beyond, and the cause of, the self-sufficiency of *Nous*. The self-return which establishes the perfection and self-sufficiency of the separate intellects is a

¹ *In Exod.*, n.16 (LW II, 21,7-10): 'Tertio notandum quod repetitio, quod bis ait: *sum qui sum*, puritatem affirmationis excluso omni negativo ab ipso deo indicat; rursus ipsius esse quandam in se ipsum et super se ipsum reflexivam conversionem et in se ipso mansionem sive fixationem'.

² *In Exod.*, n.16 (LW II, 21,10-22,1): 'in se fervens et in se ipso et in se ipsum liquescens et bulliens, lux in luce et in lucem se toto se totum penetrans, et se toto super se totum conversum et reflexum undique'.

³ *In Exod.*, n.16, (22,2-3), citing prop.1 of the *Liber XXIV philosophorum* (ed. Hudry, 5). Eckhart shifts *gignit* to *genuit* and *ardorem* to *amorem*, making the text explicitly Trinitarian.

⁴ See Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 83 (ed. Dodds, 76,29-78,4); *Liber de causis*, props. 7 and 15 (ed. Bardenheuer, 170-171; 177-178).

⁵ Plotinus, *Ennead* V.6.5.10-12.

hypostatically lower moment than its cause; it proceeds from the super-perfection of the Good. But for Eckhart, God finds himself as sufficiency prior to the analogy of creation: “God suffices to himself and to all things, and he is his own sufficiency and the sufficiency of all things.”¹ He expresses this difference with the metaphors of boiling (*bullitio*) and over-boiling (*ebullitio*), and like Aquinas grounds creation in the “prior way” (*praeuia*) of the Trinitarian processions.²

The self-relation that Eckhart is describing of the divine existence to its simple essence is absolutely not a hypostatically subordinate moment to the Godhead, as it would be for Plotinus. The life of the First for Eckhart is light in light, penetrating into light by its whole self into its whole self. Ulrich of Strasbourg (+1277), a student of Albert the Great, and Dominican provincial of Teutonia in 1272, in which Eckhart would later function, used the doctrine of the “essential cause” developed by Albert to explain how the universe in its totality proceeds immediately from the First.³ In Book IV of his major work, *De summo bono*, Ulrich describes the essential cause using the features attributed to it by his Master: God is the “most noble eternal living being”, the “clear and creative light of a universal agent intellect”. He is the noblest living being because his activity is never “obscured” or “hindered” by anything. From Aristotle he borrows the notion that this (intellectual) movement is “essential” rather than accidental because it is not determined by another.⁴ Furthermore, and suitable to Eckhart's analysis of Exodus 3.14, Ulrich states that the First can be considered in its condition as Agent (*conditio operantis*) in two ways: in his simplicity, so that “he is himself all that he possesses,” or in his perfection, insofar as “he contains in himself the perfection of all genera according to their proper reasons”.⁵

God passes through all things and so constitutes them according to what de Libera calls the “pseudo-Aristotelian” *dictum* of “the univocity of analogy”, which is a

¹ *In Exod.*, n.21 (LW II, 28,1-3): 'Sicut enim ipse sibi et omnibus est, sic et ipse sibi et omnibus sufficit, ipse sua et omnium sufficientia est, 2 Cor.3: *sufficientia nostra ex deo est.*'

² *In Exod.*, n.18 (LW II 22,7-9).

³ Ulrich of Strasbourg, *De summo bono*, IV.1.8 (ed. Lescoe, 225,1-4). See F. Lescoe, *God as First Principle in Ulrich of Strasbourg. Critical Text of 'Summa De Bono', IV, 1 based on hitherto unpublished mediaeval manuscripts and Philosophical Study* (New York: Alba House, 1979). Lescoe's edition, however, has been generally found somewhat wanting.

⁴ Ulrich of Strasbourg, *De summo bono*, IV.1.2 (ed. Lescoe, 167,9-168,2). Cf. Aristotle, *Physics* VIII, c.4, 255b31-256a2.

⁵ Ulrich of Strasbourg, *De summo bono*, IV.1.3 (ed. Lescoe, 170,17-21).

characteristic doctrine of Albert the Great.¹ Albert's theory of univocal analogy regards God as wholly present to various proportioned similitudes of his essence. God is neither participated equally by creatures, as if he were a genus, nor is the being in which creatures proportionally participate in common simply to be identified with the divine being. This last aspect of the doctrine in particular is most decisive for the differences within his school.

Their responses to this issue appear to distinguish Albert and Thomas Aquinas on one side, from Ulrich and Eckhart on the other. The issue is a familiar one: Eckhart would not say with Aquinas that “being is diverse in diverse things, [for it is that] by which a thing formally is”.² On his view “being is not only common but the same in all things”.³ Ulrich, anticipating Eckhart's later position, maintains that “God is the only true being, because he is simple” and is called “true” because he “is mingled with no extraneous determinate nature”.⁴ Having established that the truth of God's being coincides with its purity, he then uses the axis of truth and falsehood to separate creature from creator, much as we had found Eckhart to do in the previous Chapter. “True being” is what is common and convenes to all things, while each thing in its particular, incidental determinacy excludes itself from it, and is therefore a “false being”.⁵

Every creature, however, since by necessity it would be a particular being differing

¹ The *dictum* is that “every manifold of causes that fall within one causal genus is reduced to a first in that genus” (*Métaphysique et noétique*, p.134). This, however, is a synthesis and transformation of three passages from Aristotle (see *OLME*, vol.6, pp.372-373): (i) from *Metaphysics* II, c.1, 999b25, as interpreted in Averroes' commentary, that that to which a name primarily and essentially applies is the cause that the intention of this name applies to everything else; (ii) from *Metaphysics* V, c.6, 1016b18-20, that that by which we primarily know each genus is the first measure of that genus, so that the principle of what is knowable in each genus is one; (iii) from *Metaphysics* X, c.1, 1052b18, which Albert invokes and modifies: 'sicut dicitur in X *Metaphysicae*, omnia mensurantur uno primo indivisibili et certissimo illius generis; sed sicut ibidem dicitur, in genere substantiae est una prima mensura, et Commentator dicit, quod est primus motor, id est deus. See Albert, *Super Dionysium De divinis nominibus*, c.1, n.50 (ed. Coloniensis XXXVII/1, p.31,63-65).

² Aquinas, *In I Sent.*, d.19, q.5, a.2: '...in diversis rebus est diversum esse, quo formaliter res est'; idem, *De ente et essentia*, c.5: '...esse des diversum in diversis' (ed. De Libera-Michon, p.106).

³ *Sermo* XXV.2, n.267 (LW IV, 243, 6-7).

⁴ Ulrich of Strasbourg, *De summo bono* II.2.4 (ed. Collingwood, 299). Citations of *De summo bono* II.2.1-3 and II.3.1-2 from edition of F. Collingwood in J. R. O'Donnell (ed.), *Nine Medieval Thinkers* (Toronto: PIMS, 1955).

⁵ Ulrich of Strasbourg, *De summo bono* II.2.4 (ed. Collingwood, 299): 'Sed omnis creatura, cum necessario sit speciale ens differens ab aliis, habet praeter esse, quod est omnibus commune, aliud incidens in naturam [entis] ut determinatio in determinatum quod ipsum specificat, et distinguit ab aliis, quia non potest idem esse ratio convenientiae et differentiae; et ideo habet falsum esse.'

from others, has in addition to being, which is common to all [*omnibus commune*], something falling [*incidens*] into the nature of being, just as a determination [relates to] the determined which it specifies, and distinguishes from others, because the notion of harmony and difference cannot be the same being; therefore the creature has a false being.

For Ulrich, then, as for Eckhart, God appears almost like a genus which, unlike the partitioning of the genus “animal,” for example, excludes its species to the extent that they are different from it. The response of Albert, and even Ulrich himself, to that problem are crucial to Meister Eckhart's interpretation of *Ego sum qui sum*, and the relation between *ens commune* and its principle.

Creation for Albert, throughout his *corpus*, is understood as the emanation or *fluxus* of light from God who is an essentially active thinking.¹ For Albert, each communication of the divine essence is a unique theophany – the self-differentiation of the divine essence operating in and through the activity of the participating creature.² In a cosmos full of seminal reasons, the formal determinations of creatures are present first inchoately within matter before being educed in and through their activity. From that standpoint, there is a univocal presence of the divine causal power to each participant which is not only articulated diversely, but that diversity itself is a *different* mode of being than God's. Albert, like Thomas in his commentary on the *De hebdomadibus*, explains how a creature's own activity and perfection brings it into relation, both in its identity and difference, with the divine *esse* as Good.³ Therefore, the Good is wholly present to each self-related nature, but above their estranged *esse* and *essentia*, as what calls or summons them, as the end toward which they are converted and, finally, unified and perfected. Creation, for Albert and Aquinas, is a unified act: Goodness in God signifies “the divine essence and in creatures connotes the diffusion of being and the Good, not as this or that, but completely and generally”.⁴

For Albert, the danger latent in the alternative position is above all the pantheistic identity of God and creature which are merely diversified numerically. In his commentary

¹ See Albertus Magnus, *De causis et processu universitatis a prima causa* I, tr.2, c.1 and I, tr.4, c.1. For the three fundamentally different senses of light in Albert's metaphysics, see A. de Libera, *Métaphysique et noétique*, p.182.

² A. de Libera, *Métaphysique et noétique*, pp.127-129 et *passim*.

³ Albertus Magnus, *Summa theol*, I, tr.6, q.26, c.2 (ed. Coloniensis XXXIV/1, p.193,90). A. de Libera, *Métaphysique et noétique*, p.129: “la théophanie désigne un double mouvement de descente et de retour. La communication par similitude est toujours en même temps conversion par similitude.”

⁴ *Ibid.*, (ed. Coloniensis XXXIV/1, p.195,32-34).

on the *Metaphysics*, he reduces this position to that of Parmenides, whose primary assumption is this: that the highest reality is not multiplied by secondary realities.¹ One could easily number Eckhart among the proponents of such a view, for he has cited Parmenides favourably on the relation of the one substantial being and plurality of *entia hoc aut hoc*. Eckhart's solution, as we have seen, is to simply deny that the creature as such ever truly possesses its existence – being is more intimate to the creature than it is to itself.

De Libera notes how, in Albert's *De causis et processu universitatis*, the Master “seems to condemn his own school in advance, [namely in their] thesis of the identity of the First Cause according to essence and its differentiation according to being in its diverse products”; maintaining the same historical-philosophical framework to which he remained committed, where all positions can be reduced to Stoicism, Epicureanism and Peripateticism, Albert writes of the nascent origins of his own tradition:²

The mode of this flux and influx was ascribed exceedingly diversely by the Peripatetics of old. The most ancient of them, from whom philosophy first began, such as Trismegistus, Apollo, Hermes Aegyptius and Asclepius, posited that the mode of this flux [consisted] in this: that the first principle penetrates all things and is all that is of the being of everything [...]. It is not diversified in essence, according to which it is in everything, but according to being, according to which it is concealed more or less by sinking down with the shadowing of matter in this or in that.

Ulrich's own view, given in Book IV of the *De summo bono*, has argued precisely that. The first principle, which is “one in its essence, flows through all secondaries”, and although “it is other in that this nature is in diverse things, it is not differences that multiply the essence of the genus, but being”.³

These differences are still, it seems, understood within the same univocal genus as the first cause. These various analogical participations in being are not fully distinguished from the highest being that sustains them. Ulrich therefore moves in the direction Eckhart will later take:⁴

¹ A. de Libera, *Métaphysique et noétique*, p.136, citing Albert, *Metaphysica* I, 4, 10.

² A. de Libera, *Métaphysique et noétique*, p.171, citing Albert, *De causis et processu universitatis*, lib.1, tr.4, c.3 (ed. Coloniensis XVII/2, p.45,23-33).

³ Ulrich of Strasbourg, *De summo bono*, IV.1.5 (ed. Lescoe, 190,19-191,2).

⁴ Ulrich of Strasbourg, *De summo bono*, IV.1.2 (ed. Lescoe, 167,4-8): 'Et hoc necessario est primum vivum

For all nature, which is either univocally or analogically present in diverse things, is in every caused thing by that in which primarily and essentially the [diversified] nature is found, just as from the first heat, which is fire, the heat of all things is caused.

Like Eckhart in his Maimonidean reading of Exodus 3.14 as the identity of the divine *quiditas* and its *anitas*, Ulrich also grounds the productivity of God in his actuality and self-sufficiency. For Eckhart and Ulrich the same consequence follows: God is self-sufficient, he is the sufficiency of every creature.¹

The difference, however, is that Ulrich introduces this sufficiency within an account of the diffusivity of the Good; each creature achieves its perfection according to a proportioned similitude of the First. By preserving this mediating function of the similitude, Ulrich assembles a theory of essential causation which in crucial ways obviates the simple identification of his position with that of the “most ancient Peripatetics.” Ulrich arrives at many of the same conclusions regarding the causality of the Good as Albert would hold in his *Summa theologiae*, compiled during and after the final years of Ulrich’s life. Central to the causality of the Good as it is conceived by Albert is the *difference in kind* between “what is formally good by the essence of goodness” and what is “essentially good” through the identity of its *esse* and *quod est*.² This essential Good, therefore, is “not multiplied in its subjects”; it is essentially present to all things, although the relation of God to creatures, as Being, traverses an essential difference in kind.³ Despite not following Albert’s formulation of this essential difference with respect to Being, Ulrich uses the causality of the Good to a similar end. Therefore, in the univocity of analogy, creatures are united in their desire – that is, they are unified by attaining to the end that is theirs – but differentiated in their essences; the Good is present to all equally as exemplary, but sought diversely for each individual supposit. Just like a universal that precedes the whole which it effects, the Good as such cannot be predicated

quia omnis natura quae univoce vel analogice est in diversis, in omnibus eis causatur ab eo in quo primo et essentialiter ista natura reperitur, sicut a primo calido, quod est ignis, causatur calor in omnibus calidis.'

¹ *In Exod.*, n.21 (LW II, 28,1-3); Ulrich of Strasbourg, *De summo bono* IV.1.5 (ed. Lescoe, 192,10-12): 'Secundum est sua communicabilitas ex hoc quod non solum sibi, sed etiam omnibus aliis sufficit'.

² Albertus Magnus, *Summa theologiae* I, tr.6, q.26, c.2, art.1 (ed. Coloniensis XXXIV/1, 193,77-81).

³ *Ibid.*, (ed. Coloniensis, 193,82-87). Cf. A. de Libera, *Métaphysique et noétique*, p.185.

of these various subjects.¹ For Meister Eckhart, preserving the divine transcendence over the diversity to which it is univocally related as Being, not as Good, requires another approach; his theory of predication, as explained above, has God, under the guise of the *transcendentia*, as the predicate *de secundo adiacens*.

Eckhart proceeds by establishing the internal conditions of the divine self-sufficiency, derived from the abundance of Unity as such. The plenitude of the divine *esse* for Eckhart is therefore a derivative moment, founded on a more prior self-relation. Consider the use of *exseritio*, “a stretching forth”,² in Eckhart’s *In Exodum* and Ulrich’s *De summo bono*, to describe the fecundity of life within God:

Neither is [God] impeded whatsoever from the universal action of life in all things living because the being, by which he essentially is, is an active principle, that remaining continually at peace within itself stretches forth [*exserit*] the action of its nature. Neither can He be impeded by anything because he has the sufficiency of acting from himself, just as the source of light [*lux*] continually stretches forth light [*exserit lucem*] and [the source of] heat, [lesser] heats.³

Life indicates a certain pushing out [*exseritionem*] by which a thing, swelling within itself, pours forth [*profundat*] first into itself entirely, whatsoever of itself [is one] in whatsoever of itself [*quodlibet sui in quodlibet sui*], prior to pouring out [*effundat*] and boiling over externally.⁴

Whereas the difference of sufficient agent and effect is captured for Ulrich by the stretching forth of light into derivative light, characterizing the relation of perfection by similitude between the First intellect as the primordial light and a created intellect as an emanated light,⁵ for Eckhart the shining of light into light, and the stretching forth of Life is seen first and foremost as a movement of God within and toward himself. In a Latin sermon, he will even speak of this internal life and diffusion as the function of the Good.⁶

¹ Albertus Magnus, *Super Ethica* I, lect.1, n.9 (ed. Coloniensis XIV/1, 7,25-54).

² Albertus Magnus, *De causis et processu universitatis a prima causa* I, tr.2, c.2 (ed. Coloniensis, XVII/2, 27,22-58), on *Quod primum est vivens et omnis vitae principium*, continually associates life with this 'pushing out'.

³ Ulrich of Strasbourg, *De summo bono* IV.1.2 (ed. Lescoe, 167,16-168,1): 'Nec ab universali actione vitae in omnia viva aequaliter impeditur quia esse quo essentialiter est aliquod activum principium, illud in se quietum manens continue exserit actionem illius naturae. Nec per aliquid potest impedi quia sufficientiam agendi habet a se, sicut lux continue exserit lucem et calor calores'.

⁴ *In Exod.*, n.16 (LW II, 22,3-6): 'Vita enim quandam dicit exseritionem, qua res in se ipsa intumescens se profundit primo in se toto, quodlibet sui in quodlibet sui, antequam effundat et ebulliat extra'.

⁵ Cf. A. de Libera, *Métaphysique et noétique*, p.195.

⁶ *Sermo* XLIX.3, n.511 (LW IV, 426,5-9).

In what follows, I shall explain how this principle of life “exserts” (*exserit*) itself when the Good has been relegated to the *foris*. This relational and mutual inclusivity (*quodlibet in quodlibet*) has become the moment where the Father and the Son are both one and distinct. As Albert explains, “everything that is essentially and through itself an active principle continually exserts [*exserit*] its action, when it is at rest within itself”.¹ We must now explore the possibility of that relation, and how God's rest in the activity of his nature for Ulrich has been transposed by Eckhart into the difference of essence and Trinity.

3.1: *Ipsium intelligere est fundamentum ipsius esse*²

The sufficiency and productivity of God are united by Eckhart in a movement of reflexive constitution. The focus of this section is the notion of an intellectual “foundation” (*fundamentum*) of God's self-sufficient *esse* which provides Eckhart with the means of explaining how *ens commune* with its intelligible diversity of modes can be the perfection of all things without, on the one hand, compromising the divine simplicity or, on the other, annihilating the modes as such. Simply put, intellect mediates the constitution of the One as plenitude (*plenitudo*) out of the One as purity (*puritas essendi*), which is to say that intellect is the process of the One as *negatio negationis*.

Whether the originating moment of *puritas* is included within Intellect, or is strictly speaking beyond, has become a matter of some scholarly dispute, and bears on the relation of Godhead or Deity, “the Ground without ground”, and God as Triune in Eckhart's sermons. Frequently in his preaching Eckhart will urge his congregation to seek the Ground beyond the Trinity of Persons, to unify the simple ground of the soul with the Ground which, “if God were ever to look upon it, that must cost him all his divine names and the properties of his Persons”.³ Does the One Non-Being remain unthought and always anterior to the divine thinking and being, or does intellect in its procession out of the infinite *esse* of the First explicate or unfold what is latent within that infinity?

Hervé Pasqua approaches Eckhart with that kind of Neoplatonic framework in

¹ Albertus Magnus, *De causis et processu* I, tr.2, c.2 (ed. Coloniensis, XVII/2, 27,22-24): 'Omne autem quod essentialiter et per se aliquod activum principium est, continue exserit actionem illius, cum ipsum in se quietum sit.'

² *Quaestio parisiensis* I, n.4 (LW V, 40,7).

³ *Predigt 2* (DW I, 43,3-5; trans. *Essential Eckhart*, 181).

mind. Associating Eckhart continually with Plotinus, Pasqua identifies the Deity with the One beyond Being and the Triune God with the One-Being as *Nous*, specifically targeting interpretations which equate the Ground with Intellect or with Being.¹ His opposition is well-founded in a sense, for it is certainly not Eckhart's intention in his preaching to lead souls to a beatific vision of intellectual reflexivity, and so Pasqua is right to avoid any connotations of reflexivity where there cannot be any at all.² Detachment is the highest of all virtues for Eckhart, the state of holding to nothing of one's own as apart from God. In truth, it is a state that belongs to the divine liberty rather than the human; like *henôsis* in the Neoplatonic mystical tradition, detachment can be summarized as the liberty of remaining (*monê*), and is necessarily beyond thinking. Additionally, like Plotinus, reflexivity and thought are certainly stages along the mystical way for Eckhart. Intellection and the *imago* are unique forms of mediation, since they are entirely of a different order (*est alterius condicionis*) than the internal differences of analogates.³ But while the form of Eckhart's thought is certainly Plotinian, its content differs importantly in one crucial respect: the indistinction prior to intellectual reflexivity is the divine essence as being prior to the epiphany of the One-Father. *Unum* can be taken has a higher determination than *ens* only insofar as it specifies being as *puritas essendi*, which is to say the exclusion of all negation and the indistinction of the essence:⁴

It follows that the 'one' adds nothing beyond 'being', nor according to any reason, but only according to negation, which is not so for 'true' and 'good'. For this reason 'one' immediately holds fast to being, in that it signifies the purity and marrow or apex of being, which the term 'being' does not signify.

The One *as determinate* is therefore a movement, activity, or manifestation within Being and always presupposes it. Its negative relation to *ens* is a constant motif of Eckhart's thought. This is why a complete assimilation of Eckhart to Plotinus cannot work. When Pasqua supports his interpretation with a passage from the vernacular treatise *On*

¹ H. Pasqua, *Maître Eckhart. Le procès de l'Un* (Paris: Cerf, 2006), pp.35-43, for example.

² R. L. Hart, "La négativité dans l'ordre du divin," in É. Zum Brunn (ed.), *Voici Maître Eckhart* (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 1994), p.199-208.

³ *Quaestio parisiensis* I, n.5 (LW V, 42,1-2).

⁴ *In Sap.*, n.148 (LW II, 486,2-5): 'Iterum etiam li unum nihil addit super esse, nec secundum rationem quidem, sed secundum solam negationem; non sic verum et bonum. Propter quod immediatissime se tenet ad esse, quin immo significat puritatem et medullam sive apicem ipsius esse, quam nec li esse significat.'

Detachment where Eckhart says that in detachment the soul “loses its name and it draws God into itself, so that in itself it becomes nothing,” he prudently avoids including the sentence preceding, which states that while “all the powers of soul are racing for the crown, [...] it will be given only to the soul's being”.¹

My intention is to explain how Eckhart's distinction between God and Godhead is rather between the Trinity as active Being and the Ground as Being at rest. Pasqua is right to say that Eckhart follows Aquinas in separating “one which converts with *ens*” and the “one which is the principle of number”.² The result, however, is not an elevation of the One as a hypostasis above *Nous*, but the coincidence of transcendental metaphysics and Procline henology: the Godhead is simply indeterminate, undifferentiated Being, at rest and without relation, equivalent to the detached soul. In the person of the Father, the hidden essence becomes productive, generating the Son, who reflects the origin back to itself in the Spirit and constitutes the divine being in its sufficiency as a *negatio negationis*: “l'Un manifeste dynamiquement l'identité de l'Être.”³ At the transcendental level, so at the theological: the only “addition” that *ens* can receive is through the “mode of negation”.⁴

The explicit distinction of Godhead and God belongs chiefly, if not exclusively, to Eckhart's vernacular works. Eckhart, therefore, offers no direct account in his Latin work of a distinction which has appeared so crucial to contemporary scholars. I would maintain that their strict separation is best understood within the context of his preaching, the goal of which is to lead souls to their salvation by getting past all reifying, imaginative distinctions. Accordingly, Eckhart's comparison of the virtues of detachment and humility most succinctly captures the difference:⁵

The second reason why I praise detachment above humility is that perfect humility is always abasing itself below all created things, and in this abasement man goes out of himself toward created things, but detachment remains within itself.

¹ H. Pasqua, *Le procès de l'Un*, p.42, citing *On detachment (Essential Eckhart, 292)*. See also *Sermo LIV.2*, n.533 (LW IV, 449,1).

² H. Pasqua, *Le procès de l'Un*, p.75.

³ V. Lossky, *Théologie négative*, p.70.

⁴ Aquinas, *De veritate*, q.1, a.1 (ed. Leonine, vol.22/1, 5,139-142); Eckhart, *In Sap.*, n.148 (LW II, 486,2-3), cited above.

⁵ *On detachment (Essential Eckhart, p.286)*.

The distinction between these virtues illustrates the difference between the Ground and the Trinity. Humility is the movement of the kenotic Word as it passes through the *propria* of every created thing, while transcending all of them insofar as those sensible particulars are incapable of comprehending its commonality and universality. For the rational creature, this strict difference of rational and real being is the means to same intellectual universality that belongs to the divine Logos. Part of Eckhart's pastoral work, therefore, consists in undoing a tendency among "masters" in his own time, which sees intellect as one of many "powers" of the soul directed toward what is below.¹ Beatitude arises for both the soul and God himself through the passivity of filiation which completes that process, where the equality of the Father and Son passes over into the unity of Existence in the Spirit. As Michel Henry suggests, the 'process' of humility or poverty which brings the soul to union with God's essence does not fall outside the essence: "Because they effect the retreat from everything which is not the essence, humility and poverty lay bare the structure of the essence".² For Henry, the "internal structure of the essence" is "set free" by this original exclusion of otherness in humility to reveal itself to itself, not as transcending any exteriority, but as unequivocally immanent to itself.³ In this sense the response of intellectual creatures to divine grace fulfils a providential role, and becomes in fact the locus of divine self-mediation.

Creation, which Eckhart broadly associates with 'grace freely given' (*gratia gratis data*), "comes from God insofar as he is understood as being, *or rather* as something Good".⁴ Generally within the medieval period, the division of *gratia gratis data* and *gratia gratum faciens* anticipates the later relation of prevenient, or actual, and saving grace in the Counter Reformation. In Bonaventure we find a basic definition: *gratia gratis data* is any gift "superadded" to natural gifts, creating either a habit or act "whereby God excites the human soul to seek Him".⁵ Thomas Aquinas similarly associates this grace with a co-operative hierarchy of human souls leading one another to

¹ See *Predigen* 101 and 102 (Walshe, 29-44).

² M. Henry, *L'essence de la manifestation*, 2 vol., Epiméthée (Paris: PUF, 1963), I.392 (italics removed). English translation: *The Essence of Manifestation*, trans. G.Etzkorn (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), p.314.

³ M. Henry, *L'essence de la manifestation*, I.395 (Etzkorn, p.317)

⁴ *Sermo XXV.1*, n.258 (LW IV, 235,7), italics added.

⁵ Bonaventure, *In II Sent.*, d.28, a.2, q.1 (ed. Quaracchi, vol.2, p.682). Cf. A. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, pp.100-104.

God.¹ Both clearly have in mind some sort of mediated hierarchy of virtues or souls leading the soul gradually to her ultimate end. Eckhart retains this mediating form of *gratia gratis data*, but gives it an unprecedented cosmic scope, identifying it with the procession of all creatures. All creatures are ordered to each other by their differences, “not by their genus”. Creatures relate to being as external and therefore primarily as Good; they are given grace freely, but, like accidents, cannot receive it in themselves. Eckhart takes the unmerited freedom of divine grace to mean that it is given without regard for its reception.

On the other hand, the grace associated with the return, 'grace making grace' (*gratia gratum faciens*), belongs only to a rational creature which is “totally related to what it is an image of”, namely God's essence.² Intellectual cognition is an exception to the analogical diversity of creatures because it relates wholly to the common, and therefore possesses a unique relation to its origin which cannot properly be classified as 'good'.³

God is above, not among all good things. To the person who receives it grace is a confirmation, a configuration, or – better – a transfiguration of the soul into and with God. Secondly, it makes one have one existence with God, something that is more than assimilation.

Unlike the analogical difference of common and proper attributes which is given without regard for the merits of its matter, this “univocal” relation occurs “not only from grace, but also from merit” because what is given “confirms” the nature of its recipient.⁴ The soul's existence, like God's, “is the location of grace, due to the fact that nothing can be absent from or lacking to Existence itself”.⁵ The rational and the supernatural are identified. As with Dietrich, he asserts that the soul is not fashioned after one of the divine ideas but to the divine essence, and so it at all times relates to grace not as a

¹ Aquinas, *ST*, Ia-IIae.111.1.

² *Sermo XXV.2*, n.266 (LW IV, 241,11-242,9).

³ *Sermo XXV.2*, n.263 (LW IV, 239,5-8): 'Non ergo inter omnia, sed super omnia bona. Item respectu suscipientis gratiam gratia est confirmatio, configuratio sive potius transformatio animae in deum et cum deo. Secundo dat esse unum cum deo, quo est plus assimilatione.'

⁴ *In Ioh.*, n.182 (LW III, 152,1-3). Eckhart erroneously attributes the view that form is given according to the merits of matter to Plato.

⁵ *Sermo XXV.2*, n.267 (LW IV, 243,5-6).

subject receptive of grace as an extrinsic accident,¹ but as its “place”.

Intelligere is the foundation of *esse* in the same way that 'grace making grace' is superior to, and the Trinitarian ground of, 'grace freely given.'² In other words, it contains the created order and the Good concomitant with it in a higher mode than creation is in itself. As É. Wéber has noted about Eckhart, and A. de Libera has said of the Rhineland theologians generally, motivating this is a Dionysian understanding of the divine Wisdom: God's self-communication to creatures appears among them as a tension drawing created intellects back to itself. The divinisation of the soul is the “goal of creation”.³

Turning now to consider the Parisian Questions in some detail, it is clear that Eckhart's subordination of *ens* to God always coincides with a more rigorous subordination of 'good' to 'true'. Intellect's supremacy over this order of being consists in the non-being of its relationality. Therefore the *intellectual* relation of an idea or a rational creature to its origin brings it to its perfection where its material, formal realization cannot. In Lossky's words: “quand l'Un se présente exclusivement comme principe de l'opération intérieure, quand l'Être se produit soi-même *sub ratione Unius*, on ne peut parler de «similitude», incompatible avec l'Unité, mais uniquement d'«Image».”⁴

3.1.1: *Quaestiones parisienses* I and II

As I was coming here today I was wondering how I should preach to you so that it would make sense and you would understand it. Then I thought of a comparison: If you could understand that, you would understand my meaning and the basis of all my thinking in everything I have ever preached. The comparison concerns my eyes and a piece of wood. [...] Now pay good heed to me! If it happens that my eye is in itself one and simple, and it is opened and casts its glance upon the piece of wood, the eye and wood remain what they are, and yet in the act of vision they become as one. [...] But if the wood were immaterial, purely spiritual as is the sight of my eye, then one could truly say that in the act of vision the wood and my eye subsisted in

¹ *In Ioh.*, n.549 (LW III, 479, 1-4): 'Sciendum ergo quod omnis creatura citra hominem facta est ad similitudinem dei et idea alicuius in deo. Homo autem creatus est ad imaginem totius substantiae dei, et sic non ad simile, sed ad unum'; *In Gen* I, n.115 (LW I, 270,13-271,1), citing Avicenna, *Philosophia prima sive scientia divina* IX, c.7 (ed. Van Reit, 511,78-80): 'perficiatur in ea dispositio esse universitatis et sic transeat in saeculum intellectum instar esse totius mundi.' Cf. *Sermo* XI.1, n.112 (LW IV, 106,1-2).

² *Sermo* XXV.1, n.258.

³ Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names* IX.5 (PG 3, 912D). Cf. A. de Libera, *La mystique rhénane*, pp.53-56; É. Wéber, “Eckhart et l'ontothéologisme”, pp.57-59 and esp. 72-79.

⁴ V. Lossky, *Théologie négative*, p.118.

one being.¹

Meister Eckhart's *Parisian Questions* are products of their time. These are disputations recorded in a manuscript dating from 1302, held by Eckhart as Master of Theology, and following his work as prior in Erfurt under the provincial Dietrich which began after acquiring his bachelor's of theology in 1293 in Paris. The influence of Dietrich and the Dominican school of Albert the Great in Cologne, where he had studied before entering Saint-Jacques in Paris, is decisive for his tack in these disputed questions.

These disputations at first appear to have occurred in a vacuum since Eckhart makes no explicit mention of recent luminaries such as Henry of Ghent and Godfrey of Fontaines in setting out his own position; the theologians criticized in his commentaries always go unnamed. In his sermons, however, Eckhart will recall the disputation of an "important priest" who came to Paris and "thundered exceedingly" about the priority of will over intellect, until "another master spoke", better than all those in Paris who "[hold] the better opinion".² He remembers fondly how he had said "in Paris at the university" that "all things are accomplished in the truly humble person".³ It seems he took great delight in defying the blustery masters of the day with the *homo humilis* who is, surely, much more than simply the pious faithful. Ultimately, Eckhart's vocation resided in his pastoral work and in encouraging souls to partake of the uncreated Ground which can never be their own. He wanted to show the masters that this standpoint is itself grounded in the philosophical tradition of which they are recent heirs, and that the pious wayfarer is capable of the same speculative insight as the theologians through intellect, not despite it.⁴

The recurring debates in early fourteenth-century Paris would have held some interest for him, since the increasing concern with the scientific rigour of theology and the kind of knowing it yields, whether distinct and abstract, or intuitive, implicitly asks to what extent beatitude exceeds the walls of the institution.⁵

¹ *Predigt* 48 (DW II, 416,1-12; trans. *Essential Eckhart*, 197).

² *Predigt* 70 (DW III, 188,2-6; trans. *Teacher and Preacher*, 316-317).

³ *Predigt* 14 (DW I, 235,4-5; trans. *Teacher and Preacher*, 273); *Predigt* 15 (DW I, 247,4-6).

⁴ Thus the position of Eckhart cannot be reduced to that of Robert Graystones in the 1340s who, moving in the direction of Petrarch, sees theology as nothing more than a *habitus* to "*consentire et adhaerere firmiter*" and so removes its scientific character. See A. de Libera, "L'Un ou la Trinité?" p.33.

⁵ S. Dumont, "Theology as a Science and Duns Scotus's Distinction between Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition," *Speculum* 64:3 (1989), p.579-599.

Eckhart's intention is to show the supremacy of intellect over created being by contrasting their respective relations of equality and inequality. In these Questions Eckhart takes the standpoint of created being relating to God as Good. Intellect is purely anterior and constitutive to createdness because intellect is the determinate negation of it, for “in its cause, being is not a being”.¹

Édouard Wéber contrasts the positions of prominent Dominican and Franciscan theologians in the late thirteenth- and early fourteenth- centuries, and places them on two divergent paths, at the crossroads of determining the role of the intelligible *species* in cognition.² Their alternative views are, in turn, reflected in their theology of the procession of the Word and in the nature of the beatific vision. This isolates one central difference between the Aristotelian-Dionysian noetic theory of Thomas, Albert and Eckhart on the one hand, and the epistemology of Scotus and Henry on the other; to paraphrase Wéber, this is the role of the intellectual *species* in enabling the reciprocal union in act of knower and known.

Henry, Scotus and Ockham alike represent an abandonment of the Aristotelian notion of reciprocal causation, which had assumed that one cause is intrinsically oriented toward its complement, as matter is to form. What emerges with Scotus and Ockham is the theory of concurrent, partial and non-reciprocal causation.³ Central to this view is the integrity given to matter and form as genuinely composite parts of a whole which do not relate to one another beyond their distinct concurrence within a given composite – a return to the Platonism criticized by Aristotle in the *Physics* and *Metaphysics*. Matter is endowed with an actuality anterior to its reception of form, so that there is nothing intrinsic in a substance that explains their unity, and recourse to a third which ensures their unity is required.⁴ Likewise, the intellect and its object are united by a partial concurrence to produce a third term, the *species*, where each side of the relation has its own integrity and causal efficacy prior to their union. Therefore, the *species* can reside in intellect without necessarily leading to actual cognition; rather that depends wholly on

¹ *Quaestio parisiensis* II, n.10 (LW V, 54,1).

² É. Wéber, “Eckhart et l'ontothéologisme: histoire et conditions d'une rupture,” in *Maître Eckhart à Paris. Une critique médiévale de l'ontothéologie*, eds. É. Zum Brunn, Z. Kaluza, A. de Libera, P. Vignaux, É. Wéber (Paris: PUF, 1984).

³ A. de Muralt, “La causalité aristotélicienne et la structure de pensée scotiste,” *Dialectica* 47:2-3 (1993), pp.121-141.

⁴ A. de Muralt, “La causalité aristotélicienne,” pp.127-128.

volitive or spontaneous activity of thinking. Once again, the union of these two partial causes can only be ensured by the mediating role of the third term constituted by intellect, for Scotus the *esse repraesentatum*, which re-presents or points intellect to the real object, no longer one with thinking. The object is in no way a reciprocal cause of cognition.

For Thomas, on the other hand, the intelligible form, although it is that by which the object is known, is not an “intermediary” between the object and the knower; the exterior reality is what moves the intellect.¹ In Wéber’s analysis, Eckhart and Thomas deny that the essence is in any way anterior to intellection; the Word must be God and with God in the beginning. For Aquinas, this identity of being and thinking in God is the cause of the diverse, corresponding modes of being and knowing.²

Beginning his first question, *Utrum in deo sit idem esse et intelligere*, Eckhart advances five arguments from the *Summa contra Gentiles* and one from the *Summa theologiae*, asserting the identity of God’s being and thinking. Each of Aquinas’ arguments begins by asserting the primacy of the perfect being and only subsequently argues for its identity with thinking. For example, the first substance must be identical with its operation, and since thinking is an immanent act, God cannot be deficient in thinking in regard either to its actuality or its object.³ For his part, Eckhart offers an argument which he had produced “elsewhere”, and resembles the argument for God’s self-sufficiency in the Exodus commentary. If there is a perfect being, it must have “all [perfect] things through itself, such as to live, to think and to act” and if it is capable of operating all things through itself, both inwardly in the Godhead and outwardly in creatures, it must be endowed with thinking.⁴ Eckhart then gives the thesis for which historians know him best: “it no longer seems me to be this way, that because he is, he thinks”, but rather that “because he thinks, he is”.⁵ For, he continues, the Evangelist has said that *in principio erat verbum*, not that *erat ens et deus erat ens*.

Quite aside from specifically targeting Aquinas in reversing the traditional priority of *esse* over *intelligere*, Wéber has argued convincingly that Eckhart belongs rather

¹ Aquinas, *ST*, Ia.85.2; idem, *De veritate* q.22, a.5, ad.8 (ed. Leonine, v. 22/3, 625,284-301).

² Aquinas, *ST*, Ia.56.2, on the parallel hierarchy of *esse intelligibile* and *esse naturale*.

³ *Quaestio parisiensis* I, nn.1-2 (LW V, 37,5-39,5). Cf. Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* I, c.45 and *Summa theologiae* Ia.14.4.

⁴ *Quaestio parisiensis*, n.3 (LW V, 39,6-40,4). Cf. *In Exod.*, n.42 (LW II, 46,10-47,11).

⁵ *Quaestio parisiensis.*, n.4 (LW V, 40,5-7): ‘...non videtur mihi modo, ut quia sit, ideo intelligat, sed quia intelligit, ideo est, ita quod deus est intellectus et intelligere et est ipsum intelligere fundamentum ipsius esse’.

among the followers of Thomas and Albert who had been put on the defensive ever since the condemnations at the University of Paris in March, 1277, headed by eminent Augustinian theologians such as Henry of Ghent.¹ Overall, the target in 1277 appears to have been certain theologians who had come too close to certain teachings arising from the Faculty of Arts. Wéber takes these condemnations as an indication of a distrust of the fundamental features of Aristotelian epistemology, and as a continuation of an earlier condemnation from 1241 made against the Dionysian notion that God is known according to a proportioned self-revelation or theophany.² The Augustinians subsequently deny the necessity of an intellectual *species* in all cognition and the unity of knower and known.

What underlies this reaction, Wéber suggests, is their presupposition that intellect is related to its *species* as a substance to an accident, and has its own substantial integrity apart from its relation to externality.³ Against this, he finds in the conjunction of Aquinas' doctrine of the intellectual procession of the Word, on the one hand, and the extrinsic relation of intellect and its *species* among created intellects on the other, the means whereby the *species* can bring the rational creature to an intellectual union with God because it is "ecstatically oriented" toward its gracious perfection.⁴ These two doctrines stand and fall together in that Thomas' emphasis on the intellectual procession of the Word, as distinct from the traditional view that the Son proceeds "by way of nature," coincides with a realization that, for intellect, the intelligible form does not simply represent a being already intact like a derivative copy, but is the full actuality of the divine essence, and the possibility of union in distinction of God and creature.⁵

l'essence en Dieu est comprise comme forme intelligible suscitant la génération

¹ Scholars have recently questioned the earlier view, shared by Wéber, Van Steenberghe, Hissette and others, that these condemnations had as significant an impact on the subsequent intellectual climate as was suggested. Cf. J. Aertsen, K. Emery, Jr., A. Speer (eds.), *Nach der Verurteilung von 1277. Philosophie und Theologie an der Universität von Paris im letzten Viertel des 13. Jahrhunderts. Studien und Texte* (New York: De Gruyter, 2001).

² É. Wéber, "Eckhart et l'ontothéologisme," pp.30-31.

³ É. Wéber, "Eckhart et l'ontothéologisme," p.37, where he cites Bonaventure on the immediacy of self-reflexivity. Cf. Bonaventure, *In I Sent.*, d.3, p.2, a.2, q.1 and 2 (ed. Quaracchi, vol.1, p.88 and 90); *Itinerarium*, c.3, n.1 (vol.5, p.303).

⁴ É. Wéber, "Eckhart et l'ontothéologisme," pp.35, 38, 40.

⁵ É. Wéber, "Eckhart et l'ontothéologisme," p.53. Wéber's attempt to lump Duns Scotus in with Henry on this issue (50-53) has been appropriately criticised in C. Bérubé, "Le dialogue de Duns Scot et d'Eckhart à Paris en 1302", *Collectanea Franciscana* 55 (1985), pp.323-350.

intellective du Verbe, à l'instar, *mutatis mutandis*, de la forme intelligible identifiée au niveau humain et définie comme principe noétique transcendant qui, tel un foyer attractif, induit l'intellect à engendrer son opération de connaissance. Ceci implique une acception de la notion de l'essence telle que celle-ci s'applique au rapport noétique qui unit et distingue à la fois Principe générateur et Verbe engendré. Dans cette perspective, il n'y a aucune primauté spéciale de l'essence indépendamment de sa valeur de forme intelligible.

If the theophanic communication of God is to be effective at the level of creation, it cannot be reduced to a finite re-presentation of God; the divine essence must be fully present as itself within the Word. Thomas' solution is to preserve on one side the infinity of the intelligible object, the divine essence as intelligible species by which God is known (*quo intelligitur*) and, on the other, the integrity of human nature as receptive of a created disposition under which it is able to think that object (*sub quo intelligitur*): the doctrine of the *lumen gloriae*.¹ In *Metaphysics* II, Aristotle explains how our intellects must adjust to the supreme intelligibility of the highest things, like bats in the light of day. Aquinas gives this notion a Dionysian foundation by stressing that the causality exercised by that *species* is fundamentally the movement and initiative of the divine toward us.²

Wéber contrasts this view with Henry of Ghent, in whose hands the psychological explanation of the Trinity has the procession of the Word follow an immediate, intuitive and confused grasp of the essence as already present.³ In this process the movement of human and divine cognition is analogous for Henry; our mind begets a Word whenever we come, by a process of “investigation” to a perfect and “declarative” definitional knowledge of an essence initially apprehended confusedly.⁴ He therefore presents Dionysian negative theology as an alternative to the ontotheology inaugurated by Henry of Ghent, where the ascent to God likewise mirrors the defining utterance of the Word which unfolds and explicates a content already given intuitively, insofar as Denys provides the possibility of a genuine addition to and transformation of the knower.

This non-replicative function of the *species* is the key to a shift in Aquinas'

¹ É.-H. Wéber, *Dialogue et dissensions entre saint Bonaventure et saint Thomas d'Aquin à Paris (1252-1273)*, préf. Y. Congar (Paris: Vrin, 1974), pp.211-219; W. J. Hankey, *God in Himself*, pp.82-87.

² É.-H. Wéber, *Dialogue et dissensions*, pp.214-215, citing Aquinas, *In IV Sent.*, d.49, q.2, a.1.

³ É. Wéber, “Eckhart et l'ontothéologisme,” p.45, citing Henry of Ghent, *Quodlibet* VI, q.1 (ed. Paris, 1518, fol. 216v): 'verbum est quoddam declarativum et manifestativum eius (=notitiae), tanquam praebens in se ampliorem rei manifestationem'.

⁴ Henry of Ghent, *Summa quaestionum ordinariorum*, a.58, q.2 (ed. Badius, vol.2, f.130vI-K); a.54, q.9 (ed. Badius, vol.2, f.104vC). Cf. R. Friedman, *Medieval Trinitarian Thought from Aquinas to Ockham* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.82-92.

writings, from speaking of the procession of the Son *per modum naturae* (following the traditional view since Damascene) and only secondarily *per modum intellectus*, to giving priority to the latter as what best illustrates a real relation constitutive of a personal distinction.¹ For traditional Trinitarian theology, against the evidence of Augustine and Scripture, the name *Verbum* was generally thought to be applied essentially, and not personally, to the divine thinking. Bonaventure, for example, makes little use of the psychological model in the *Itinerarium* and in the *Sentences*.² What Aquinas is able to show in his later writing is that, in both human and divine thinking, the necessity of an intelligible *verbum*, which is known *per se* and which is the presence of the object in act, is a real relation of knower and known, united in one nature as generator and offspring.³ We must keep in mind, however, that Aquinas does not straightforwardly identify the Word with the intelligible *species* impressed upon the possible intellect by the agent intellect; the Word, he says, is properly the *terminus* of the act of the possible intellect which he identifies with Augustinian *memoria*.⁴ It is therefore a distinct element of the cognitive process: where Aristotle's theory of abstractive cognition explains how we can acquire new knowledge, Augustine is used to explain how our habitual knowledge is determined. This means that the Word is not identical to the act of the possible intellect, but is the offspring or product of the act of that intellect as memory. Aquinas does not, therefore, side with the later application of the psychological model in Henry of Ghent, and later Franciscan theologians generally, who simply identified the emanation of the Word with the operation of thinking.

This background should be kept in mind as we follow Eckhart's reasoning. The “higher condition” of *intelligere* over *esse* stems from the fact that that being is “creatable” (*creatable*) whereby a creature “relates to God as an efficient cause”; however, its idea or its essence relates to Him as “exemplary cause”.⁵ Here are two

¹ É. Wéber, “Eckhart et l'ontothéologisme”, p.43.

² Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in deum* III.5 (ed. Quaracchi, vol.5, 305a-b); *In I Sent.*, d.27, p.2, a. unica, qq.1-4.

³ Aquinas, *De potentia*, q.9, a.5: 'Haec ergo similitudo se habet in intelligendo sicut intelligendi principium, ut calor est principium calefactionis, non sicut intelligendi terminus. Hoc ergo est primo et per se intellectum, quod intellectus in seipso concipit de re intellecta.' Cf. *ST* Ia.27.3 and a.5; Ia.28.4; Ia.93.6.

⁴ Aquinas, *De potentia*, q.8, a.1; *ST* Ia.79.6. Cf. R. Friedman, *Medieval Trinitarian Thought*, p.79.

⁵ *Quaestio parisiensis* I, n.4 (LW V, 41, 7-10): 'Esse ergo habet primo rationem creabilis, et ideo dicunt aliqui quod in creatura esse solum respicit deum sub ratione causae efficientis, essentia autem respicit ipsum sub ratione causae exemplaris'.

different kinds of relations to God; one as a concrete substance and one as essential idea. By following Henry of Ghent (the “*aliqui*”) in this, Eckhart apparently is committing to a reading of Avicenna which, unlike Thomas’ position, reifies the essence prior to its existence,¹ and therefore departs from Aquinas’ more nuanced view that a substantial self-differentiation is at the heart of each creature in its identity precisely at the moment of creation. Henry and Eckhart, by contrast, are still committed to a two-stage account of participation. For Henry, this ideal relation of a creature-as-idea to the divine essence ensures that there can be true science about absent existents - though not of fictive entities, which have no intrinsic *certitudo* - owing to a “real relation” in the form of formal exemplary causality.² Through that relation, an essence in its *esse essentiae* is able to receive predicamental attributions as a distinct *res* regardless of its extra-mental existential value. Indeed Eckhart's whole thrust in this *quaestio* is to contrast the uncreatable and eternal character of an idea over against the creatable, finite existential being related as to its source as good.

Intellect is the *fundamentum* because truth pertains to mind and goodness to being. The Aristotelian doctrine that soul and its object, either in nutrition, sensation or thinking, become *unum in actu*, and in the latter instance, one in being, is essential to this. That unity belongs primarily to the operative or “energetic” union of the two terms, which Eckhart sets at the crown of his entire work – as we see in *Pr.* 48.³ Intellect, like the *unum* that indicates the *negatio negationis*, or *sapientia*, produces the notion of *puritas essendi*: purity from the differences inherent in created being.⁴ For God is the cause of being, and since it belongs to the nature of a “true cause” (*vera causa*) that the same thing is not “formally (*formaliter*) in the cause and the caused”, then *esse formaliter* cannot be in God.⁵ The truth of a “true” cause, which is its purity, consists in the virtual equality of each of its effects within it and their eternal identity with it.⁶ Such ideas do not

¹ Henry of Ghent, *Quodlibet* X, q.7 (fol. 418v); *Quodl.* III, q.9 (fol.60v-52r); *Quodl.* I.9 (fol.7r). Henry's view does not follow Avicenna, who held that a nature can never be realized outside of its actual existence or its abstraction in the mind. On Henry's move “from the order of the possible to the order of the real”, see J. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Godfrey of Fontaines*, pp.66-89.

² Henry of Ghent, *Quodlibet* IX, q.1 (fol. 341v). Cf. J. Wippel, *Godfrey of Fontaines*, p.71.

³ Aristotle, *De anima* III.2, 425b25 and III.4, 429a24.

⁴ *Quaestio parisiensis* I, n.9 (LW V, 45,10-11): 'et ideo in deo non est esse, sed puritas essendi'. Cf. *In Ecc.*, n.8 (LW II, 235,14-15): 'Primo igitur modo sapientia dei notat sui puritatem dicens *ego*. Li *ego* enim meram et puram substantiam significat.'

⁵ *Quaestio parisiensis* I, n.8 (LW V, 45,1-3).

⁶ *Quaestio parisiensis* I, n.10 (LW V, 46,5-6): 'in ipso intelligere omnia continentur in virtute sicut in

not have the *ratio entis* since they are not creatable, nor do they indicate existence. Likewise, on the side of human knowing, a *species* in the mind has the character of non-being because, as that by which a thing is known, it cannot itself be a being. Otherwise it would distract the mind from what it intends to know.¹ It is rather a pure relation or reference to its other, apprehending the essential content of what it knows as indifferent to existence. The mediation provided by the *species* is of a higher condition than external media, which persist through efficient and final causality, since those always presuppose a distance which separates term from term. Eckhart's criterion of truth is always that the knower must "be in and be" what he knows; lacking this prior identity, one speaks of concepts and things only as "a blind man speaks of colours".² Therefore the role of the *species* is the exact opposite of the *esse obiectivum* in Scotus, insofar as Eckhart understands the begetting of an image or *species* as a synergy of the knower and object known.

Eckhart therefore accepts Henry of Ghent's view that the *esse essentiae* is in a real and exemplary relation to the divine essence, but reinterprets it within the strict difference between the "formal emanation" proper to "living, intellectual and uncreated" being and the *hoc et hoc* plurality of material creatures.³ He takes Henry's eternal existence of *esse essentiae* in a very different direction. Essential being, for Eckhart, still preserves its intrinsic relation to God, as it had for Aquinas, and therefore cannot be thought apart from its principle.⁴ Eckhart may be thinking *esse essentiae* without reference to its creation *ad extra*, but as will be clear, this does not require that it is without a principle. Since this intellectual being is the cause of formal being, the reality of Henry's exemplary relation is ultimately ensured by its non-being for Eckhart, and stands in dialectical opposition to created being:⁵

causa suprema omnium.¹

¹ *Quaestio parisiensis* I, n.7 (LW V, 43,13-44,5).

² *In Ioh.*, n.620 (LW III, 541,14-542,2): 'Non sic quae ab extra discimus videndo vel audiendo; nisi tales simus per inesse et per esse, possumus quidem de talibus loqui sicut caecus de coloribus, nequaquam tamen scire possumus.' Cf. J. Casteigt, *Connaissance et vérité chez Maître Eckhart*, pp.40-41.

³ *Sermo XLIX.3*, n.512 (LW IV, 427,1-2; trans. *Teacher and Preacher*, 237); *In Gen.*, n.77 (LW I, 238,1-6).

⁴ Francisco Suarez would take up from Henry, holding a doctrine of "*aliquiditas*" as simply the *non-nihil*. See *Disputationes metaphysicae* 28.3.15 (ed. Berton, vol.26, p.18); *ibid.*, 28.3.11 (ed. Berton, p.16). Cf. J.-F. Courtine, *Suaréz et la système de la métaphysique*, 2^{ie} partie, ch.4; J. Paulus, *Henri de Gand. Essai sur les tendances de sa métaphysique* (Paris: Vrin, 1938), pp.121 et seqq.

⁵ *Quaestio parisiensis* I, n.4 (LW V, 40,11-41,2): 'Veritas autem ad intellectum pertinet importans vel includens relationem. Relatio autem totum suum esse habet ab anima et ut sic est praedicamentum reale,

Truth pertains to intellect and imports or includes a relation to it. Relation thus has all of its being from the soul and as such is a real category, just as time, to the extent that it has its being from soul is nevertheless a species of the real category of quantity.

This is another appearance of the grammar of the ontological difference of substance (God) and accidents (creatures) from the Prologues, as well as the paradox that every name, including *ens*, always signifies being while predication *de tertio adiacens* carries no existential import in itself. The solution resided in the mediation of the Word as *apud esse*, and all names, insofar as they are *apud verbum* are also *apud esse*.¹ There they receive their truth which is their purity: “[‘true’] is said of any one thing in two ways, first if it attains to the substantial form of its nature, second if nothing foreign is mingled in”.² Eckhart unites Augustine’s theory of truth as a pure affirmation of *esse id quod est* with Aristotle’s propositional notion that truth is in intellect “composing and dividing,” and in the affirmation that what is is and what is not is not.³ Therefore every creature has a “dual being” (*dupliciter esse*): “one in its original causes, at least in the Word of God, and this is firm and stable. [...] The other being of things is external in natural things, which things have in their proper forms”.⁴

This ascendancy of the transcendental determination of “true” is novel to discussions in the early fourteenth-century, beginning with Henry of Ghent.⁵ Henry himself draws on Aquinas’ account given in q.1, a.1 of *De veritate*: truth is the “concord” (*concordia*) or “equality” (*adaequatio*) of intellect and being. With Henry the “conformity” (*conformitas*) of being and thought, in q.34, q.3 of his *Summa quaestionum ordinariarum* brings about a twofold priority. Truth is “more transcendental” than being insofar as it is the very condition for the “assimilation” of the *ratio entis* to intellect; however, “being” (*ens*) has “objective” primacy, insofar as it is necessarily the first object

sicut quamvis tempus suum esse habet ab anima, nihilominus est species quantitatis realis praedicamenti.’

¹ *In Exod.*, n.167 (LW II, 146,13-147,4) and n.29 (LW II, 36,1-6).

² *In Ioh.*, n.87 (LW III, 75,3-6): ‘verum dicitur unumquodque ex duobus: primo si attingat formam substantialem illius naturae; secundo, si nihil alieni admixtum habent’.

³ A. de Libera, *Le problème de l’être*, p.18, n.50. See Augustine, *Soliloquies* II.v.8 and Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IV, 1011b20.

⁴ *In Gen.*, n.77 (LW I, 238,1-6): ‘Nota quod omnis creatura dupliciter habet esse: unum in causis suis originalibus, saltem in verbo dei; et hoc est firmum et stabile. [...] Aliud esse rerum extra in rerum natura, quod habent res in forma propria.’

⁵ J. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, pp.278-282.

of intellect, that is met by the equally “dispositive” or preparatory function of 'true' is the notion under which the objective is necessarily perceived.¹ Thus, as Olivier Boulnois comments, Henry makes the *ratio entis* in some sense depend on its being conceived by human intellect: “En effect, si l'étant est la première raison de notre intellect, elle ne s'y trouve qu'en tant qu'il est connaissable”.² Eckhart himself develops this priority of the true to such an extent that, relative to created being at least, it has acquired complete priority.

The *puritas essendi* denoted by *unum* as *negatio negationis* or by *sapientia* consists in its reduplication of a given determination, and this, finally, is founded in God's self-predication in Exodus 3.14. The One begets a One, distinct in person, but negates the difference in the unity of nature. At the outset of his defense in 1326, Eckhart explains that the *inquantum* is the first point of clarification; it is a “reduplication which excludes everything other [*aliud*] and everything alien, even according to reason, from a term”.³ For, he continues, we do not say that God *is* evil insofar as he *knows* evil. Likewise, the accusation that he has identified the good man and the uncreated goodness of God fails to recognize it is “insofar as he is good” that the good man “signifies goodness alone, just as white signifies the quality alone”.⁴ After describing the fecundity of the intellectual self-return of God in *In Exodum*, Eckhart uses Augustine to illustrate this *reduplicatio*: as God is not a “good soul, a good angel or a good heaven, but a good Good”, so one must purify one's notion of goodness from all particular determinations. For “good Good” signifies the “unmixed and highest good affixed in itself, in need of nothing, returning upon itself with a complete return.”⁵ Eckhart's emphasis in the *Parisian Questions*, then, is the capacity for the reduplicative function of truth, the unity of the Holy Spirit, to establish the fecundity which God's *ebullitio* as goodness is founded upon. As Aertsen writes, “in their arguments for the non-identity of *esse* and *intelligere*, both *Questions* take the transcendental notions into consideration and claim the

¹ Henry of Ghent, *Summa quaestionum ordinariorum*, a.34, q.3 (ed. Macken, pp.191-192).

² O. Boulnois, “*Abstractio metaphysica*. Le séparable et le séparé, de Porphyre à Henri de Gand,” pp.37-59, at p.58.

³ *Proc. Col.* I, n.81 (LW V, 277,7-8): 'Primum est quod li 'in quantum', reduplicatio scilicet, excludit omne aliud, omne alienum etiam secundum rationem a terminus'.

⁴ *Proc. Col.* I, n.82 (LW V, 278,3-4).

⁵ *In Exod.*, n.17 (LW II, 23,5-8): 'Sic ergo 'bonum bonum' significat bonum impermixtum et summum bonum in se ipso fixum, nulli innitens, super se ipsum 'rediens reditione completa'. Sic li *sum qui sum* impermixtionem esse et eius plenitudinem indicat'.

convertibility of *ens* and *bonum*”.¹

This is what happens when a mind well-acquainted with the thought of Dietrich comes to Paris and encounters what for Henry of Ghent is supposed to indicate the *indifference* of an essence to its efficiently bestowed existence: the intrinsic unity of essence and existence is affirmed in the operational identity of intellect and its object, in which one does not find the *ratio boni nec efficientis nec finis*.² The divine essence is a boiling thinking that generates its relational other in the eternal relation of Father and Son, exemplar and image.

Truth is of a different order (*alterius condicionis*) than goodness because it, like accidental being, is without a cause:³

'good' and 'bad' are in things, and 'true' and 'false' are in the soul. Accordingly, he [Aristotle] says there [*Met.* E.4, 1027b25] that 'true', which exists in the soul, is not a being, just as accidental being is not a being because it does not have a cause, as he also says there [E.2, 1027a7].

But, he continues, while truth and accidental being are both without a cause, nevertheless they are distinguished from one another according to their respective “place”. Indeed the relation of a *species* to intellect is precisely not the inherence of an accident to its subject, for a *species* has “an object, but not a subject, because place [*locus*] and subject differ”, for a “*species* is in the soul not as a subject, but as a place” and not soul as such, but as intellect, as Aristotle says.⁴

Like Avicenna, Eckhart maintains that the soul “considered in herself, is the active passage in the intelligible universe, and follows her true nature – thenceforth indeterminate – in the extent to which she abandons herself”.⁵ The mediating function of the *saeculum intelligibili*, however, disappears entirely from Eckhart. Every *species* as *particular* is entirely opposed to the *visio dei*. Drawing the particular *species* as idea

¹ J. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, p.357.

² *Quaestio parisiensis* II, n.8 (LW V, 53,9-10); *Quaest. Par.* I, n.7 (LW V, 43,7-9): 'Dicitur enim III *Metaphysicae* [996a29] quod in mathematicis non est finis nec bonum, et ideo per consequens nec ens, quia ens et bonum idem.'

³ *Quaestio parisiensis* I, n.7 (LW V, 43,9-12): 'Unde ibi dicitur quod verum, quod est in anima, non est ens sicut nec ens per accidens, quod non est ens, quia non habet causam, ut ibi dicitur'.

⁴ *Quaestio parisiensis* II, n.5 (LW V, 51,9-12): 'Species autem habet obiectum et non subiectum, quia differunt locus et subiectum. Species autem est in anima non sicut in subiecto, sed sicut in loco. Anima enim est locus specierum, non tota, sed intellectus'. Cf. Aristotle, *De anima* III.6, 429a27.

⁵ *In Ioh.*, n.528 (LW III, 459); Avicenna, *De anima* I, c.1 (ed. Van Reit, 15-17;26-27). K. Flasch, *D'Averroès à Maître Eckhart*, p.158.

together with the divine essence requires a new theory of the relation between knower and known.

3.1.2: Trinitarian Theology in Eckhart's Time

In a treatise on the divine names in the *Expositio libri Exodi*, Eckhart assembles the various authorities of Maimonides (nn.34-44), the “Greek and Arab philosophers” (nn.45-53), and the Christian theologians (nn.54-78). Eckhart's citations and inconspicuous transformations of these figures are amusing to behold, but they cannot be our focus now. Relative to the Christian position, and anticipating the problem of Trinitarian predications which cannot compromise the divine simplicity now firmly established, Eckhart says we must consider the logic of categorical predication in itself, aside from the beings to which they apply. Such a distinction between the *ratio* and the *esse* of a relation was a constant motif in Aquinas' treatments of the issue, and no doubt he is the major inspiration in Eckhart's account.¹ As innocuous as this distinction appears, it actually supports the entirety of his argument.

Eckhart begins by advancing the now familiar Averroist emphasis that substance is the “one absolute being” (*unum ens absolute*), and since all accidents in their very essence are “*entia in obliquo*” they relate to it extrinsically.² Relation alone among the categories does not signify in the manner of an accident;³ it does not signify by inhering in a subject. Whiteness, concretely, has no existence apart from its inherence in a subject. The species 'white' “signifies the quality alone” and only connotes its subject, the substance of this whiteness, “obliquely”.⁴ Therefore a species in its *ratio* is related primarily to its term, or object, and only secondarily to its subject. Relation, “in its notion as a category”, he concludes, signifies nothing about its subject or about inherence, but only that something “is from another and is directed toward another, and there it is born, there it dies”.⁵

This separation of the categories in their *rationes* from the beings determined by

¹ Aquinas, *ST*, Ia.28.2; idem, *In I Sent.*, d.8, q.4, a.3; d.26, q.2, a.1. Cf. A. Krempel, *La doctrine de la relation chez saint Thomas* (Paris: 1952); M. Henninger, *Relations*, pp.13-39.

² *In Exod.*, n.54 (LW II, 58,1-59,9) and n.63 (LW II, 67,6-9).

³ *In Exod.*, n.63 (LW II, 67, 9-11).

⁴ *In Exod.*, n.63 (LW II, 67,11-68,3).

⁵ *In Exod.*, n.64 (LW II, 68, 4-5;8-10).

them allows Eckhart and Aquinas to redirect the objections of Maimonides against predications derived from relations, which Maimonides had understood specifically as “comparisons”.¹ Relations, in that sense, cannot be applied to God since they would indicate a common genus under which he, as a determinate species, can be subsumed. For a relation's “second feature” is that its being (*esse relationis*) is “always based in something of the thing”, either quality, quantity or so on.² Aquinas calls this a real relation, such as between mover and moved, father and son, double and half, because its extra-mental reality is founded in the mutual disposition of two accidents within the same genus. The relation is only intelligible because both *relata* are subsumed within another category which serves as their common foundation. Since all nine accidental categories are absorbed into God's simple, perfect, substance, it is impossible that he should be so related to anything outside himself. Accordingly, Eckhart can continue to endorse Maimonides' view that there are no 'comparisons' between God and creatures, since they do not share an external basis of comparison.

Nevertheless, this distinction of a relation's *esse* and *ratio* is intended to allow for subsistent and real relations in God, even though there cannot be a real *mutual* relation between God and creatures. This has to do with the second feature of relations just mentioned: not only do relations primarily signify *ad alterum* according to their *ratio*, their *esse* is to be founded in a particular category. That equivocal separation of the substantiality of God and the accidentality of creatures means that the respective foundations of their relations are entirely different. According to Aquinas, relations of inequality and equality are only mutual if each term has the same foundation;³ as Eckhart says, this is the abstract quality to which whiteness primarily refers. Since in God's essential simplicity all categories are absorbed in their *ratio* and in their *esse*, relations too can be substantially united to the divine essence while remaining rationally distinct from it.⁴ Trinitarian predications are now permitted.

Regarding their foundation, Trinitarian relations are identical to the divine

¹ *In Exod.*, n.39 (LW II, 44,12-43,6) and Maimonides, *Dux neutrorum* I, c.51 (ed. Justinianus, fol. 19). Cf. Aquinas, *ST Ia*.28.1, ad.1.

² *In Exod.*, n.64 (LW II, 68,6-7). Because of this derivative feature of a relation, Aristotle says it has the least being of all extra-mental realities (*Metaphysics* N.1, 1088a20-7). It nevertheless indicates a real disposition, of quantity for example, between two things (*ST Ia*.13.7).

³ Aquinas, *De potentia*, q.10, a.7. Cf. M. Henninger, *Relations*, p.34.

⁴ *In Exod.*, n.64 (LW II, 69,4-6): 'propter hoc ratio secundum modum significandi sive praedicandi, qui modus genus praedicamentale relationis constituit, manet in divinis.'

essence; in their mutual implication, or *ratio*, they are really distinct. This is common parlance in thirteenth century theology. However, the applications of that logic vary significantly. Aquinas employs the terminology of the *ratio* of a relation (to refer *ad alterum*) to argue that “in comparison to the essence” the relation is distinct only in reason (*est ratio tantum*). Bonaventure, alternately, argues that, “in comparison to its subject,” relation “vanishes (*transit*) into the substance”, although it preserves its own “mode of reference” (*modus se habendi*).¹

The scenario is this. In addition to the third kind of relation given in Book Δ of the *Metaphysics* (1021a15-27), the non-mutual relation obtaining between measure and measured (the knower, the measured, is really related to its object, the measure, although not *vice versa*), Aristotle speaks of the relations founded on number and unity, and of causal relations of producer and produced. Generally the latter class of relations served as the basis of Trinitarian theory, since Aristotle too had used the model of the mutually opposed, though real, relation of father and son. As Friedman explains, the debate that overwhelmingly divided Dominicans and Franciscans initially concerned how we are to “conceive” the personal properties (fatherhood, sonship) within the Trinity.² It is a question of whether the notional act (“being born”, “active spiration”, etc.) logically precedes the constituted relation, which Friedman dubs the 'emanation' account, held by Bonaventure, or whether the opposed personal relations give rise to the notional acts, as Aquinas taught. This we can see in the the difference of terminology between the rational difference of the relations and the essence in Aquinas and the way relations “pass into” (*transit*) the substance for the Seraphic Doctor. What begins as a disagreement regarding how we *conceive* the Trinity, becomes reified in subsequent decades, so that these merely conceptual differences in approach are taken to indicate the inner reality of the Triune God.³ The Dominican understanding of this in particular is essential for grasping the reflexivity of *intelligere* for Eckhart, and what difference there is between the Trinity and the Ground or essence.

Aquinas characterizes the Dominican approach, positing the distinction between

¹ R. Friedman, *Medieval Trinitarian Thought from Aquinas to Ockham* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.11-13. Cf. Aquinas, *In I Sent.*, d.2, q.1, a.5; Bonaventure, *In I Sent.*, d.33, a.1, q.2.

² R. Friedman, *Medieval Trinitarian Thought*, pp.18-21.

³ R. Friedman, *Medieval Trinitarian Thought*, pp.30-31, 39-40.

the notional acts as *operations* and the lesser disputed fact that the Persons have *origins*.¹ Bernard Lonergan points out how in the *de deo trino* of the *Prima pars* Aquinas begins from our concepts *in fieri*, namely the processive origins of intellect and will in the divine essence, and subsequently passes to the relations, and then the opposed persons; Thomas then moves in the reverse order, from the standpoint of *de facto esse*, from the persons considered individually, to the relations, and finally to the notional acts.² But this does not commit Thomas to having the persons result from the notional acts of begetting, paternity, and so on. Since operations arise from distinct individuals, even in our order of concepts, the distinct persons come first.³ For Aquinas, who by no means represents the universal view of the matter in his own time, we cannot deduce the Trinity of Persons from the essence, but we begin from the revelation of the Triune God, and offer arguments which illustrate the effects proceeding from these revealed principles.⁴ While the procession of the Word *per modum intellectus* which Aquinas argues in his later *De potentia* indeed approaches the proofs of Anselm, Richard of St. Victor and Matthew of Aquasparta, and even though the *quaestiones* (qq.14-21) on the divine operations of thinking and willing lay the logical foundation from which the *de deo trino* emerges, nevertheless the important *quaestio* 32 bridges the origins and the relations, stating that revelation must provide the model of our demonstrations. Even the procession of the Word as the *terminus* of human intellection cannot fully capture the mode of divine thinking.⁵ Thus, when Aquinas finds in the unity and distinction of the intellect and its word a genuinely real relation, and the means to argue a real relation of paternity and filiation,⁶ he does not intend thereby to account for the distinction of the Son from the Spirit as reflecting two really distinct operational processions of nature (Son) and will

¹ Aquinas, *In I Sent.*, d.26, q.2, a.2: 'Sic autem dicatur quod 'haec est sola origo per quam determinate efficitur haec hypostasis', aut per originem intelligitur ipsa relatio originis, et hoc est quod ponimus; aut origo significatur per modum operationis, et sic nullo modo habet quod distinguat hypostases'.

² B. Lonergan, SJ, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, ed. D. Burrell (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), pp.206-7. See also W.J. Hankey, *God in Himself*, pp.115-118.

³ Aquinas, *In I Sent.*, d.27, q.1, a.2; cf. R. Friedman, *Medieval Trinitarian Thought*, pp.22 and 33 where he points out that in the later *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas incorporates something of Bonaventure's criticism by stating that the Father's paternity depends on the generated Son so that, *secundum intellectum*, the notional act is presupposed by the relation (*ST*, Ia.40.4).

⁴ Aquinas, *ST*, Ia.32.1, ad.2: 'inducitur ratio, non quae sufficienter probet radicem, sed quae radici iam positae ostendat congruere consequentes effectus. [...] per fidem venit ad cognitionem'.

⁵ W.J. Hankey, *God in Himself*, pp.132-135. See Aquinas, *De potentia*, q.8, a.1, ad.12: 'Sicut enim de deo scire possumus quod est, sed non quid est, ita de deo scire possumus quod intelligit, sed non quo modo intelligit.' Cf. Lonergan, *Verbum*, p.9.

⁶ Aquinas, *ST*, Ia.28.1, ad.4.

(Spirit).¹

The prominence Wéber gives to the *modum intellectus* in Aquinas must be understood within that framework. By employing the psychological model, Thomas is trying to avoid speaking of a temporal process in God; the divine essence has no priority apart from its status as intellectual *species*. And we begin from fully articulated, opposed relations. The alternative, which Wéber locates in Henry of Ghent's "phénoménologie de l'évidence" and which bears fundamental similarities to Friedman's analysis of the Franciscan tradition of Trinitarian theology, can be defined most broadly as a position wherein the essence is given intuitively prior to its intellection as something distinct from reflexivity.² In this view, the intellectual *species* will eventually appear as extraneous to knowing in general, and even antithetical, to the beatific vision. Among later Dominican theologians like John of Paris (+1306) and Durand of St. Pourçain (+ c.1332), intellectual beatitude is said to consist chiefly in a reflexive act *which follows upon* and completes a more immediate grasp of the essence.³

Whether Bonaventure's emanation account is behind this is not entirely clear, for Bonaventure does not directly address the relation of intuition and reflexivity in this context. Nevertheless, in his response to an objection (resembling Aquinas' position) relative to the *ordo cognoscendi* of the notional act and personal relation of the Father, we do find the basis for the more reifying approach of the later Franciscans. According to Bonaventure, "it is not necessary to first understand the Father in his distinct actuality", since the reason of that distinction (*ratio distinguendi*) is already present, though "begun inchoately", in the property of "innascibility".⁴ With Henry, the procession of the Word becomes the "declarative" and perfect knowledge arising from the confused *notitia*.⁵ For Aquinas, on the other hand, if that property of 'ungenerated' were abstracted from the

¹ Thomas Aquinas, *In I Sent.*, d.13, q.1, a.2.

² É. Wéber, "Eckhart et l'ontothéologisme", pp.45-46; R. Friedman, *Medieval Trinitarian Thought*, pp.26-30, and 62: "Henry merged Aquinas' psychological insights with the Franciscan emphasis on emanations."

³ Both views are rejected by Eckhart, at *In Ioh.*, n.679 (LW III, 594,1-2): 'beatitudo non est in actu reflexo, quo scilicet homo beatus intelligit sive cognoscit se deum cognoscere'; *ibid.*, n.108 (LW III, 93,6-7). For references to Jean Quidort and Durand, see the footnotes in *OLME VI* (pp.212-215) and W. Goris, *Einheit als Prinzip und Ziel*, pp.366-367.

⁴ Bonaventure, *In I Sent.*, d.27, p.1, a. unica, q.2, ad.1: 'sed non oportet praeintelligere eam actu distinctam, quia ipsa distinguitur per proprietatem generationis distinctione completa ... tamen secundum rationem intelligendi ratio distinguendi inchoatur in innascibilitate, et ideo generat, non ut prius distincta paternitate, sed ut distincta quodam modo innascibilitate'.

⁵ Henry of Ghent, *Summa quaestionum ordinariarum*, a.58, q.2 (ed. Badius, vol.2, fol.130vM-N); Idem, *Quodlibet VI*, q.1. See R. Friedman, *Medieval Trinitarian Thought*, pp.83-84 and 91.

concrete determination of paternity, it could only be an attribute of the divine essence.¹ This is because, unlike paternity, innascibility for Aquinas has no positive content as an attribute; it merely indicates that God is not generated from another. However, for his Franciscan critics like John Peckham already by the 1270s, innascibility has acquired positive content, *primitas*, and it is according to that disposition to generation that the Father is fecund.² Friedman notes that whereas this difference had only been a conceptual one for Bonaventure, pertaining only to our way of knowing God, with Peckham “primity” (*primitas*) has become the definitive explanation of the Father's generative act.

From the Dominican perspective, the Franciscans are moving closer to relocating all generative power from the essence in the Person of the Father. If the Father as *primitas* corresponds to the generative potency, in the application of the psychological model to the Trinitarian processions, the acts of intellection and will come to define the respective processions of Son and Spirit.³ The formerly essential divine knowing and willing are increasingly related immediately to the Persons themselves as constituted by the Father.

Aquinas' application of the psychological model, on the other hand, had assumed that the *Verbum* as intellectual *species* reflected the generative power of the divine essence as present to itself as measure, namely as the formal causality exercised by the object upon the knower. The difference between this causality as it pertains to the human or divine intellect is neatly summarized by Averroes, and carried over by Thomas and Eckhart: “God's knowledge is the cause of being; for us, our knowing is caused by the being which we know”.⁴ Nevertheless, the divine essence as actively known in its *species* still exercises a measuring function for Aquinas in that – according to his well-known doctrine of the divine ideas – God, in knowing his own essence, knows the infinite ways in which that essence is imitable by creatures, and knows himself as their truth and measure.⁵

Eckhart's doctrine of relations, for his part, is most closely approximated in the

¹ Aquinas, *In I Sent.*, d.28, q.1, a.2, ad.3. See R. Friedman, *Medieval Trinitarian Thought*, pp.28-29.

² R. Friedman, *Medieval Trinitarian Thought*, pp.35-36.

³ R. Friedman, *Medieval Trinitarian Thought*, pp.63-71.

⁴ Averroes, *In IX Metaphysicam*, comm.51 (ed. Juntas, fol.337); Aquinas, *ST Ia*.14.8, ad.3; Eckhart, *Quaestio parisiensis I*, n.8 (LW V, 44,10-15); *In Gen.*, n.8 (LW I, 192,3-6). See É. Wéber, “Eckhart et l'ontothéologisme”, p.33.

⁵ Aquinas, *ST*, Ia.15.2; *ibid.*, Ia.16.5.

writings of a follow Dominican lecturing on the *Sentences* in Paris around 1302/1302, Jakob of Metz. Burkhard Mojsisch has noted the apparent similiarity between their two doctrines.¹ Jakob of Metz suggests that there are two ways under which the divine essence can be considered, and expressly raises the question of whether one relation can be the *fundamentum* of another. This directly pertains to the relation of paternity to the *potentia generandi*, and places himself squarely within the Dominican tradition outlined by Friedman:²

In divine things there is nothing to consider other than the essence under the aspect of essence absolutely or essence as fecund, that is as multiplicative of itself, or as relation. But relation is not the foundation of another relation, whenever the relation is a real one; I say this because we say that paternity is a relation in this way, since paternity, which is a real relation, is rather in a certain way the foundation of a rational relation, but not a real relation. Nor is the essence, considered as essence, the foundation of a relation, but [only] considered as fecund and able to communicate itself. Therefore, the generative potency is the foundation of relation, not a relation.

3.1.3: The Constitution of Relations

God was the Word. It is necessary that from the outset in which there was one, there would always be another.³

The fundamental features of Eckhart's Trinitarian theology place him firmly in the Dominican tradition. As we have seen, he follows Thomas' distinction of the *ratio* and *esse* of relations, where the *ratio* of a relation is its complete reference to its "other". Eckhart is therefore committed to the Dominican emphasis on relations as defined by their fully articulated personal oppositions: "If there is only a father, there is not only a

¹ B. Mojsisch, *Meister Eckhart. Analogy, Univocity, and Unity*, pp.113-115, from whom I retrieved the following text.

² Jakob of Metz, *In I Sent* (B), d.7, q.1 (ed. Decker, *Die Gotteslehre des Jakob von Metz*, 339, n.148): 'In divinis non est considerare nisi essentiam sub ratione essentiae absolute, vel essentiam ut fecundam, id est sui multiplicativam, vel relationem. Sed relatio non est fundamentum alterius relationis, quando utraque realis est; quod dico, quia dicimus quod paternitas est relatio ita quod paternitas, quae est relatio realis, bene est quodammodo fundamentum relationis rationis, non tamen realis. Nec essentia sub ratione essentiae est fundamentum relationis, sed sub ratione, qua fecunda et potens se communicare. Ergo potentia generativa est fundamentum relationis, non relatio'.

³ *In Ioh.*, n.137 (LW III, 116,9-10): '*deus erat verbum*, necesse est quarto quod ab initio quo fuit unum, fuerit semper et alterum.'

father”.¹ Moreover, on the question of whether the power of generation (*potentia generandi*) pertains to the divine essence or the relation of paternity, Eckhart follows Aquinas: “it is more directly and principally proper to the essence than the relation”.² What they mean by this is that the essence is the power by which (*quo*) the Persons generate, rather than the *quod* of the generative process, as the Joachimites held.

My aim in this section is to show how Eckhart takes up the basic Dominican form of Trinitarian theory as what which gives a metaphysical foundation to the primary aim of his pastoral work: to lead the soul to union with God through the vanishing mediation of the *imago Dei*. From the standpoint of distinct faculties in act, that is from the perspective of the *imago* for Eckhart, there is the operative Trinity of Father as (appropriated) power, Son as wisdom and Holy Spirit as goodness. But “the theology of the image is a theology of operation” which “is not yet the absorption into Deity”, the Ground or Being.³

That which God is in power, we are in the image: what the Father is in power, the Son in wisdom and the Holy Ghost in goodness, we are in the image. [...] But this is not without working, for the soul is borne up in that image, and works in that power as that power; she is also borne up in the Persons in accordance with the power of the Father, the wisdom of the Son, and the goodness of the Holy Ghost. All this is the work of the Persons. Above this is being that does not work [*wesen unwirksam*], but here alone is being and work. Truly, where the soul is in God, just as the Persons are suspended in being, there work and being are one, in that place where the soul grasps the Persons in the very indwelling of being from which they never emerged, where there is a pure essential image. This is the essential mind [*wesenlich vernünftlichkeit*] of God, the pure and naked power of intellect [*intellectus*], which the masters term receptive. Now mark my words! It is only above all this that the soul grasps the pure absoluteness [*absolutio*] of free being, which has no location, which never receives nor gives: it is bare 'self-identity' [*isticheit*] which is deprived of all being and all self-identity.

Eckhart emphasizes the intellectual procession of the Son more strongly than Aquinas, but he remains within the Dominican approach which does not simply identify that procession with an act of intellect. Compared to the Franciscans, the Dominican

¹ *In Sap.*, n.101 (LW II, 437,6): 'si tantum pater est, non tantum pater est'.

² *In Ioh.*, n.43 (LW III, 36,4-5). Cf. Aquinas, *ST Ia.45.5, resp.*, ad.3 and the *scholium* to Bonaventure, *In I Sent.*, d.7, a. unicus, q.1 (ed. Quaracchi, vol.1, p.137), which outlines a variety of disputes on this question. It ultimately wants to find Bonaventure and Aquinas holding to a middle way between the two options.

³ *Predigt 67* (DW III, 132,2-133,36, trans. Walshe, 358), italics removed, the Latin terms appear in the sermon itself. The importance of Eckhart's doctrine of *isticheit* is discussed in the conclusion of this Chapter and in Chapter Three.

application of the psychological model is instrumental, but not demonstrative. It ranges from Aquinas' nuanced position to the extreme view of Durand of St. Pourçain, who argued that “*verbum*” is only predicated “metaphorically” of the Son.¹ But what unites the Dominicans on the whole is the tendency to begin from opposed relations, so that what distinguishes are simply negative determinations: the Son is begotten simply because he comes from the Father, while spiration comes from the Father and Son together. In applying the psychological model, Eckhart assumes the real relation of intellect and word, and then progressively removes the multiplicity of *species* as he ascends from lower to higher spiritual creatures. He argues accordingly that in the highest intellect, there is only one Word, as Son is engendered in relational opposition to the Father.²

For Eckhart, Scripture places the intellectual procession of the Word at the foundations of the science of being *qua* being, exemplified in John's Gospel; “the metaphysician considers it [the image or essence] in abstraction from the efficient and final causes”.³ The first verse of its prologue outlines the very first principles of the science, the most “proper, prior and preeminent sense” of “procession, production or emanation”, which is generation.⁴ The generation of the Son, as in the *exseritio* in Albert and Ulrich, as the life of intellect precedes the external diversification of the “boiling over”: *quodlibet in quodlibet*, prior to *quodlibet in quolibet*.

The paradigm of this equality (*quodlibet in quodlibet*) is in the unity of knower and known, sense faculty and its object in act, of potency and act, which, following Averroes, Eckhart explains is “more one” than the unity of matter and form.⁵ Accordingly, against Augustine, the doctrine of the Incarnation and adoption of the sons of God is something also known by the philosophers. Aristotle, Eckhart assumes, already teaches that the Father must have a Son, and that the Son alone knows the Father in Book II of the *De anima*.⁶ A basic principle of intentionality guides Eckhart's analysis:⁷

¹ R. Friedman, *Medieval Trinitarian Thought*, p.72.

² *In Ioh.*, n.193 (LW III, 162,1-7).

³ *Sermo XLIX.2*, n.511 (LW IV, 425,15-426,2; trans. *Teacher and Preacher*, 236).

⁴ *In Ioh.*, n.8 (LW III, 8,10-11): 'processio sive productio et emanatio, de quibus loquimur, proprie, primo et maxime locum habet in generatione.'

⁵ *In Ioh.*, n.505 (LW III, 436, 5-6). Cf. Averroes, *In XII Metaphysicam*, comm.39 (ed. Juntas, fol.322).

⁶ See *In Ioh.*, nn.106-107 (LW III, 90,11-93,3) on Jn. 1.12, *Quotquot autem receperunt eum, dedit eis potestatem filios dei fieri*.

⁷ *In Ioh.*, n.682 (LW III, 597,1-2): 'potentia omnis, ut potentia, totum suum esse et se tota accipit a suo obiecto formali: ab ipso, per ipsum and in ipso et nullo alio. Propter quod potentiae, in quantum potentia, nihil tam intraneum quam obiectum actu, nihil plus extraneum quam sui ipsius subiectum'.

every potency as such receives all of its being, and itself entirely, from its formal object – from it, through it and in it, [*ab, per, in*] and in none other. Accordingly, for a potency, insofar as it is a potency, nothing is so intrinsic as its object in act, nothing more extrinsic than its subject.

Every faculty therefore relates to its object in precisely the same way that an image relates to its exemplar: “an image, insofar as it is an image, receives nothing from its subject in which it exists, but receives its entire existence from its object, of which is the image”.¹ The same logic of existing from, in and through an object also pertains to the relation between the object and the medium of sense perception, as it is outlined in *De anima*. A man is “assumed” into what he knows or perceives insofar as his faculties become identical with their object, but not in the same mode of being. The Son is both species/image and knower of the Father because every act of intentional consciousness or perception requires a medium by which the object/exemplar is known. As he explains, “in every sensitive or rational potency” there is necessarily “a begotten species, the offspring of the object, [which must] first be brought forth.” Through the mediation of that *species* “seeing in act is other [*alius*], though not different [*aliud*] than the visible object in act, but is one” with it, just as the “father and son, the image itself and of whom it is image”.² The visible species, proceeding from (*ab*) the colour and made visible in potency by the act of the diaphanous medium which the colour actually 'moves', is that through which (*per*) the eye comes to be one in actuality (*in*) with it.

With Eckhart, every mediated form of consciousness or perception tends toward the immediacy of knowing that the Only-Begotten Son alone possesses: “it is contrary to the concept of a medium that something should be silent or at rest”.³ Moved by the colour colour in a visible object, the medium was necessary to purify the object of its materiality, which was the condition of the immediate union of seer and visible *species*.⁴ That medium accomplishes the difference of the “*modus essendi*” between the inhering formal colour and the “intention or likeness” which is the difference of an accident and a

¹ *In Ioh.*, n.23 (LW III, 19,5-7): 'Imago enim, in quantum imago est, nihil sui accipit a subiecto in quo est, sed totum suum esse accipit ab obiecto, cuius est imago'.

² *In Ioh.*, n.57 (LW III, 47,17-48,4). Cf. Aristotle, *De anima* II, c.2, 425b26.

³ *In Sap.*, n.285 (LW II, 618,3-5).

⁴ *In Exod.*, n.125 (LW II, 117,3-5): 'Id ipsum igitur, puta color, est in pariete et in oculo, sed sub alio esse aut potius sub alio modo essendi'; *In Ioh.*, n.57 (LW III, 48,9-10): 'Nam, ut ait commentator, si non esset materia, idem esset balneum in anima et balneum extra animam'.

relation.¹ The cognitive *species* by definition, like a relation, cannot be a being for otherwise it would not make being known.² Eckhart applies the same logic to the possibility of knowing God, who is absolutely incomparable to created being: *deum nemo vidit unquam* (Jn. 1.18). But the Scripture continues: the *unigenitus, qui est in sinu patris, ipse enarravit*. The indistinct One, as the Father, is by definition “relatively opposed” to the Son, who is not different in nature from him (*aliud*), but only personally (*alius*).³ Likewise, the difference between spiritual and natural being demands that a *species* and medium must make what is different in being simply other in 'person'. The relation between the One and its image is therefore for Eckhart the paradigmatic *medium* in which all other media are and are operative; he calls this medium without media sometimes “being” or sometimes the “Word”.⁴ For “any one [essential cause] generates another self [*alterum se*], not an other to itself [*aliud a se*].”⁵ And intellect is the highest example of that essential causation.⁶

That theory of the *causa essentialis*, which Eckhart inherited from Dietrich, was undoubtedly the fulcrum of his inversion of *esse* and *intelligere* in the Parisian Questions. The application of this Neoplatonic theory of causation within the Dominican Trinitarian framework allows Eckhart to found the simplicity of the divine *esse* on thinking, rather than Aquinas' opposite approach. The *causa essentialis*, or the *vera causa*, appears as an analogical cause just as Eckhart characterizes it in the first *Quaestio* (nn.10-11), where there is a mutual exclusion of cause and effect, of the *formaliter* and *virtualiter*, when being is the predication at issue, or in other words, when the causal relation is that of *creation*. But, as Burkhard Mojsisch argues, Eckhart's notion of the *causa essentialis*

¹ *In Exod.*, n.125 (LW II, 116,12-13): 'Et quia forma est ad esse, intentio sive similitudo non est ad esse nec propter esse, sed ad cognoscere et propter cognoscere et videre.'

² *Quaestio parisiensis* I, n.7 (LW V, 43,13-14): 'Ens ergo in anima, ut in anima, non habet rationem entis et ut sic vadit ad oppositum ipsius esse.'

³ *In Ioh.*, n.197 (LW III, 166,1-14).

⁴ *In Sap.*, n.284 (LW II, 616,9-10): 'esse ex sui natura est primum et novissimum, principium et finis, nequaquam medium; quin immo ipsum est medium ipsum, quo solo mediante sunt et insunt et amantur omnia sive quaeruntur'; *Predigt 69 (Teacher and Preacher, 313)*: “The eternal Word is the medium and the image itself that is without medium and without image, so that the soul may grasp and know God in the eternal Word without medium and without an image.”

⁵ *In Ioh.*, n.195 (LW III, 164,2). At 163,8-9, he indicates that this concerns the *causa essentialis*. Cf. E. Butler, “Polytheism and Individuality in the Henadic Manifold,” *Dionysius* 23 (2005), pp.83-104, at pp.96-98, for a similar distinction between the henads which are 'other' Ones (*alla*) without being 'different than' (*heteron*) the One. But for Proclus the relations do not constitute the henads.

⁶ *In Gen.* II, n.47 (LW I, 515,5-8): 'omnis causa essentialis generaliter dicit effectum suum et dicit se ipsam totam ut sic in effectu, et ipse effectus est verbum, quo dicens dicit, et est ipsum verbum, quod dicitur et quo solo innotescit dicens.'

extends more widely than for Dietrich insofar as it pertains also to the “*causa univoca*”.¹ This difference can be explained in terms of Eckhart's theory of relation.

During his own regency in Paris in 1296-1298, Dietrich had argued that intellection is a higher mode of cognition than sensation and ratiocination because it is always simple and always essentially in act. Sensitive cognition apprehends a singular as a “*hoc aliquid*” possessing “material parts” which follow from the whole (*post totum; partes posteriores toto*).² Rational cognition apprehends the “universal” which possesses “formal parts,” which are “before the whole” (*ante totum*).³ In contrast to these divided modes of knowing, intellectual cognition, which belongs to “God and the created intelligences,” consists in knowing within itself, not through another, a “simple essence which collects in itself the entirety of being, insofar as it pre-contains within itself all being and its properties in a simple way and more nobly”.⁴ Finally, these three kinds of cognition can be distinguished according to the presence of their object; sensation grasps its object *secundum suam similitudinem*, reason *secundum suam rationem*, but intellection knows through itself (*per essentiam*).⁵

That mode of internal and virtual possession for Dietrich founds his doctrine of the *causa essentialis*. For there is not only an order of dependence within the sublunary genera of the four causes (matter depends on form, form and matter on the efficient cause, and all on the final cause), but there is “an order of essential dependence” (*ordo essentialis dependentiae*) within each ranked order of prior and posterior.⁶ Dietrich attributes the origin of this doctrine to Proclus, who had posited a relation of essential emanation or causation exercised by a prior upon its effect, which “converts in its essence toward that from which it proceeded”.⁷ This inherent revertive tension in the effect follows, for Proclus, from the principle that any cause pre-contains more primarily or

¹ B. Mojsisch, *Analogy, Univocity and Unity*, pp.28-34. Cf. A. de Libera, *La mystique rhénane*, pp.216-220, n.46, and Complementary Note n.2 in *OLME VI*, pp.371-381.

² Dietrich, *Quaestio utrum in deo*, 1.1.6 (ed. Pagnoni-Sturlese, 294,35-41).

³ *Ibid.*, 1.1.7 (ed. Pagnoni-Sturlese, 294,45-49). These “formal parts” are presumably the constitutive parts of the definition of a thing, as Aristotle explains in *Metaphysics VII*, c.10, 1035b33.

⁴ Dietrich, *Quaestio utrum in deo*, 1.1.4; 1.1.8 (ed. Pagnoni-Sturlese, 293-294): ‘intellectivae cognitionis est simplex essentia colligens in se totum ens, in quantum est praehabens in se modo simplici et nobiliore omnia entia et proprietates eorum, quam sint in seipsis’. For this “pre-containment,” see Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop.65 (ed. Dodds, 62,13-62,23).

⁵ Dietrich, *Quaestio utrum in deo*, 1.1.10 (ed. Pagnoni-Sturlese, 294,63-295,65).

⁶ Dietrich, *De animatione caeli*, 4.2 (ed. Sturlese, 15,73-87).

⁷ Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, props. 31 (ed. Dodds, 34,28-36,2) and prop.34 (36,20-38,8).

primordially what its effect possesses secondarily.¹ Therefore the derivative effect is essentially bound to the content of its cause, which stands in a perfective relation to it both as its goal and its origin. In addition to this pre-containment, what is crucial to the doctrine, as Proclus develops it, and what marks an important difference with its use by Dietrich and ultimately Eckhart, is that these causes, Proclus writes, “act in their own being” (*autôî tôi einai*).² What exercises its causal power simply by existing is not the same as exercising that same power in virtue of its essential structure.³ Eckhart’s doctrine of univocal causation and his Trinitarian thought depends on this shift. For Dietrich, however, these Procline principles of a cause that acts from itself is explanatory of the analogical causation of the heavens, as the divine intellect produces the separate intellects and celestial souls, so too they produce their effect as “another mode of being”.⁴ being”.⁴

The shift from the existential function of the “cause through its own being” to its essential rendering in Albert the Great and his successors, owes almost entirely to the fact that the Latins had received the doctrine of Proclus already by way of Dionysius and the *Liber de causis*.⁵ Given the assumed Aristotelian provenance of the *Liber de causis* – which had lasted until Aquinas sat down with the *Liber*, the Dionysian corpus, and Moerbeke’s new translation of the *Elements of Theology* before him – the notion that a cause acts “by its being alone” (*per esse suum tantum*) would have been understood as causes that are operative “through themselves” (*per se*), taken from Aristotle. Dietrich’s awareness of Proclus’ more elaborate treatment of such causes is therefore already coloured by that background. As a result, where the gods in Proclus exercise their causal efficacy in virtue of their existence alone, and simply irradiate goods upon what is lower, the Dominicans see this as the essential activity of Intellect. Eckhart’s expansion of this theory beyond the analogical differences of *modus essendi* involves finding a self-relation of the cause “as an immanent effect in the originless origin, and in the essential agent (deus-pater)”.⁶ As Eckhart says, “it is different for an effect in a proximate univocal

¹ Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 61 (ed. Dodds, 58,16-21).

² Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop.18. (ed. Dodds, 20,3-20,20).

³ A. de Libera, *Métaphysique et noétique*, p.201, n.144.

⁴ Dietrich, *De animatione caeli*, 8.1-4 (ed. Sturlese, 19,3-20,38). This text is very influential for the opening paragraphs of Eckhart’s exposition *In Iohannem*. Cf. *OLME VI*, pp.378-380.

⁵ A. de Libera, *Métaphysique et noétique*, pp.202-206.

⁶ B. Mojsisch, *Meister Eckhart. Analogy, Univocity and Unity*, p.33.

cause”.¹ He continues: “not only in intellect is its effect within itself a word, but is a word and a *ratio*” which is both *in principio* and *apud deum* “in intellect [...] and in every proximate intellect that is its image or made according to its image” that is of the “*genus dei*”.² Indeed, univocal relations only obtain between two terms within a shared genus.³ In this relation, the principle is not in its effect as a different mode of being, is not the same content received under a different mode of reception, but simply the principle in its principate as itself.⁴ The principate is therefore as much a cause as its principle; in the passive reception of its principle is also its greatest activity. Thus Eckhart develops Dietrich’s theory of the *causa essentialis* within the established Dominican tradition of Trinitarian doctrine, where “the Father and the Son are opposed relatively; insofar as they are opposed, they are distinguished, but insofar as they are relative, they mutually posit one another”.⁵

Once he has placed Dietrich’s theory within that framework, Eckhart must qualify Dietrich’s notion of the *imago Dei* as the active intellect within us:⁶ “This is the essential mind of God, the pure and naked power of intellect [*intellectus*], which the masters term receptive”. The pure and naked power of thinking resides in its passivity, in the pure relation of an image or a power to its object, the relation of the Son to the Father as One. The disagreement between Eckhart and Dietrich on the question of the beatific vision was known in their own time, though whether it can amount to more than a difference of emphasis shall be considered later.⁷ Eckhart himself, at any rate, opposes his theory of the *imago toto se ad alterum* to deny, against Durand, that there is any reflexive awareness in the beatific vision, and to maintain, against Eckhart’s former student Hervaeus Natalis, that there can be any internal division of the soul’s powers when confronted with the same formal object.⁸ Like John Quidort, Hervaeus argued that the vision of the pure divine essence remains incomplete without an act of divine will which

¹ *In Ioh.*, n.31 (LW III, 24,8): ‘effectus est aliter in causa proxima univoca’.

² *In Ioh.*, n.31 (LW III, 24,16-25,1).

³ *In Ioh.*, nn.182-183 (LW III, 150,5-152,14).

⁴ *Sermo* II.1, n.6 (LW IV, 8,4-11): ‘In causis autem primordialibus sive originalibus primo-primis, ubi magis proprie nomen est principii quam causae, principium se toto et cum omnibus suis proprietatibus descendit in principiatum. Audeo dicere quod etiam cum suis propriis – Ioh. 14: *ego in patre et pater in me est.*’

⁵ *In Ioh.*, n.197 (LW III, 166,10-12).

⁶ Dietrich, *De visione beatifica*, 1.1.1.3 (ed. Mojsisch, 15-16).

⁷ A. de Libera, *La mystique rhénane*, pp.170-171 for a text, *Ler von der selikeit* by Eckhart of Gründig, which contrasts the activity or passivity of the highest state for Dietrich and Eckhart, respectively.

⁸ *In Ioh.*, n.102 (LW III, 93,4) and n.682 (LW III, 597,4-6).

brings the seeker's *appetitus* to rest.¹ For Eckhart, however, such a doctrine fails to observe the difference of natural and supernatural cognition; the reflexive vision is the highest state attainable by nature, but not by grace.² Indeed the blessedness of the just man simply mirrors the *bullitio* of the perfect image, Christ, who pours forth “formally without the cooperation of the will, but rather with its concomitant activity.”³ That, for Eckhart, is the meaning of John 17.3, “This eternal life, that they know you alone,” namely to receive one's entire being from God alone as object.⁴ God first appears as Good from the most external standpoint, “will and love run before intellect, because God in this life is able to be loved through himself, but not known through himself”.⁵ Only in this life, then, in contrast to the *vita aeterna* in John 17.3, do the two faculties of intellect and will proceed toward God as “one object, but under different aspects”.⁶

The crossing-over and the beginning of eternal life supersedes the standpoint of the Good, for “by the Good, that which is created is good”.⁷ Following a series of citations from Scripture, one attributed to Moses, “Man has never seen God” (cf. Exod. 33.20), and another to John, “We shall know God just as God knows himself” (cf. 1 John 3.2), Eckhart concludes that, once the soul is made into the perfect image of God, “we shall know him just as he knows himself – in that reflection that alone is the image of God and the Godhead, that is, to the extent that the Godhead is in the Father”.⁸ There is, however, another “death” that follows this non-reflexive immediate vision, wherein the “soul looses herself into “the primitive divine nature which manifests itself in the Father as operative”.⁹ The difference of these two deaths – to eternal life and to the Ground of

¹ W. Goris, *Einheit als Prinzip und Ziel*, p.366.

² W. Goris, *Einheit als Prinzip und Ziel*, pp.366-372. Goris finds an important counter-balance to the passages from *In Iohannem* in the *Book of the Nobleman* (*Von dem edeln Menschen* [DW V, 116,21-118,13-15; trans. *Essential Eckhart*, 244-247]), where Eckhart elevates the reflexive vision over the immediate one. Goris argues, rightly that Eckhart's emphasis here is on the present state (*nû hie*), and that one cannot transpose this to the state of grace promised in John 17.3 (DW V, 118,3-6).

³ *Sermo XLIX.3*, n.511 (LW IV, 426,8-9; trans. *Teacher and Preacher*, 237).

⁴ *In Ioh.*, n.107 (LW III, 92,9-14): 'Cum enim homo, ut dictum est, accipit totum suum esse se toto a solo deo, obiecto, sibi est esse non sibi esse, sed deo esse, deo, inquam, ut principio dante esse, et deo ut fini, cui est et cui vivit, se ipsum nescire nec quidquam nisi deum et in deo, in quantum in deo et in quantum deus.'

⁵ *In Ioh.*, n.696 (LW III, 611,14-15).

⁶ *In Ioh.*, n.695 (LW III, 611,12-13): 'Adhuc autem current *simul*, quia unum obiectum habent deum, quamvis sub alia et alia ratione.'

⁷ *In Ioh.*, n.562 (LW III, 490,9-10): 'Unde secundum hoc bonum ipsum proprie principium est et fons creaturarum; eo enim, quod quid creatum est, bonum est, et quo bonum est, creatum.'

⁸ *Predigt 70* (DW III, 197,5-6; trans., *Teacher and Preacher*, 318).

⁹ This text is taken from a sermon of dubious authenticity, and has not been given a critical edition. It can

eternal life – must now be explained.

3.2: *Negatio negationis*

In Eckhart's thought, the One has two aspects. It can be considered either as the Father in whom the generative power of the divine essence is present as mutually opposed to its offspring the Son, in which case it is responsible for the perfection and self-sufficiency of the divine *esse*, or it can be viewed as the Indistinct essence itself, where no distinction or relation is posed at all. These are both aspects of the transcendental determination of *unum* itself, which either indicates the *puritas essendi* and the plenitude of the *negatio negationis*, or is appropriated to the Father. In the latter instance, it belongs to a lower moment than being insofar as “*ens* or *esse* is unbegotten nor begetting nor begotten, without a principle nor from another; 'one' also is without principle and unbegotten, but begetting”.¹ In this way he is the principle of the Son as truth or as equality, who “has the principle from another” in the sense that “equality from its nature proceeds from unity, which remains in unity itself and unity in it”.² And that equality, as we have seen, mediates unity to the unequal which “does not proceed from equality that it would remain in it *formaliter* nor equality in it”.³ The One as a term in equality, however, is not the same as the One as *puritas*. Eckhart explains why:⁴

The idea of being is something commonplace and indistinct and by its indistinction is distinguished from the others [*transcendentia*]. In this way God is distinguished by his indistinction from all distinct things. For this reason essence itself or *esse* in God is unbegotten and not begetting. 'One' itself, by its own property, indicates distinction. For 'one' is in itself indistinct, is distinct from other things, and because of this is [a] personal [attribute] and pertains to a supposit to whom it belongs to act.

In this account, the One considered in itself is indistinct, and therefore indistinct

be found in A. de Libera, *La mystique rhénane*, pp.244-246.

¹ *In Ioh.*, n.564 (LW III, 492,3-4).

² *In Ioh.*, n.564 (LW III, 492,5) and n.557 (LW III, 486,6-7).

³ *In Ioh.*, n.557 (LW III, 486,11-12).

⁴ *In Ioh.*, n.562 (LW III, 489,3-8): 'ratio enim entis est quid abiectum et indistinctum et ipsa sua indistinctione ab aliis distinguitur. Quo etiam modo deus sua indistinctione ab aliis distinctis quibuslibet distinguitur. Hinc est quod ipsa essentia sive esse in divinis ingenitum est et non gignens. Ipsum vero unum ex sui proprietate distinctionem indicat. Est enim unum in se indistinctum, distinctum ab aliis et propter hoc personale est et ad suppositum pertinet cuius est agere.'

from the Ground or Being which gives rise to it. On the other hand, by its transcendental property, “one” indicates distinction. That is to say, it indicates “indivision”, which poses another outside itself against which it is a unity. Accounts which ascribe a primarily negative meaning to transcendental property of *unum* were commonplace in the thirteenth century, from Philip the Chancellor, through Alexander of Hales, and Albert the Great, although Eckhart likely had before him Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q.1, a.1, which by that time had become the milestone text of transcendental theory.¹ Aquinas himself had employed the phrase “*negatio negationis*,” although the term for him retained its strictly negative character, in the sense that “one” always already negates the negativity of a division.²

What must be explicated now is the association of the One with the divine essence in their shared indistinction – a characterization of *unum* which is not nearly as ubiquitous as the property of indivision. In a Latin sermon, Eckhart explains that, in the proclamation in Deuteronomy 4.6, “*Deus unus est*,” “*unum*” can be taken in two ways. In one sense, God “alone” *is*, and alone is “pure being” (*purum esse*), the “being of all things”,³ for it is as “Indistinction” that the One contains “all things and the fullness of being”.⁴ Therefore the plenitude of the One is not opposed to, but rather comprehensive of, the affirmative character of being.

The second meaning of “one” is that God alone is “pure intellect,” since “unity seems to be the property of intellect alone”. Eckhart then makes the same reference proposition 4 from the *Liber de causis* used in *Quaestio parisiensis* I, intellect is “uncreatable,” while being has the aspect of “creatability”.⁵ So the “plenitude” of God’s being follows from the One as “negation of negation” which is the “marrow” (*medulla*) or “apex of the purest affirmation”.⁶ Accordingly, the Good is subordinate to the aspect of the “creatable” being which follows from this apex, and in particular among divided creatures; for “One is higher, prior and simpler than the Good Itself, and it is closer to Existence Itself and to God, or rather according to its name it is one existence in or with

¹ Albertus Magnus, *Metaphysica* IV, tr.1, c.6 (ed. Coloniensis, vol.XVI/1, 168,63): ‘est enim unum indivisum in se et divisum ab aliis.’

² Aquinas, *Quodlibet* X, q.1, a.1, ad.3.

³ *Sermo* XXIX, n.301 (LW IV, 267,2-3).

⁴ *Ibid.*, n.298 (LW IV, 265,7-8).

⁵ *Ibid.*, nn.300-301 (LW IV, 266,11-268,10); *Quaestio parisiensis* I, n.4 (LW V, 41,6-15).

⁶ *In Ioh.*, n.207 (LW III, 175,4-7).

Existence itself? ¹

Indistinction, therefore, is a property which provides *unum* with a positive determination. But, again, one should note that this positive aspect of the One is not that which Eckhart associates with the supposit of the Father, “to whom it pertains to act,” who rather represents the aspect of *unum* which makes a person “*distinctum ab aliis*”. Contrast this with John Peckham, for whom the *primitas* of the Father had acquired a positive nature as a personal property. Henry of Ghent also had departed from the traditional transcendental account of the *unum* as simply negative, and argued that “indivision,” as the “negation of division” or the “negation of privation,” it indicates “true position”.² This, however, remains within the horizon of the *indivisum*. Eckhart himself is fully aware that the issue whether *potentia generandi* is a personal or essential divine attribute is a “knotty question,” but his own view on the matter is that, strictly speaking, and with the Dominicans, potency is an essential attribute, although it is only active in the personal supposit of the Father. He writes:³

Accordingly, the saints and doctors say best, that in God the essence does not generate. For the doctors commonly say that the power of generation is not the essence absolutely, but the essence with a relation. Which, however, is more primary, is a knotty question.

The potency of generation in the Father is the essence more than paternity, as the better ones say.

In the relation between *esse* and the *unum* as indistinct or as supposit, we find the transcendental logic for this difficult question:⁴

Esse, then, both because it looks inward and to the essence, and because it is absolute and indeterminate, is the principle of no production, according to its own

¹ *Sermo XXIX*, n.299 (LW IV, 266,4-6).

² Henry of Ghent, *Summa quaestionum ordinariarum*, a.25, q.1 (ed. Badius, fol.148rE). The influence of Henry is noted by W. Goris, *Einheit als Prinzip und Ziel*, pp.201-206.

³ *In Ecc.*, n.11 (LW II, 241,1-4): 'Propter quod optime dicunt sancti et doctores quod in divinis essentia non generat. Dicunt etiam doctores communiter quod potentia generandi non est essentia absolute, sed essentia cum relatione. Quid autem principalius, nodosa quaestio est'; *In Exod.*, n.28 (LW II, 34,1-2): 'potentia generandi in patre est essentia potius quam paternitas, ut dicunt meliores.'

⁴ *In Ioh.*, n.512 (LW III, 443,8-10;14-15): 'Esse autem, tum quia ad intus et essentiam respicit, tum quia absolutum et indeterminatum, nullius productionis principium est secundum sui rationem. Ab indistincto enim et indeterminato nihil procedit. [...] Hinc est etiam quod theologo dicunt esse seu essentiam nec generare nec generari.'

notion. For nothing proceeds from the indistinct and indeterminate. [...] This is why the theologians say that *esse* or essence neither begets nor is begotten.

It is therefore as indistinct that *esse* is, in itself, not generative, but for *unum* it is otherwise; because of its dual aspect as either indivisible or as indistinct it can be at once identical to its prior Ground and with the supposit of the Father, the *essentia cum relatione*, which is the fount of the procession of the *imago*. We must now determine basis for a positive understanding of *unum* that does not reduce the *potentia generandi* entirely to the Father.

The association of *unum* with the *indistinctum* can be traced back to Dietrich, in his treatise *De natura contrariorum* which discusses the various kinds of opposition.¹ The first and most absolute opposition obtains between affirmation and negation, both of which are more than simply determinations of reason, but relate to something real “about being” (*circa ens*).² By this he means that affirmation corresponds to the positing of a being, and negation to its removal. This is the only way, he continues, to secure the real modes of being, the one and the many. From here, Jan Aertsen explains, Dietrich begins with the positive character of being (*ens*) and proceeds to its negation or removal, non-being. This gives rise to the first and fundamental *ratio* of *oppositio*, where the contraries are simply the first concept, *ens*, and its removal.³ Such an opposition “founds the meaning of *distinctio* of distinguishable things”, writes Aertsen, presumably since it allows for the determination of a “this” over against a “not-this”. Immediately, the *ratio* of *unum* arises, since it removes the opposed distinction of being and non-being. Dietrich then cites the traditional, negative determination of *unum* as *ens indivisum*, but suggests that one could more accurately say “that in which no distinction is” (*in quo non cadit distinctio vel remotio*), since *indivisum* is too closely tied to the genus of quantity.⁴

Yet the positive determination of this *indistinctum* is not made explicit by Dietrich. Mojsisch notes that, for Dietrich, *ens* itself already has the purely affirmative content as “first intention”. Therefore when he speaks of the *privatio privationis*, the privation of the privation of the *ratio oppositionis*, he precisely does not intend thereby

¹ For the following I have relied on J. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, pp.327-329.

² Dietrich, *De natura contrariorum*, 13.1 (ed. Imbach, 93).

³ Dietrich, *De natura contrariorum*, 15.1 and 16.1 (ed. Imbach, 94-95).

⁴ Dietrich, *De natura contrariorum*, 16.2 (ed. Imbach, 95).

“to think this negatively determined cancellation of opposition as itself position”.¹ As Dietrich explains:²

The first privation in the *ratio* of unity posits itself materially, because it is a part or an extreme [term] of the opposition, which is being and non-being. This opposition as opposition, however, has a certain mode of being. For this reason the privation of said opposition has the mode of a privation rather than of position.

For Dietrich, then, the “one,” in its own *ratio*, remains inherently negative, for it always functions as a privation of a given positive content, which he associates with being (*ens*). As *privatio privationis*, then, the *unum* is entirely relating to itself, either in the first moment (*materialiter*), as one part of an opposition, or completely, as the privation of that opposition as pure indistinction.

With Eckhart, the *unum as indistinctum* acquires its fully positive meaning as the *negatio negationis* precisely because it can be associated with the divine essence *per se*, not with a personal supposit, and inscribed in the same incommeasurable relation of creature and creator which he takes up from Moses Maimonides. After discussing the impossibility of names of comparisons according to the reasons of Maimonides, Eckhart offers an additional, “more subtle proof”, namely that “every comparison takes at least two things that are distinct”, and since “every created being, taken or conceived by itself, distinct from God is not being, but is nothing”, nothing can be more distinct and beyond comparison than the indistinct and distinct.³ The key to this logic, as Burkard Mojsisch explains, is that the separation of distinct and indistinct is not reducible to relative or contrary opposition, for the difference of indistinct and distinct being is of a higher order than that between two distinct beings.⁴ If we stopped there, we would have the *vera causa* of the Parisian disputations once again: the mutual exclusion of cause and effect along the vertical division of virtual and formal difference. The indistinct distinguishes itself by its

¹ B. Mojsisch, *Analogy, Univocity, and Unity*, p.97. Wouter Goris suggests that Henry of Ghent is the target of Dietrich's criticism (*Einheit als Prinzip und Ziel*, pp.203-205).

² Dietrich, *De natura contrariorum*, 16.5 (ed. Imbach, 96): 'Ad quod patet responsio, quia prima privatio in ratione unius materialiter se habet, quia ipsa est pars sive extremum oppositionis, quae est entis et non entis. Oppositio autem in eo, quod oppositio, aequaliter habet modum entis. Hinc est, quod privatio dictae oppositionis modum privationis habet potius quam positionis'.

³ *In Exod.*, n.40 (LW II, 45,7-11); *In Sap.*, n.154 (LW II, 489,9-10): 'plus distinguitur indistinctum a distincto quam quaelibet duo distincta ab invicem'.

⁴ B. Mojsisch, *Analogy, Univocity, and Unity*, p.103. The following is indebted to Mojsisch's account of the “objective paradox theory” in Eckhart (pp.102-109).

indistinction.

Eckhart says more: it is not enough that the indistinct remains indistinct from itself as that which distinguishes itself from the finite by its indistinction – it must furthermore distinguish itself from itself as that which distinguishes itself from the distinct by its indistinction. A self-relation of the indistinct distinguishing itself from itself, while preserving its identity as the indistinct, is what we have seen already in the pure relations of the Trinity, which add nothing to the indistinct essence in the way of being. At this moment, the *negatio negationis* fully emerges; in the first relation there had been an imbalance between the opposed degrees of negation, but here that asymmetrical opposition is itself subject to a negation. As Mojsisch makes clear, this second stage of self-related negation is necessary for the *negatio negationis* to undo the “degrees of intensity” that persist in the first stage, for only this makes clear that at all times the indistinct is merely distinguishing itself *from itself*. Following Eckhart, he provides the example of number: “nothing is so one and indistinct as what is constituted and that from which, through which and in which it is constituted and subsists” - this is the operative agency of the Trinity mediating the essence to itself in a movement that comprehends creation – “but, as is said, number or multiplicity, the numbered and the numerable, as such, is constituted from unities and subsists [by them]”.¹ In this relation *unum* is not only the determinate negation of the multiplicity, but as what constitutes them, as *unitas*, it runs through all of them as what is itself counted in each. Nor can the *unum* in this sense be reduced to the “true position” (*vera positio*) of Henry of Ghent, which must remain a secondary moment; in determining the positive position of each person in their opposition, the *unum* as *indistinctum* transcends indivision.² Therefore, Meister Eckhart

¹ *In Sap.*, n.155 (LW II, 491,3-6): 'nihil tam unum et indistinctum quam constitutum et illud ex quo, per quod et in quo constituitur et subsistit. Sed, sicut dictum est, numerus sive multitudo, numeratum et numerabile ut sic ex unitatibus constituitur et subsistit. Igitur nihil tam indistinctum quam deus unus aut unitas et creatum numeratum!'

² This anticipates a later account of the difference of the negative and positive *unum* can be found in Berthold of Moosburg, a successor of Albert and Eckhart at the *studium* at Cologne around 1335-1343. Writing his commentary Proclus' *Elements of Theology* – the only commentary on that work in the Middle Ages – Berthold departs from the traditional attempts to reconcile Plato and Aristotle by explicitly and repeatedly setting them in opposition. Their respective accounts of unity provide one example. Commenting on the first proposition of the *Elements*, Berthold opposes the Peripatetic (transcendental; the negative determination that follows upon, and is convertible with, being) and Platonic (transcendent; the positive unity which is anterior to the opposition of the one and many) notions of unity as indicative of a difference between “Aristotelian wisdom” and the “Platonic hyperwisdom” of Proclus and Dionysius, between the metaphysics of Being and the Platonic theology of union (cf. A. de Libera, *La mystique rhénane*, pp.384-391). Berthold appears among the commentators

concludes, “nothing is as indistinct as God, one and unity, and created number.” God mediates himself to himself in each of his modes.

As the *potentia generandi*, Unity, as the *negatio negationis* runs through the self-relation of the Trinity. It is that which founds and enables the diverse relation of *transcendentia* to one another. Mojsisch draws the connection with the *Non-Aliud* of Nicholas Cusanus, who places the non-other in a different class than the four transcendentals, and even above *unum*, for the same reason Eckhart locates the *indistinctum* above the *unum* as personal supposit: where the *unum* is always posed relative to an other against which it is undivided (the Father is never without a Son), the non-other comprehends and enables both sides of the opposition. But if one were to hypostasize the *Non Aliud* as something prior to the four transcendentals, one misses the import of the second stage of negation. Mojsisch explains:¹

The transcendentals are not to be regarded as subordinate to the not-other, since they are as such in each instance nothing other than themselves – this through the not-other itself. The not-other is thus not prior to the transcendentals (it would then be an other), but is instead the not-otherness itself of the transcendentals.

3.3: Conclusion

Learned men commonly hold that the potency of generating is not the essence absolutely, but the essence with a relation. Which, moreover, is more principal, is a knotty question.²

Therefore, in the fourteenth-century, a robust threefold distinction of essence, nature and person had become current within the schools. Jakob of Metz already differentiated them as three possible ways of signification *in divinis*.³ Eckhart’s own position in this matter, I shall conclude by noting, was often misunderstood. For Jan van Ruusbroec, a later critic

of Proclus in Nicholas of Cusa's *Apologia doctae ignorantiae*, n.43 (as Iohannes de Mossbach), and his influence can be recognized the cardinal's *transcensus* of the *transcendentia* as traditionally understood (cf. J. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, p.553).

¹ B. Mojsisch, *Analogy, Univocity, and Unity*, p.107.

² *In Ecc.*, n.11 (LW II, 241,4-6): 'Dicunt etiam doctores communiter quod potentia generandi non est essentia absolute, sed essentia cum relatione. Quid autem principalius, nodosa quaestio est.'

³ Jakob of Metz, *In I Sent* (A), d.5, q.1 (ed. Decker, *Die Gotteslehre des Jakob von Metz*, 330, n.114), cited in B. Mojsisch, *Meister Eckhart. Analogy, Univocity, and Unity*, p.114. The theory goes back to John of Paris (John Quidort), another Dominican in the sillage of Aquinas on Trinitarian relations, see R. Friedman, *Medieval Trinitarian Thought*, p.30.

of Eckhartism – that is, the posthumous reputation of Eckhart in his vernacular dissemination – the divine nature is not an intermediary between the essence and the persons.¹ Rather, this nature can be conceived from two perspectives; it is either “onfold” and identical to the essence, or “threefold” and always “fruitful”. This, ultimately, is Ruusbroec's answer to elevation of a “Ground beyond the Persons” which he associates with Eckhart. So when the Flemish mystic speaks of the 'whirlpool' into which the persons lose themselves, he opposes the notion of a “Godhead behind the persons” by identifying the divine nature with the Father from “a nonpersonal or nonrelational perspective”.²

In advocating such a perspective, Ruusbroec indicates his debt to the Franciscan tradition.³ The way of overcoming the quietist outcome of the elevation of a distinctionless Ground beyond the Persons is to identify “fruitful nature” with the Father, as John Peckham had argued for the personal attribution of the positive determination of *primitas*. Ruusbroec likely inherited this strand of Trinitarian theology from the *Compendium theologiae veritatis* of Hughes Ripelin of Strasbourg (+1268), which was based directly on the *Breviloquium* of Bonaventure and translated almost immediately into the vernacular.⁴ Hughes' emphasis, like Bonaventure, is on the emanation of the Son *per modum naturae* as the most primordial generation of the divine essence as Goodness.

For Ruusbroec, the outcome of such a union with the Father as the fruitful nature is the simultaneous indistinction of rest and activity in the “common life” (*ghemein leven*) of the Trinity. There, the spirit is stirred by God to an ever more interior craving that is only quickly exhausted, reducing the spirit to nothing in its love; the spirit then “falls back into new activity.”⁵ That *perichoresis* is lived out by the “common man” (*ghemeine mensche*), for whom there is no disjunction of contemplation and action.⁶ So

¹ R. van Nieuwenhove, *Jan van Ruusbroec*, p.87.

² R. van Nieuwenhove, *Jan van Ruusbroec*, p.97.

³ The influence of Bonaventure on Ruusbroec's Trinitarian thought in identifying paternity with the fruitful nature is noted in Van Nieuwenhove, pp.91-93. For the notably widespread vernacular dissemination of Bonaventure in this period, see A. de Libera, “*Sermo mysticus*: La transposition du vocabulaire scolastique dans la mystique allemande du XIVe siècle,” *Rue Descartes* 14 (1995), pp.41-73, at pp.43-44.

⁴ On the *Compendium* and Bonaventure's *Breviloquium*, see A. de Libera, *La mystique rhénane*, pp.73-77. For the influence of Hughes on Ruusbroec see Van Nieuwenhove, *Jan van Ruusbroec*, p.91 with citations *ad loc*.

⁵ Jan van Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht* (ed. Alaerts, b1581-b1588). Cf. R. Van Nieuwenhove, *Jan van Ruusbroec*, pp.176-180.

⁶ Jan van Ruusbroec, *Vanden blinkenden steen*, in G. de Baere, Th. Mertens, H. Noë (eds.), *Opera omnia*,

concludes Ruusbroec's later treatise *The Sparkling Stone*, which ends where it began:¹

A man who wants to live in the most perfect state offered by the Holy Church must be a zealous and good man, and an inward and spiritual man, and an uplifted man contemplating God, and an outflowing, common man.

The common man and the common life are at the pinnacle of the mystical ascent for Ruusbroec. Eckhart would agree with Ruusbroec that the human is united to God in detachment, by dying to oneself to overcome the *hoc aut hoc* particularity of oneself and live a life of indistinct communion. He, however, grounds that common life in a principle which depends on dialectical thought as its *locus*, which Nicholas of Cusa later called the *Non-Aliud*. Only the Son knows and manifests the Father; that non-other must be known to be lived.

Indeed, from the Dominican standpoint, it is inconceivable that the Father could be considered from a “non-relational perspective”. The fruitful divine nature as the indistinct *unum* in Eckhart cannot be predicated of any supposit – its indistinction consists therein. Its productivity is not that of the Good which produces the Son *per modum naturae* but, as is seen in Eckhart's exposition of Exodus 3.14, operates in and through the intellect's articulation of the essence, anterior to what Eckhart identifies as the external diversity of the Good. The standpoint of *isticheit* is a dialectical thought.

The vernacular sermon 67, which we have referred to already, explains how *isticheit* is the Eckhartian equivalent of the “fruitful nature”. Prior to the operative image of the Trinity, he speaks of a bare *isticheit*, translated by Walshe as “self-identity,” that is “deprived of all being and all *isticheit*.”² In an anonymous collection of sentences called the *Sayings of twelve sublime masters teaching in Paris*, containing teachings attributed to Albert the Great and Meister Eckhart, and which had a wide circulation throughout Germany, the Low Countries, England and France, the doctrine of Dietrich is characterized in very similar terms: “Maître Dietrich parle de la conscience [individuelle: *sinnekait*]. / Il comprend l'image de l'âme dans sa réalité propre. / C'est là qu'elle connaît

vol.10, Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis, 110 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1990), ll.936-961; (trans. Wiseman, p.184).

¹ *Ibid.*, (ed. De Baere-Mertens-Noë, ll.1-4; trans. Wiseman, p.155).

² *Predigt 67* (Walshe, 358).

Dieu dans son être vrai (*isticheit*).”¹ In Eckhart this term *isticheit* is the vernacular equivalent of the One as *indistinctum*, as the non-other who runs through and establishes each person in their own self-identity. Since Ruusbroec has associated the divine nature with the Father, he can only think *isticheit* as “eternal inactivity, modeless darkness, unnamed isness [*istegheit*], the superessence of all creatures”.² With Eckhart it is otherwise. As Burkhard Mojsisch explains, *isticheit* is the “specifically relational essence in its passage into being”.³ Alessandra Beccarisi provides a similar, but not identical, formulation that is helpful for bringing Eckhart closer to Dietrich: *isticheit* signifies an “Identity back-facing upon itself” (*zu sich selbst zurückgewandte Identität*) that comprehends “God's way of being [*Seinsweise*] and the dynamic between God and man”.⁴ This definition in particular brings out the constitutive role played by the created intellect in the life of the absolute, as part of one providential movement.

Just as Eckhart said in *Predigt 67*, the soul must ascend beyond the receptive *intellectus* that is the “pure essential image” to the simple essence (*isticheit*) that is without *isticheit* or being. *Isticheit* or *quidditas*, the essence where the divine being is what it is, brings us back to that moment in the Exodus commentary with the reversal of Avicenna: the divine *essentia* precedes and founds the divine *esse* through the constitutive activity of intellect, and the ensuing equality of truth. Eckhart thinks the quiddity of God as a logical moment prior to his *anitas*, and employs the intermediary *essentia cum relatione* of Jakob of Metz,⁵ while, unlike Ruusbroec, refrains from identifying it with the Father.

¹ Cited in K. Ruh, *Théologien, prédicateur, mystique*, pp.137-138. The compilation indicates something of the reputation surrounding Albert as an important precursor to the inward detachment preached by Eckhart, just as witnessed by Eckhart himself in *Predigt 52* (DW II, 488,3-6). The saying attributed to Albert from the *Sayings of the twelve* reads: “Si l'on veut s'enquérir des clercs les plus sages de la terre, on les trouvera à Paris dans l'école. Mais, si l'on veut s'enquérir du secret intime de Dieu, que l'on demande alors la personne la plus pauvre qui soit sur terre, qui par Dieu est volontairement pauvre : elle connaît davantage du secret intime de Dieu que le clerc le plus sage de la terre,” translated in W. Wackernagel, “Vingt-quatre aphorismes autour de Maître Eckhart,” p.92.

² Jan van Ruusbroec, *Van seven trappen*, in R. Faesen (ed.), *Opera omnia*, vol.9, Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis, 109 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), ll.1158-1161.

³ B. Mojsisch, “*Perfectiones spirituales* – Meister Eckharts Theorie der geistigen Vollkommenheiten. Mit möglichkeitsphilosophischen Reflexionen,” in M. Pickavé (ed.), *Die Logik des Transzendentalen. Festschrift für Jan A. Aertsen*, *Miscellanea Mediaevalia*, 30 (Berlin-New York: De Gruyter, 2003), pp.511-524, at p.513.

⁴ A. Beccarisi, “*Isticheit* nach Meister Eckhart. Wege und Irrwege eines philosophischen Terminus,” in A. Speer, L. Wegener (eds.), *Meister Eckhart in Erfurt*, *Miscellanea Mediaevalia*, 32 (Berlin-New York: De Gruyter, 2005), pp.314-334, at p.315.

⁵ *In Ecc.*, n.11 (LW II, 241,4-6).

Eckhart's transcendental theory as it evolves out of and into his notion of *quidditas* and *essentia* is considered in the next Chapter, but for now we conclude by noting that the fecundity of *isticheit* or *quiddity* is not identical to *essentia* as such. Rather the operation of *intellectus*, which is also the Trinity as the operative God, constitutes the divine *esse*. *Isticheit* is the ground out of which the Trinity works:¹

God must utterly become me, and I utterly God, so fully one that his 'he' and this 'I' become and are one 'is', and in this essence [*isticheit*] eternally work one work.

Thus the moment of *essentia* belongs to the manifestation of the *isticheit*, which is why the Ground can be called “an *isticheit* without *isticheit*”. Nonetheless, the nearly identical association of *isticheit* and *essentia* is what will enable the “infinite intellectual sphere” to be wholly present in each particular essence.

The principle of the common being that is the *perfectio* of all creatures, then, is to be found God's self-relation as Trinity, constituted by *intellectus* proceeding from the divine quiddity or *isticheit* which has the conceptual role of the *Non Aliud*. That *isticheit* does not appear outside those relations, nor is it reducible to any of them. It founds the divine relations whereby the divine quiddity achieves its plenitude – to use Nicholas of Cusa's term it is the coincidence of the absolute *maximum* and *minimum* – but transcends those relations precisely because it passes through them all. The unity of God's 'he' and and this 'I' (not “my ‘I’,” for those two pronouns are inherently opposed to each other for Eckhart) is not, moreover, a One beyond Being in the strict sense. After all, one of the meanings of “I,” Eckhart explains, is “the bare purity of the divine being, which is bare of all mixed being” - the *puritas essendi* or *medulla* (marrow) which “one” indicates but not despite being.² That “I,” Ground or *isticheit* is, therefore, the principle of the common, insofar as it is the foundation or “reason” (*sache*) for God's being God in relation to creatures: “That God is ‘God,’ I am the reason; if I were not, God would not be God”.³

¹ *Predigt* 83 (DW III, 447,5; trans. *Essential Eckhart*, 208, modified).

² *Predigt* 77 (DW III, 341,2-3): 'Ze dem vierden mâle meinet ez die blôzen lûterkeit götliches wesen, daz blôz âne allez mitewesen ist.'

³ *Predigt* 52 (DW II, 504,2): 'Daz got 'got' ist, des bin ich ein sache; enwaere ich niht, sô enwaere got niht 'got!'.

Chapter Four: *Isticheit*, Providence and *Iustitia*

Because 'that which is' [quod quid est] is the fount and cause of all the properties of the thing, consequently it communicates [communicat] all things. Therefore the Father is shown when God is manifest through essence.¹

All things hope for the good, as the Philosopher says in Ethics I, but the Good consists and is reduced to the One, as Boethius shows in the Consolation.²

Through the equivalence of the terms *quidditas*, *istischeit*, and the *unum indistinctum* or *non-aliud*, we found the source of the common or “uniform” relation that God has to creatures, which they have under the mode of not having – or, in other words, as they have in common.³ The Indistinct One is not confined to any supposit in the Trinity, it passes through them all and establishes each in their non-otherness from themselves and in relation to one another. That One is the cause of the common or, better, the principle within the common life of the Trinity.

I have noted the distance separating Eckhart from Avicenna on the relation of *quidditas* and *anitas* in God, and have argued that the priority given to the divine essence in its simplicity over the self-sufficient existence that 'boils over' is the key to situating the priority of *intelligere* over *esse* in the whole of Eckhart's thought. By asserting the priority of quiddity over existence, Eckhart intends to show how there can be a manifestation of a First principle that would otherwise be entirely self-contained and hidden. Taking John 1.18, *deum nemo vidit unquam; unigenitus, qui est in sinu patris, ipse enarravit*, “above its literal and historical” sense, we find an account of metaphysical first principles. Any *causa essentialis* – which, he indicates, can pertain to “everything superior and everything divine, insofar as it is such,” and therefore can appear among causes below God *in quantum huiusmodi* – every such cause is “unknown, latent and hidden”.⁴ The Father, prior to becoming a generative cause, is not the Father at all, but

¹ *In Ioh.*, n.572 (LW III, 500,2-4): 'sed quia quod quid est fons est et causa omnium proprietatum rei, consequenter communicat omnia. Pater ergo ostenditur, quando per essentiam deus manifestatur.' *In Gen.* II, n.80 (LW I, 542,6-7): 'quia accipit [intellectus] ex sui natura rationem rerum, quod quid est sive quidditatem nudam.'

² *In Ioh.*, n.550 (LW III, 480,11-12): 'bonum optant omnia, philosophus I Ethicorum; sed bonum consistit et reducitur ad unum, ut ostendit Boethius in De consolatione.'

³ See, esp., *In Ioh.*, n.103 (LW III, 88,12-89,5) and *Sermo VI.1*, n.53 (LW IV, 51,7-52,6).

⁴ *In Ioh.*, n.195 (LW III, 163,7-10): 'notandum primo quod in his verbis docemur, praeter sensum

simply the divine essence as potency, as “latent” quiddity. The cause must remain totally hidden “from everything that is different [*aliud*] in nature” and “foreign [*alienum*]”, since “nothing is known through [what is] different or alien from itself, just as it neither is [what it is] through another”.¹ An essential cause is that which, through itself, causes a different, lower nature which it precontains in itself in a more exalted manner.

For Eckhart, this turns into the univocity of the divine essence in all things, providing the terms of his agreement with Averroes that only the essence, quiddity, *ratio* or *quod quid est* “of things” (*quiditatem rerum*) is the proper object of metaphysics.² He provides a Trinitarian, univocal reading of the *causa essentialis*: “everything superior, [and] everything divine, as such, is known to itself alone and the begotten from itself, which is not different nor alien from itself”, so that the essence “begets some one thing other to itself, but not different from itself”.³ The knower must be of the same “nature” as what it knows and the nature requires such a knower in order to be manifest at all. The coincidence of providence and essentialist metaphysics emerges.

This logic is consistent with the Dominican tradition of Trinitarian theology generally, and with the importance of the *modus intellectus* of the *Verbum* that Wéber has found in Aquinas. The cause is not a cause unless it has its *imago* or offspring, the Father always has a *Verbum*. Now, additionally, an essential cause depends on its image so that it might become known to itself. As Burkhard Mojsisch has realized, in univocal relations within a single genus, an agent receives in acting, and a patient acts in receiving. For this reason Eckhart had preached the pure image, the pure mind of God to be what the masters call “receptive”.⁴ The Word or *imago* is therefore not a derivative replica of its exemplar; the Father is never without a Son in the operative image that is the Trinity. According to Henry of Ghent, for whom an intuition of being had preceded its explication, the *verbum* had been the declaration of an inchoate content in the memory,

litteralem et historicum, quod omnis causa essentialis, omne superius et omne divinum, in quantum huiusmodi, est incognitum, latens et absconditum'.

¹ *In Ioh.*, n.195 (LW III, 163,11-14): 'absconditum, inquam, omni illi quod est aliud in natura ab ipso supremo et ipsi alienum, Prov. 5: 'non sint alieni participes tui'. Nihil enim cognoscitur per aliud sive alienum a se, sicut nec est per aliud'.

² *In Gen.*, n.3 (LW I, 187,5-9): 'commentator VII Metaphysicae dicit quod quiditas rei sensibilis semper fuit desiderata sciri ab antiquis, eo quod ipsa scita sciretur causa primum omnium. Vocat autem commentator primam causam non ipsum deum, ut plerique errantes putant, sed ipsam rerum quiditatem, quae ratio rerum est, quam diffinitio indicat, causam primam vocat.'

³ *In Ioh.*, n.195 (LW III, 163,14-164,2) '[...]. Generat enim unumquodque alterum se, non aliud a se'.

⁴ *Predigt 67* (DW III, 133,3-4; trans. Walshe, 358).

expressing that same content after a process of clarification or “investigation” that begets a perfect manifestation; but for Eckhart, there is simply no content apart from the relation to the image. That One as revealed and related to itself in the Son, and as that Son, remains, however, a subordinate power to the Indistinct One that passes through and comprehends both moments. The Indistinct One is that which differentiates itself from all things distinct and, moreover, as Mojsisch explained, distinguishes itself from itself, in turn, as what differentiates itself from all distinction. This One identical to that divine *quidditas* or *istischeit* out of which the human by grace works with God. It is *esse*, in relation to creatures, only because God's *quidditas* is intellection: “the principle always is pure intellect, in which is no different being than intellection, having nothing in common with nothing”.¹

This Chapter begins by positing Eckhart's forceful separation of the ideal and concrete or, as he says citing Thomas Aquinas, between “nature and supposit” among creatures.² What the first three verses of Genesis indicate, for Eckhart, is the dual order of being obtaining between generation in the Word (*deus dixit*) and creation as such; to the first, he attributes the transcendental “true,” insofar as it is the pure, unmixed self-identical essence of the thing as it exists in the soul or in the Word itself, while the second receives the lower determination of “good,” where the same thing is mingled with externality.³ The difference between the ‘true’ and ‘good’ corresponds to two distinct orders of being (*duplex esse*).⁴

The Chapter then unfolds the basis for their unity, and follows the precedent set by Eckhart here, as it is given in the following verse: “‘And God saw the light [Gen. 1.4],’ from which it is clear that the light and all that is created externally in nature has a true being, before becoming something made”.⁵ Indeed, that is where it's *true* being resides. These really exist in the truth of the Word “which is good” and prior to its external

¹ *In Ioh.*, n.38 (LW III, 32,11-12): 'ipsum principium semper est intellectus purus, in quo non sit aliud esse quam intelligere, nihilo nihil habens commune.' This is why Eckhart ventured beyond Aquinas, for the divine quiddity is unthinkable without thinking: “I say that they [i.e. *intelligere* and *esse*] are the same thing, and perhaps even the same in the thing and in reason [*forsan re et ratione*]”. *Quaetio parisiensis* I, n.1 (LW V, 37,4). Cf. Aquinas, *ST* Ia.26.2: 'in deo autem non est aliud esse et intelligere secundum rem, sed tantum intelligentiae rationem.'

² *In Gen.* II, n.53 (LW I, 521,1-9).

³ *In Gen.* II, n.54 (LW I, 522,3-523,2), citing the *Liber de causis*, prop.8 (ed. Bardenhewer, 172,13-16) on the subordination of the good (nature) to intellect.

⁴ *In Gen.*, n.25 (LW I, 204,8); cf. *Proc. Col.* II, n.61 (LW V, 331,9).

⁵ *In Gen.* II, n.55 (LW I, 523,5-9).

diversity as *ens hoc aut hoc*.¹ Eckhart's interpretation of Genesis 1.4, as Casteigt argues, finds the unity of the *duplex esse* in the reciprocal activity of efficient and final causes "by the production of the Word and from the Word".² I shall, once again, rely on a comparison with Dietrich to show how Eckhart modifies his two-fold conception of Providence toward a single end for the blessed, or just soul: "the humble man does not need to entreat, but he can indeed command, for the heights of the divinity cannot look down except into the depths of humility", so, in a way, the "humble man has as much power over God as he has over himself".³

4.1: The Dual Aspects of Ratio: Form and Idea

The "idea" as distinct from the form is the object of metaphysics: "every thing taken in respect to its essence [*quod quid est*] has no efficient or final cause".⁴ What John means by "the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it" (*lux in tenebris lucet et tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt*), is that "nothing shines in created things, nothing is known, nothing makes one to know, beyond the quiddity, definition or idea". For that essence is "definition which is the middle term of a demonstration, or rather is the total demonstration which makes one know".⁵

What the definition indicates, however, must not be identified with the abstract universal derived from the thing (*post rem*). *Ratio* has a twofold meaning for Eckhart.⁶

The form [*ratio*] is received from things or abstracted through intellection, and this is posterior to the things from which it is abstracted; [or] it is prior to the things, the cause of things and their idea

¹ *In Gen.* II, n.55 (LW I, 523,9-524,3).

² J. Casteigt, *Connaissance et vérité chez Maître Eckhart*, p.338-339.

³ *Predigt 15* (DW I, 247,6-248,5; trans. *Essential Eckhart*, 190). It is unclear whether the antecedent of the final two pronouns is God or the *homo humilis*.

⁴ *In Sap.*, n.20 (LW II, 340,12-341,1): 'res omnis quantum ad sui quod quid est non habet causam efficientem nec finalem'. Avicenna, *Liber de philosophia prima* V, c.1 is cited shortly thereafter (341,6-9).

⁵ *In Ioh.*, n.11 (LW III, 11,8-13): 'Diffinitio autem est medium demonstrationis, aut potius est tota demonstratio faciens scire. Constat ergo quod in rebus creatis nihil lucet praeter solam rerum ipsarum rationem. [...] in rebus creatis nihil lucet, nihil cognoscitur, nihil facit scire praeter rerum ipsarum quidditatem, diffinitionem sive rationem'.

⁶ *In Ioh.*, n.29 (LW III, 22,13-23,2): 'ratio dupliciter accipitur: est enim ratio a rebus accepta sive abstracta per intellectum, et haec est rebus posterior a quibus abstrahitur; est et ratio rebus prior, causa rerum et ratio, quam diffinitio indicat et intellectus accipit in ipsis principiis intrinsicis. Et haec est ratio, de qua nunc est sermo.' Cf. *In Exod.*, n.265 (LW II, 213,12-14;214,2-3).

[*ratio*], which the definition indicates and [which] intellect receives in its intrinsic principles. And this is the *ratio* of which I am now speaking.

The intrinsic principles of an idea (*ratio*) which the definition indicates are parts of that definition, such as 'rational' and 'animal' in the definition of human. Aristotle had called these the “parts of the form” which are *ante totum*:¹

Wherefore the Commentator in Book VII of the *Metaphysics* says that the question concerning the sought-after quiddity of things was always perceived by men of old, that by knowing the quiddity itself the cause of everything would be known, that is to say everything which is in the thing itself. The principles of the substance, which the parts of the definition indicate, are the principles of the properties and dispositions of the subject.

Finally, these intrinsic principles are the parts or elements of the *ratio ante rem* which for Eckhart “precontains more eminently, and virtually, what its effect has formally,” for “the idea is in intellect, is formed by intellect [*intelligendo formatur*] and is nothing other than intellect”.²

Thus the *ratio* for Eckhart, according to what I shall call its ideal meaning, as opposed to its formal one, stands before its instantiation as its cause. It is also identical to the Word in that it is “with God in the principle” (*apud deum in principio*):

[The idea is] with him, because [God] is always thinking in actuality, and by thinking begets an idea; and this idea, which begets its own thinking, is God himself: *God was the Word*, and *this was in the principle with God*, because he has always thought, and has always begotten the Son.

The opposition in Chapter Two had been between God as being and as goodness, between the immediacy of the divine being to all things in common and their inherent

¹ *In Ioh.*, n.32 (LW III, 26,4-7): 'Unde commentator VII Metaphysicae dicit quod quaestio de rerum quidditate desiderata fuit semper sciri ab antiquis, eo quod scita quidditate ipsa scitur causa omnium, omnium scilicet quae sunt in re ipsa. Principia enim substantiae, quae partes diffinitionis indicat, ipsa sunt omnium principia proprietatum et passionum subiecti.'

² *In Ioh.*, n.38 (LW III, 32,16-33,3): 'Ratio enim non solum habet, sed praehabet et eminentius habet, quia virtute, quod effectus habet formaliter. Iterum et ratio in intellectu est, intelligendo formatur, nihil praeter intelligere est.'

self-alienation from that community in their own formal particularity. Those forms were, in comparison to the “form of forms,” were given the status of accidents. Then, the tension had surfaced between vertical omnipresence of the Word as the immediacy of being to intellect, univocally traversing every order of analogical causes. Those analogues appeared as various instances of inequality, each in various degrees falling short of the self-identity of the *ratio verum*, which it receives only in thought. The same tension occurs now in the dual nature of the *ratio*. For it is “one thing to speak of the *rationes* of things and their cognition, and another to speak of those things externally in nature,” in relation to Chapter Three, “just as it is one thing to speak about substance and another of an accident,” in relation to Chapter Two.¹ Now we have the apparent incommensurability between the *ratio veri*, which stands for equality and the divine self-relation when that *ratio* is God's own essence, and the *ratio boni*; for just as “cognitive being proceeds first [in creation], and from it external being descends into natural things”, so “truth descends immediately from the one, while 'good' [descends] from the one by the mediation of truth”.² Thus, “the *ratio veri* is prior and simpler than the *ratio boni*, nay is itself the *ratio boni* in intellect, not in things nor is it good, but is moreover *ratio*, which is Reason, word, principle and cause of the good”.³

As Jan Aertsen observes, “the phrase *ratio* is ambiguous in his [Eckhart's] considerations,” since it “sometimes does not signify the intelligible concept of a thing in the human intellect but the exemplary idea in the divine mind”.⁴ That ambiguity is, I argue, the key to the unity in the Word of the dialectic of the indistinct One.

On these two sides of any given *ratio* stand the opposed standpoints of being, unity, equality and truth on the one hand, and goodness, on the other. Nowhere is this clearer than the passages in the *Expositio libri Exodi*, where Eckhart applies the dialectic of the indistinct and distinct to the relation of idea and form: “nothing is as equally

¹ *In Ioh.*, n.514 (LW III, 445,12-14).

² *In Ioh.*, n.518 (LW III, 447,13-448,2): '[...] quam in creatis, ubi primo procedit ens cognitivum et ab ipso descendit ens extra in rebus naturalibus, utpote sub illo et posterius illo. Sic enim, ut dictum est, verum descendit immediate ab uno, bonum autem ab uno mediante vero'.

³ *In Ioh.*, n.518 (LW III, 448,7-9): 'Patet et hoc eo quod ratio veri prior est et simplicior quam ratio boni, quin immo et ipsa ratio boni in intellectu est, non in rebus nec ipsa est bona, sed potius est ratio, logos scilicet, verbum, principium scilicet et causa boni'.

⁴ J. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, p.355; cf. V. Lossky, *Théologie négative*, p.224: “Il faut reconnaître cependant que la terminologie flottante d'Eckhart ne distingue pas suffisamment le premier mode [dans l'âme du sujet connaissant] d'avec l'*esse primum* des créatures ou les idées divines.”

similar and dissimilar as the *ratio* of a thing and the thing itself”.¹ Natural, external things, are incapable of receiving the perfection that belongs to their immutable idea, which is also their incapacity to receive their own essence:²

The notion [of] 'that which is' [*id quod est*] pertains to intellect and to truth. Moreover, truth is in intellect alone and not in external things. Therefore the perfections in external things are not true perfections.

For a *ratio* to be predicated of its formal subject, that subject must be in some way “similar” to the uncreated idea; but, on the other hand, “what is as dissimilar as the eternal uncreatable and the temporal created?”³ Given that the “*ratio* of similarity is not [itself] similar, but dissimilar” to what is corruptible and changeable, just as the “*ratio* of a circle is not a circle nor circular”, Eckhart must establish the locus of their mediation. He contends that these two opposed orders of idea and form could never be similar “unless in it [the *res*] according to its innermost [parts] were the *ratio* of similarity”. Therefore in the *intima* “the similar and dissimilar are equally joined together”.⁴

This is but the third of four arguments, each concluding with the coincidence of the similar and dissimilar, and the indistinct and distinct. Each argument begins by pointing to the absolute dissimilarity of Creator and creature, then considers their similarity, and finally the equal union of both sides.⁵ The second argument gives a fuller account of the *intima sui*. Eckhart begins by noting absolute dissimilarity between the creature as finite and the Creator as infinite – a preliminary moment of the 'bad infinite'. In providing the basis for their similarity, Eckhart also provides the key: nothing “is so similar to anything as when 'what is' [*id quod*] is assimilated to an other [*alteri*] in its innermost [parts] and according to its innermost [parts]”. These innermost parts, he tells us, are the transcendental properties of “existence, truth and goodness, and the like”.⁶

¹ *In Exod.*, n.120 (LW II, 113,9-10): 'Nihil autem tam simile pariter et dissimile sicut ratio rei et res ipsa'.

² *In Exod.*, n.176 (LW II, 152,1-5): 'ratio id quod est ad intellectum pertinet et ad veritatem. Veritas enim in solo intellectu est, non extra. Igitur perfectiones in rebus extra non verae perfectiones sunt. Ipsas igitur attribuere deo est ipsum apprehendere imperfectum et ipsum non esse intellectum se toto purum, sed esse rem extra, saltem aliquo sui, sicut in intellectibus creatis.'

³ *In Exod.*, n.120 (LW II, 113,10-13).

⁴ *In Exod.*, n.120 (LW II, 113,15-114,1): 'Nec tamen esset simile quippiam, nisi in ipso secundum intima sui esset ratio similis. Patet ergo quod pariter et coniunctim similis et dissimilis.'

⁵ *In Exod.*, n.112 (LW II, 110,3-6).

⁶ *In Exod.*, n.115 (LW II, 111,13-14): 'quid tam simile cuiquam, sicut est id quod assimilatur alteri in

On the basis of this similarity, the equal conjunction of similar and dissimilar is then articulated around the perpendicular axes of the univocal and analogical relations. For, on the one hand, Eckhart characterizes the creature's similarity through its absolute relation to its divine exemplar, stating that nothing so purely related to its object can be different than that object. Therefore the creature, in being, truth, and goodness, is an absolute reference to the divine being, truth and goodness. The moment of dissimilarity, on the other hand, is expressed by the distinct being (*hoc ens*) which belongs to the creature *proprie*, corresponding to predication *de tertio adiacens*. Eckhart's resolution is the familiar logic of God's distinction by indistinction, so that “the more dissimilar” he is from all finitude, “the more similar he becomes”.¹ Just as God is not the common through the agglomeration of the more from the less, likewise “inasmuch as something is like God in many ways or in many things, that much more would it be dissimilar to God”.² The transcendentals have now emerged as the locus for the divine self-relation in and through creatures.

With the dialectic of the idea and form, the *intimis* occupies the place where the indistinct *isticheit* mediates itself to itself in its various “modes”. For the perfections of particular forms, their truth, unity and so on, are within them as something they have by not having.³ By now it should be clear that this self-relation, understood as transcending the Persons precisely by enabling their opposed relations, is what Eckhart renders in the vernacular as *isticheit*. Before looking back on the texts assembled above, consider what is perhaps the most disclosive use of the term Eckhart's sermons: here, above all, its integral relation to truth is clearly brought out:⁴

Where the text says, “I,” this means first of all that God is self-identity [*isticheit*], that God alone *is*; for all things *are* in God and from Him, since outside him and without him nothing is in truth: all creatures are a

intimis et secundum intima sua? Haec autem sunt esse, verum, bonum, et huiusmodi.'

¹ *In Exod .*, n.117 (LW II, 112,12).

² *In Exod .*, n.119 (LW II, 113,4-6): 'Quanto igitur in pluribus vel secundum plura quidquam deo similatur, tanto plus et secundum plura fit deo dissimile.'

³ *In Ioh.*, n.397 (LW III, 338,11-12).

⁴ *Predigt 77* (DW III, 339,1-6; trans. Walshe, 263, modified): 'Daz diu geschrift saget ,ich', meinet des êrsten gotes isticheit, daz got aleine ist; wan alliu dinc sint in gote und von im, wan ûzwendig im und âne in enist niht in der wârheit: wan alle créatûren sint ein snoede dinc und ein blôz niht gegen gote. Dar umbe: waz sie sint in der wârheit, daz sint sie in gote, und dar umbe ist got aleine in der wârheit. Und alsô meinet daz wort ,ich' die isticheit götlicher wârheit, wan ez ist ein bewisunge eines ,istes' Darumbe bewiset ez, daz er aleine ist.'

worthless thing, and a mere nothing compared to God. Therefore, what they are in truth, they are in God, and therefore is God alone in truth. And also the word “I” means the self-identity of divine truth [*die isticheit götlicher wârheit*], for it is the testimony [*bewîsunge*] of one 'existing'. It thus testifies [*bewîset*] that He alone is.

In that identity of divine truth one has both stages of the indistinct-distinct dialectic; Eckhart concludes, “Again, it [the word “I”] means that God is unseparated from all things, for God is in all things and is more inwardly in them than they are in themselves”.

The *intimis* is also found, then, to have a particular relation to the transcendental determination of truth (*wârheit*). *Predigt 77*, as well as sermons 66 and 67, discussed earlier, belong to Eckhart's years as provincial in Erfurt between his first and second regencies as Master of Theology in Paris – between 1303 and 1311. Both sermons, and especially *Predigt 77*, testify to the Meister's effort to translate and preach his Latin thought in the vernacular. His exposition of the word “I”, arising from the innocent observation that Luke omits the pronoun when he echoes the prophet, *Ecce (ego) mitto angelum*, reflects the fundamental features of Eckhart's interpretation of the *Ego sum qui sum* in the Exodus commentary, compiled in Erfurt around 1305.¹ Most importantly, it reiterates the function of truth as pure equality, as reduplication, the conversion of pure intellect upon itself, which is nothing else than the monad begetting the monad, and reflecting upon itself with ardent desire. It confirms this with the name *isticheit*, the “I” as the indistinct *unum* which founds each person of the Trinity. It therefore continues the ascendancy of the determination of 'true' that was begun in Henry of Ghent and transformed by Eckhart in his disputations in Paris in the years preceding his period in Erfurt: relation is a real category because, like truth, it derives its entire existence from the soul.

Looking back to the last of the four arguments in the Exodus commentary, Eckhart provides an important clarification of the ontological status of the *ratio* of similarity that is present in the *intima*, which equally unites the similarity and dissimilarity of the terms. A problem from the third argument resurfaces here: the idea of a thing, which the definition indicates once it is constituted out of the “intrinsic principles” received by intellect, does not denominate the form: “the *ratio* is not truly

¹ A. Beccarisi, “*Isticheit* nach Meister Eckhart,” p.318.

[*vere*] affirmatively predicated of the thing, as 'rational animal' [is predicated] of man, unless it is similar to the form, or moreover the same, as was said above”.¹ Eckhart refers the reader back to *In Exod.*, n.73, concluding the account of the *ratio* and *esse* of relations, where he states that “the affirmative truth of a proposition universally consists in the identity of the terms”, which he understands in the manner of Augustine: “Truth is that which is [*verum est id quod est*]” or “the truth of affirmation consists in the being that is [*in esse quod est*]”.² Truth for Eckhart pertains primarily to the conceptions of beings, and not the things themselves, and therefore it is true that “man is an animal, even if no man exists”.³ His frequent citation of Matthew 5.37, *sit autem sermo vester: est, est; non, non*, indicates that at the heart of his account is the reflexive identity of Exodus 3.14. The identity of truth must come from the univocal relation outlined there: *quodlibet in quodlibet*.

Since it is impossible that the unchangeable idea and the concrete substance should ever be identical, the reflexive identity of truth must be sought on a different basis. Against this absolute difference, he introduces the moment of similarity using a principle of causation: “everything that would be, would be from something similar”.⁴ For an idea to be predicable of a thing or a form – that is, for the definition to agree with that which it is supposed to define – Eckhart appeals to the causal pre-containment of the form, by which a name is given, within the idea. While a form is not in God under the aspect of form (*formaliter*), it is present as in its cause.

He provides three examples. Heat is found in fire *formaliter*, where it both gives the name 'fire' and allows it to be called hot. In its cause, the sun, it is present only “spiritually and virtually”, where it neither has the existence nor name of heat.⁵ So the similitude, heat, is present in both the sun and in fire, but in different aspects. The virtual, productive non-being of “heat” sun, in the first example, is matched by the receptive potentiality of the eye, in the second; is the colour that denominates the surface and exists in it formally, is not denominates of the eye that perceives it, just as heat is not predicated

¹ *In Exod.*, n.120 (LW II, 113,10-11).

² *In Exod.*, n.73 (LW II, 75,16-17;76,3;76,12), citing Augustine, *Soliloquies* II.5.8.

³ *In Sap.*, n.20 (LW II, 341,10-342,2); *In Exod.*, n.55 (LW II, 60,6-12).

⁴ *In Exod.*, n.122 (LW II, 115,4): 'Omne enim, quod fit, fit a simili.' This dictum, adapted from Aristotle's natural philosophy (*De gen. et corr.* I, c.7, 324a9-11), is found throughout Eckhart's work. Cf. *In Ioh.*, n.30 (LW III, 23,5-7); *ibid.*, n.67 (LW III, 55,9)

⁵ *In Exod.*, n.123 (LW II, 115,9-13).

of the sun which causes it. An essential content must be present in the thing, the *species* and the sense-organ, “under a different mode of being”. The moment of dissimilarity centres on the various *modi essendi* while the formal colour and the non-existent “intention or similitude” share a unity.¹ Finally, the Father and the Son are the same under the aspect of essence, but different in respect to their personal properties. In each example, it is the same essence that appears “under different aspects here and there” (*sub alia ratione*).²

4.2: Essence as *Intentio* and the Divine Ideas

In finding a single essential content persisting through these various modes of being – idea, thing, and form – Eckhart, like the majority of philosophers in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-centuries, relies on Avicenna, who used the comparison with artifice to describe the three possible states of that content, which later became known conventionally as the “three states of the universal”.³ Eckhart's use of the term *intentio*, the common translation of the Persian doctor's *ma'nâ*, is one indication of his use of Avicenna. *Intentio* or *ma'nâ* generally indicates the reality of what is known considered strictly as known. It is not a universal; its universality or singularity are both existential accidents in relation to its intrinsic aptitude to exist. Universality can befall a *ma'nâ* in three ways: insofar as it is actually predicated of a multitude (“man”); insofar as it could be predicated of a multitude (“heptagonal house”) - it is still a universal even if such houses are not actually existing; or insofar as a representation allows that it could be predicated of a multitude, even if an external demonstration or cause determines otherwise (“Sun” or “Earth”).⁴ Avicenna's doctrine of the 'indifference of the essence', as it was called, does not therefore posit that there are essences that are not instantiated. A contrast can be made with Alexander of Aphrodisias, who argued that universality is accidental to an essence because every essence in order to exist must be first and foremost particular.⁵ Avicenna is arguing that an essence, even in respect to particularity, always has existence as its first concomitant and therefore that there is no essence, no

¹ *In Exod.*, nn.124-125 (LW II, 116,3-117,5).

² *In Exod.*, n.126 (LW II, 117,10).

³ Avicenna latinus, *Logica*, pars 3 (ed. Veneta 1508, fol.12va).

⁴ Avicenna latinus, *Liber de philosophia prima* V, c.1 (ed. Van Reit, 227-228).

⁵ Cf. A. de Libera, *Métaphysique et noétique*, pp.250-251.

thing (*res*), that existence does not accompany.

Looking to Avicenna, and also “Alghazel and Alfarabi,” Albert had argued that the validity of a true affirmation without the concrete subject, *homo est animal, nullo homine existente*, holds insofar as what is attributed to an essence is comprehended within the subject.¹ Meister Eckhart would rephrase this to say that the truth of such an affirmation resides in the “intrinsic principles” of a definition being comprehended within the essence. Intellect there relates to a *ratio* or *intentio* as non-existent in comparison to its existence *formaliter*: “all things are in God, as intellectually in the first cause and in the mind of the artificer”.²

The notion of a kind of existence proper to an essence emerges through many discussions in the thirteenth-century; Siger of Brabant, commenting on Albert's position on *homo est animal*, calls this the “aptitude of an essence” prior to its material and individuated being. As taken up by subsequent philosophers, the *esse essentiae* was then used to describe the being of essence as it is known apart from its matter, such as that known by a mathematician, for example; it is the universal as it exists in the soul and beyond its relation to the multitude. But this is not the position of either Avicenna or Albert. The proper being of an essence, its intrinsic aptitude, as de Libera notes, is its capacity to be “common” or “communicable”, apart from its existence in a multitude of particulars or in its existence as a universal *in anima*: for Avicenna, that which exists in the singulars is the nature “insofar as it is apt to give way to the intellection of a universal form”.³ It is the same nature or essence that is “common”, rather than “universal,” strictly speaking, in these three states of existence.

The status of the *esse essentiae*, as de Libera characterizes it for Albert and Avicenna, is crucial for Eckhart: “the existence proper to the essence is the same being of the divine intellect that produced it,” for “the notion of aptitude cannot be separated from that of communicability”.⁴

The exemplary ideas in their causal power are identical with God.⁵ The

¹ See *ibid.*, p.253-256, for what follows concerning Albert the Great and Avicenna.

² *In Sap.*, n.21 (LW II, 342,9-12).

³ A. de Libera, *Métaphysique et noétique*, pp.256-257.

⁴ A. de Libera, *Métaphysique et noétique*, pp.257 and 260, italics removed.

⁵ *In Ioh.*, n.31 (LW III, 25,1-5): 'Vel *apud* ipsum, quia semper actu intelligit, et intelligendo gignit rationem; et ipsa ratio, quam gignit ipsum intelligere suum, est ipse deus: *deus erat verbum, et hoc erat in principio apud deum, quid semper intellexit, semper filium genuit!*'

indifference of the essence, its intrinsic aptitude or *esse essentiae* is, for Albert, Avicenna and, one could add, Meister Eckhart, primarily not thought “in the categories of caused being, but only in those of causal being”.¹ The causal priority of the idea as such a communicable nature depends on its identity with the divine intellect. For Eckhart, as for Albert,² such a theory of the divine ideas is grounded in the Commentator's reading of Aristotle. A look back to the paragraph following the distinction at n.29 of *In Iohannem* between the *ratio* as idea, known in its “intrinsic principles” and “prior” to the thing, and the *ratio* as abstract form which is “posterior,” and known in “abstraction,” indicates the Averroist influence.³

The principle by which (*principium quo*) an agent produces another that is “similar to itself” is like the “art” in the mind of an artificer. In order for a house-builder to build, he must first have a “form in his mind” which is the “principle by which” he assimilates matter to be like the idea. That form is the “word by which [*verbum quo*] he speaks and manifests himself and everything that is of him, insofar as he is a house-builder”. The qualification of the *inquantum* is crucial. As Aristotle explains, Polycleto is the cause of the statue only “accidentally”; he is the cause of the statue *per se* “insofar as he is a sculptor, possessing the art of sculpting”.⁴ It is “universally” the case that “an effect is in its effective principle according to it and [according to] that by which it formally and through itself [*per se*] is efficient and cause of the effect”.⁵ Therefore the product can be predicated of the principle only incidentally, but of the art directly. Therefore the product that exists *formaliter* is not identical *formaliter* to the art as it exists in the mind. In addressing Aristotle's criticism of the Idea of the Good in *Nic. Eth.* I.6, Albert made the same point: an exemplary form (*forma exemplaris*) “is not common through predication,” as if it were a genus, “but through procession”.⁶ One is a “living conception” - “in him was life” (John 1.3) is the subject of nn.61-67 – and the other is an external thing existing in matter; but the house existing in matter is not “different” (*aliud*)

¹ A. de Libera, *Métaphysique et noétique*, p.260.

² *Ibid.*, pp.239-244.

³ The identity of the idea as both “prior and posterior to the things” is established at *In Sap.*, n.22 (LW II, 343,1-3): ‘rerum creaturarum rationes non sunt creatae, sed nec creabiles ut sic. Sunt enim ante rem et post rem, causa tamen originalis ipsarum rerum.’

⁴ *In Ioh.*, n.66 (LW III, 54,9-11). See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* V, c.2, 1013b24-1014a6.

⁵ *In Ioh.*, n.66 (LW III, 54,6-8): ‘universaliter effectus est in suo principio effectivo secundum id et id quo formaliter et per se ipsum efficiens est causa effectus.’

⁶ Albertus Magnus, *S. Diony. De div. nom.* II, n.83 (ed. Coloniensis XXXVII/1, 97,20-33).

than that in the mind, for it is “the same itself [*idem id ipsum*] under different distinguishing properties”.¹

If, however, the art of building possessed by a subject were identical to the subject itself, then its product would express and manifest the entire substance of the artisan.² This would be an instance of univocal predication, *quodlibet in quodlibet*. For, when fire generates another fire, “the principle, which is the generative fire has the form of the generated fire”. But nature, he then notes, cannot distinguish between the thing and the idea (*non distinguit inter rem et rationem*).³ Therefore the essence which causes this activity, that which is the basis of the communicability exhibited among natures, that which alone shines in the darkness, is not received adequately; the “intrinsic principles” in the divine Idea are *ante rem* as the cause of nature's activity, but are therefore not predicable of it. For the abstract universal taken from several instances of fire, and which gives it its name, cannot be said to cause those instances. Eckhart writes that, because of this, “in intellect not only is its effect in itself a word, but is a word and a *ratio*, either of which signify *Logos*, as was said above [in n.29]”.⁴

Therefore both God and his Ideas are “essential causes”. In accordance with Eckhart's modification of Dietrich's *analogous*-essential causation to *univocal*-essential causation, I will now show how Eckhart adapts Dietrich's theory of the “quiddifying” activity of the passive intellect. Ultimately, this reflects the providential role of the “humble” or “detached” soul, which finds the divine quiddity equally present in all things.

4.2.1: Quidditative Knowledge of God

That constitutive, univocal reception of the divine ideas in Eckhart depends on the anti-Thomism of Dietrich. Dietrich's proximate opponent is John Picardi of Lichtenberg, who ridiculed Henry of Ghent's interpretation of the *abditum mentis* as a hidden and perpetual activity of God in the soul, since such a notion was in complete violation of basic Thomistic principles.⁵ John was reprimanded by Dietrich who develops a Neoplatonic

¹ *In Ioh.*, n.57 (LW III, 48,6-8).

² *In Ioh.*, n.30 (LW III, 23,15-24,3); *ibid.*, n.66 (LW III, 55,1-2).

³ *In Ioh.*, n.31 (LW III, 24,11).

⁴ *In Ioh.*, n.31 (LW III, 24,12-14).

⁵ Iohannes Picardi de Lichtenberg, *Quaestio utrum imago trinitatis sit in anima vel secundum actus vel*

modification of Henry's theory.¹

John Picardi's argument is as follows: since human cognition is thoroughly sense-bound in this life, the human can be said only to be made "according to the image of God" (*ad imaginem dei*) insofar as it is potentially cognisant or "capable of God".² That potential cannot be fulfilled in this life. Picardi therefore distinguishes between the perfect *imago*, the Only-Begotten Son, and humanity in general. The grace which brings that image to its perfection, as for Aquinas, cannot be another substance in addition to the soul, nor can the soul itself be identical to its operation; grace, therefore, is an accident created by God in the soul.³ Dietrich, as I explained in Chapter Two, rallied against this Thomistic principle, by asserting the identity of substance and operation in every essential intellect, which includes the human, which obtains through the unique relation obtaining between human and divine agent intellects. The response of Meister Eckhart and Dietrich is to accept, with Henry, the Augustinian doctrine of uncreated light always present within *abditum mentis*,⁴ but deny that its hidden acts pertain to the human as made "*ad imaginem dei*".⁵ Rather, the *abditum mentis* is identical to the Ground of the soul, so that the soul is naturally capable of elevating itself beyond the analogical difference of supernatural and natural knowing to the self-knowledge of the Son of God.⁶

secundum potentiam, edited in the appendix to B. Mojsisch, *Meister Eckhart. Analogie, Univocität, Einheit* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1983), III.7, 153,101-155,159. Mojsisch's edition of Picardi's *quaestio* is available only in the German original.

¹ A. Beccarisi, "Johannes Picardi von Lichtenberg," p.219, for texts from John and Dietrich. Picardi's critique of Henry, that a "sane and natural intellect" must be completely aware of its cognitive acts (ed. Mojsisch, 157,248-250), might also apply to recent discussions of post-modern Augustinian readings of Aquinas. Cf. J. Milbank and C. Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, Radical Orthodoxy (London-New York: Routledge, 2001), pp.22-24; p. 51; pp.117-118, n.8; p.126, n.103. Such an infusion of intellectual intuition into natural cognition is shown to be an erroneous reading of Thomas in W.J. Hankey, "*Participatio divini luminis*, Aquinas' Doctrine of the Agent Intellect: Our Capacity for Contemplation," *Dionysius* 22 (2004), pp.149-178. As Emery notes, Henry of Ghent sought to avoid the mediation of Dionysian hierarchy altogether in his mystical theology; for him, "the only true authority is Augustine" ("The Image of God Deep in the Mind," p.111).

² Iohannes Picardi de Lichtenberg, *Quaestio utrum imago trinitatis*, IV.3 (ed. Mojsisch, 159,20-23).

³ K. Flasch, *Maître Eckhart*, p.87, citing Aquinas, *ST*, Ia-IIae.110.2, ad.2.

⁴ For Eckhart's only reference to the constant activity of the *abditum mentis* is meant to illustrate the unending justice exercised by the just man. *In Ecc.*, n.27 (LW II, 255,5-6): 'Augustinus docet quod in abdito mentis potentiae animae semper sunt in actibus suis.'

⁵ B. Mojsisch, *Analogy, Univocity, Unity*, p.91.

⁶ Dietrich, *De visione beatifica* 1.1.1.6 (ed. Mojsisch, 16): 'Supposita igitur veritate divinae scripturae, quae claret ex auctoritate supra inducta et sano intellectu eius, qui dicit hominem factum ad imaginem Dei, necesse est et aliquantulum patet ex iam dictis, quod id, quod secundum suam naturam formaliter est imago Dei in nobis, est substantia'; Meister Eckhart, *In Ioh.*, n.581 (LW III, 508,11-12): 'Septimo ait : *Pater in me manens* [John 14.10] ad denotandum quod deus ipse illabitur essentiae animae. Iterum etiam manet in abditis, intimis, et supremis ipsius animae.'

It is crucial for Dietrich and Eckhart that the identity of the *abditum mentis* with the Ground of the soul is something distinct from the essence of the soul as such, for it relates to the soul as “an intrinsic causal principle”.¹ The identity of *abditum mentis* or agent intellect and the Ground of the soul is the causal univocity of an interior exemplar which is relating to itself in and through the external knowing of its effect.²

Dietrich’s own position takes up from Albert the Great, who emphasizes the commensurative activity of the mind in its relation to the *res*. Following Averroes, Albert holds that the measuring operation of the mind, in both practical and theoretical knowing, results from its participation in the divine creative light, which he calls the “acquired intellect” (*intellectus adeptus*).³ The divine Ideas themselves are more directly involved in the ascent of human intellect to God, insofar as the gradual acquisition of all the possible intelligibles, during which the intellect is called the *intellecta speculativa*, is brought to the point where the universal agent intellect stands above it as “its essence itself and no longer extrinsic”, no longer an efficient but a formal cause.⁴ Decisively for Albert, the Latin Averroists and for Meister Eckhart, this produces the notion of the “assurance of the philosophers” (*fiducia philosophorum*): the possibility of a worldly felicity integral to philosophy as such.⁵ This “Averroès *farabisé*,” stands at the font of an alternative conception of philosophy to that of either Thomas or the Franciscans, which situates the Aristotelian doctrine of felicity in *Nic. Ethics* X.7-9, 1177a12-1179a32 in a Neoplatonic framework, setting our conjunction with the separate agent intellect as the goal of earthly life.⁶

Albert's conception of rectitude or truth, Wéber shows, is “the essence of the thing just as creative thought knows and causes it”.⁷ The co-operation of divine and human noetic places the intellectual ascent of the human through the *saeculum intellectuale* is

¹ Dietrich, *De intellectu et intelligibili* II.31.1. (ed. Mojsisch, 169; trans. Führer, 81).

² A. de Libera, *La mystique rhénane*, p.214, n.9: for Dietrich, the order of intellectual being “est donc à la fois celui de l'intériorité décroissante de l'homme et celui de l'extériorisation croissante de Dieu.”

³ É.-H. Wéber, “*Commensuratio*,” pp.45, 48, 55; A. de Libera, *Métaphysique et noétique*, pp.325-328.

⁴ Albertus Magnus, *De anima* III, tr.3, c.11 (ed. Coloniensis, VII/1, 221,73-272,17).

⁵ Averroes, *In De anima* III, comm.36 (ed. De Libera, 169): “Or, l'espoir (*fiducia*) dans la possibilité de la jonction de l'intellect à l'homme réside dans la démonstration qu'il est en relation à l'homme au titre de forme et d'agent, et non pas seulement au titre d'agent.”

⁶ Albertus Magnus, *De anima* III, tr.3, c.11 (ed. Coloniensis, VII/1, 221,47-49,54-56): ‘Id autem quod dicit in X Ethicae, est, quod fiducia philosophantis est non coniungi tantum agenti ut efficienti, sed etiam sicut formae [...]. Sed intelligere est nostrum opus per intellectum nobis coniunctum.’ Cf. A. de Libera, *Métaphysique et noétique*, p.333 et seqq.

⁷ É.-H. Wéber, “*Commensuratio*,” p.57.

the completion of the trajectory of the divine Idea itself, as what is fundamentally communicable and capable of universality.

A modified doctrine of the agent intellect emerges with Dietrich which will be decisive for Eckhart: the agent intellect is not a power of the soul, but a substance with which the soul is always substantially related.¹ Eckhart's own view of the matter is not consistent across his work; at times cognition is called a faculty of the soul, generally in his earlier works, and later it is the Ground of the soul that is one with the creative activity of God, insofar as all being is created within it.²

That latter view is thoroughly in agreement with Dietrich. Both employ the Augustinian notion of an immediate relation of the human mind to God so as to avoid all traces of mediation in metaphysics and divine things generally. Eckhart would be condemned for asserting that all “mediation [*allerleie mittel*] is foreign to God,” which, moreover, will jeopardize a fundamental tenant of the Peripatetic intellectual ascent.³ Each of them, nonetheless, find the Thomistic account of grace as a “divine quality inhering in the soul” to be inadequate.⁴ The substantial identity of God and the Ground of the soul which resulted from this would receive further condemnation in Cologne.⁵ Let us consider the relation of immediacy and mediation first in Dietrich.

Dietrich's own view is established consistently in opposition to Thomas Aquinas, and those “run of the mill babblers” (*communiter loquentes*) for whom intelligence and will inhere in the soul as accidents in a subject, which is but one objection among many given against the Thomists by Dietrich.⁶ If grace is conceived of a disposing accident or medium which is created in the soul, such grace could never lead the soul to the immediate vision of God which it seeks.⁷ He must develop an alternative logic to that of

¹ B. Mojsisch, “La psychologie philosophique,” p.692: “Mais tandis qu'Albert accepte sans réserve la théorie d'Averroës, un progrès constant dans les sciences spéculatives étant la condition de la vision béatifique, Dietrich au contraire fait une objection fondamentale à la théorie d'Averroës: l'union formelle ne s'obtient pas par l'acquisition d'une connaissance par efficence complète. Il faut une conversion totale de l'homme, qui doit abandonner l'ordre de fondation par efficence et pénétrer dans l'ordre de fondation par la forme.”

² B. Mojsisch, *Analogy, Univocity, Unity*, p.131.

³ *Proc. Col.* I, n.23 (LW V, 208,21): 'Allerleie mittel ist gote vremde = omnis distinctio est deo aliena.'

⁴ Aquinas, *ST Ia-IIae*.110.2.

⁵ *Proc. Col.* I, n.70 (LW V, 224,13-15).

⁶ See Dietrich of Freiberg, *De intellectu et intelligibili* II.3.2-3 (ed. Führer, 59-60), against Aquinas, *ST Ia*.77.5-6. For the larger dispute, see R. Imbach, “*Gravis iactura verae doctrinae*, Prolegomena zu einer Interpretation des Schrifts «*De ente et essentia*» Dietrichs von Freiberg O.P.,” *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 26 (1979), pp.369-425. Thanks to Elizabeth Curry for the translation.

⁷ Cf. Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* III, c.147 (ed. Leonine, vol.3, 345-346).

substance and accidents so that, in its essential relation to the divine agent intellect, the soul immediately knows its Principle by knowing under the mode of the Principle itself. Such is how one must construe the thesis of al-Farabi and Avicenna (the “*philosophi*”) that felicity resides in the acquired intellect, when the separate intellect as such is the form of the divinized intellect.¹ Eckhart, on the other hand, makes no directly irreverent remarks against “brother Thomas” regarding the beatific vision, and in fact he accepts the need for the “*lumen gloriae*” for the vision of God.² His resemblance to Dietrich's position extends only so far as this theory of the intellect in man allows one to drink from the font of eternal life: the divine essence which distinguishes itself from all created goods.

Despite these differences, this Augustinian emphasis, once grafted into the henological theory of causation from Proclus, produces a very different perspective on the relation of the human to the divine ideas – resembling, but not reducible to, Albert's position. The Ideas themselves comprehend their various instances of being-known.

The relation of human thinking to the divine ideas can be understood in various ways, and most frequently is discussed relative to the question of the proper object of human thinking. Since the doctrine of the *imago* as it is developed by Dietrich, and Meister Eckhart, assumes and transforms the theory of Henry of Ghent, the Belgian Master should be mentioned briefly. Henry's inclusion of God directly within the scope of metaphysics, as Eckhart does, relies on this psychology.

What emerges from this with Henry is the possibility of knowing the divine quiddity as such since that quiddity is given, confusedly, at the outset of all cognition. The proper object of mind for Henry, Eckhart and Dietrich is the same: it is “being as being” as inclusive of, or ultimately identical with, God.³ This is yet another indication of

¹ Dietrich, *De visione beatifica* 4.3.2.5 (ed. Mojsisch, 114).

² *In Exod.*, n.275 (LW II, 222,8-10): 'ad videndum deum per essentiam [...] requiritur lumen gloriae'; *Sermo XLIX.1*, n.508 (LW IV, 423,5-6): 'in eandem imaginem transformamur a claritate in claritatem' [2 Cor. 3.18], id est a naturali lumine in supernaturale et a lumine gratiae tandem in lumen gloriae'.

³ Henry of Ghent, *Summa quaestionum ordinariarum*, a.7, q.6, ad.2 (ed. Badius, vol.1, fol.56rS): 'deus cadit sub subiecto metaphysicae, quod est ens simpliciter.' Cf. J. Aersten, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, p.297: “Henry knows the traditional considerations for the ontological conception of metaphysics, but also advances an interesting new argument that is based on the identification of the *subiectum* of metaphysics with the *obiectum* of human intellect. Metaphysics is First Philosophy, because it deals with what is first conceived by the mind, 'being as being'.” Unlike Aquinas, “the subject [of metaphysics] contains under itself both being that is the principle and the being that is the effect of the principle. God is thus not outside the *ens commune* of the subject of metaphysics, but part of it” (p.298).

of the influence of Bonaventure's theology, in which the divine being is presented as the "first known," though dimly and confusedly among derivative beings.¹

Henry employs this theory in his direct and sustained criticism of Thomas Aquinas, and in particular against the epistemological foundations of his separation of sacred doctrine and philosophy. A theological determination of first philosophy is possible, Henry maintains, following the suggestion of Avicenna, because the "universal intelligible propositions" from which God can be known are operative in the natural knowledge of any essence: these are the very first concepts of the intellect, which are the transcendentals such as being, thing, one, good, etc.² They are, moreover, the immediate presence of the divine quiddity in the mind, which is not yet grasped in its singular, explicit determinacy. In this way, Henry revives the Franciscan doctrine that "God is the first known" insofar his being is the standard against which all acts of intellection are measured, whether one is aware of it or not. The question is how one arrives to the *explicit* knowledge of this.

Few scholastic theologians before Henry, Kent Emery observes, afforded to human cognition a condition so exalted.³ Scientific knowledge, broadly speaking, takes place in the interplay of two questions. What "precedes all other knowledge (*scientia*) about something is a mere precognition (*praecognitio*) of what something is (*quid est*)".⁴ The ensuing process of enquiry then asks "*si est*," whether this confused notion actually exists. The pure and indeterminate notion of absolute being (*ens absolutum*) that founds this question is for Henry the inchoate knowledge of God, which for Avicenna "is impressed in the soul as the first impression".⁵ Since it arises from a pre-scientific and pre-cognitive relation to a quiddity, the question "*si est*" for Henry always already has a quidditative meaning; it does not ask simply whether *anything* exists, but whether this posited, "imaginary" thing (*res as in reor*) either can or actually does exist (*res as*

¹ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in deum* V.3-4 (ed. Quaracchi, 308-309).

² J. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, pp.302-314. Henry of Ghent, *Summa quaestionum ordinariorum*, a.22, q.5 (ed. Badius, vol.1, fol.134vB-D); Avicenna latinus, *Liber de philosophia prima*, I, c.3 (ed. Van Reit, 20-21).

³ K. Emery, Jr., "The Image of God Deep in the Mind," p.84.

⁴ J. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, p.293, citing Henry of Ghent, *Summa*, a.24, q.3 (ed. Badius, vol.1, fol. 138vO): 'Quid est enim praecognitio est nuda, et simpliciter cognitio, et intellectus confusus eius quod significatur per nomen'.

⁵ Henry of Ghent, *Summa*, a.24, q.3 (ed. Badius, 138vP).

ratitudo).¹ To explain how God can be present within the soul beyond his immediate, “natural” presence to all creatures in this “first impression” Henry employs the terminology of God's *illapsus*, or “falling into” the soul, taken from a spurious treatise of Augustine, which extends from its very first operations up to the beatific vision when God will be completely and freely “fallen into the soul”.² The importance of Henry for Dietrich and Eckhart relative to the theology of the *imago* appears also in Eckhart's adoption of the term *illapsus* which he relates to the *abditum mentis*, although it relies on Dietrich's transformation of the doctrine, which I shall treat momentarily.³

It is clear, however that the anti-Thomistic notion of the *abditum mentis* as the perpetual activity of the divine mind in the soul enables the possibility of a quidditative knowledge of God and a theological metaphysics insofar as the divine *quidditas* is present at the very outset, and only has to be clarified and determined.⁴

A complete knowledge of the divine quiddity through this “other way” lies beyond the possibilities of this life, since we cannot simply begin from knowledge of the nature of God in himself. This ultimately reflects the difference between the *abditum mentis* and the essence of the soul and is manifest in the character of the most complete metaphysical knowledge to which one can attain, according to Henry, which in this life cannot be beatifying. Although the subject of metaphysics as *ens commune* includes God, there is still an analogous relation *within* that commonality, which is reflected in the imperfect knowledge of God ascertained by abstraction.⁵ From the pre-cognition of the *quid*, and the beginning of scientific knowledge in the question 'whether' that essence

¹ For more on Henry's innovative etymological division of *res* into *reor/reris* and *ratitudo* see J. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, pp.287-290 and pp.294-297; S. Dumont, “The *quaestio si est* and the Metaphysical Proof for the Existence of God according to Henry of Ghent and John Duns Scotus,” *Franziskanische Studien* 66 (1984), pp.335-367, at pp.340-342.

² K. Emery, Jr., “The Image of God Deep in the Mind,” pp.79-84.

³ *Sermo IX*, n.98 (LW IV, 93,5-6): 'Secundo nota quomodo gratia est supra omnem naturam, supra opus, supra potentias intellectivas, in abdito animae, ubi solus deus illabitur.' Eckhart always attributes the doctrine to Augustine.

⁴ For Aquinas on the impossibility of knowing the divine *quid* metaphysically, see *ST Ia.3*, prol.: 'Sed quia de Deo scire non possumus quid sit, sed quid non sit, non possumus considerare de Deo quomodo sit, sed potius quomodo non sit.' Aertsen concludes against the majority of influential commentators on Henry that his innovation is not in the foundation of metaphysics as 'tinology', where thingness is divorced from actual being as a more universal and fundamental concept. For Henry, *res* as *reor/reris* is not properly speaking a concept (*ratio*) of intellect at all. The beginning of intellectual enquiry, the question *si est*, simultaneously poses *ens absolute* and *esse quidditativum*; his innovation is, therefore, not as a proto-Kantian, but as inaugurating metaphysics as a study of “essential being” (p.297).

⁵ Henry of Ghent, *Summa*, a.21, q.3 (ed. Badius, vol.1, 126rD): 'ens largissimo modo acceptum, quod secundum Avicennam est subiectum metaphysicae, et est commune analogum ad creatorem et creaturam.'

exists, the intellect then asks once again “what is it,” and begins to determine the thing's specific nature. It is only with that stage that a determinate or “real concept” begins to emerge.¹ The “first impression” of *ens absolutum* for Henry does not, therefore, correspond to a determinate concept as, for example, one could have of God or a creature; what Avicenna means by a “first impression” is an indeterminate concept which corresponds to an indeterminate reality.² Moreover, he continues, it is indeterminate in a twofold sense: “negatively” in respect to God, because his infinite being can receive no determination; “privatively,” insofar as the creature is naturally disposed to receive determination. Therefore *ens absolutum* as such carries no positive predication of God and creature, but only arises through confusing what is similar in these two modes of indeterminacy. *Ens absolutum* in that sense is an analogous concept common to both God and creature.³ This can apply to all the transcendental concepts insofar as they are the simplest concepts and are the basis whereby a creature is somehow, in some sense, “similar” to God.⁴ The same *intentio* is latent in this similitude which was the basis for Henry's argument that the *esse universale* is present within the phantasm. A twofold abstraction occurs: one which produces the confused analogical concept in the human mind, say a “common and universal good” that has been abstracted from “this or that good,” and which is negatively indeterminate in respect to God, and privatively for creatures; secondly, what follows is an abstraction, or separation, from this universal, privative concept which is naturally receptive to determination, which would lead the mind to the subsistent Good itself. Therefore God is 'first known' to the intellect, insofar as he is comprehended within the *ratio* of *ens* which is the “first discrete concept,” but he is not known distinctly.⁵

With Meister Eckhart, as Aertsen realizes, one finds the same confidence in the “other way” of Avicenna, and the same application of the transcendentals as the 'first

¹ Henry of Ghent, *Summa*, a.24, q.3 (ed. Badius, vol.1, 138vQ): 'statim postquam de eo conceptum est esse, dubitat homo de eo quod est simpliciter conceptum non determinatum.'

² J. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, p.301, citing Henry, *Summa*, a.21, q.2 (ed. Badius, 124vP).

³ Scotus' response, which states that there can be a determinate concept of an indeterminate reality, arises from the impossibility of securing what precisely is meant by that latent “similarity” in the analogical concept. See S. Dumont, “Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus”, pp.298-307.

⁴ J. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, p.307, citing Henry, *Summa*, a.24, q.6 (ed. Badius, 141rQ).

⁵ J. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, pp.312-313, citing Henry, *Summa*, a.24, q.7 (ed. Badius, fol.144rF-H) and *ibid.*, a.7, q.6, ad.2 (ed. Badius, 56rR).

intentions' to the divine being. One also finds that metaphysics for Eckhart centres on essential being, as in his Maimonidean reading of Exodus 3.14.¹ In Eckhart, however, the mediating function of the confused analogical concept disappears completely; instead of Henry's two-tier abstraction, "Eckhart *immediately* relates the distinction between *ens* and *ens hoc aut hoc* to God and creature," simply along the axis of the indistinct and the distinct.² This, I want to explain, is a function of the transformation of the *abditum mentis* in Dietrich and the role of the *imago* in Eckhart, which proceeds from his own understanding of the *unum indistinctum*. He applies Henry's ontotheology within the framework of Procline henology.

4.2.2: *Ens conceptionale* in Dietrich of Freiberg

For Dietrich, the exemplary relation of intellect to being as such (*ens inquantum ens*) establishes the separability and autonomy of intellect as a substance which "is not a natural reality, nor a power of the soul, but a thinking related to itself [...] an *intellectus per essentiam*".³ This distinguishes Eckhart and Dietrich from Henry of Ghent and the Thomist response of John Picardi alike, since he refuses, ultimately, to differentiate between what is *ad imaginem* and the *imago* itself. Man is made *ad imaginem dei* only insofar as his rational faculty has not yet posited the divine image within itself or, better, only insofar as reason has not yet realized its implicit supremacy over all finite forms.

The human as rational has not been made after any determinate idea but according to the entire divine essence, since its perfection, as intellectual, is that it "might become an intelligible universe" (*ut fiat saeculum intellectuale*) and so realize its intrinsic "similitude to the divine substance".⁴ Through its intellectual nature, the human acquires the "substantial perfections or the divine essence, namely knowledge, wisdom, rulership, the disposition over beings and providence, and the governance of other creatures".⁵

¹ Stephen Dumont also notes how, after Henry, "the question *si est* in Scotus's scientific procedure reveals an important feature of his metaphysical proof for the existence of God, namely, that it deduces the divine existence from the divine nature" ("The *quaestio si est* and the Metaphysical Proof," p.335).

² J. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, p.343.

³ B. Mojsisch, "La psychologie philosophique," p.687.

⁴ *In Gen.*, n.115 (LW I, 270,5-271,5). The editors of *OLME*, vol.I (pp.384-385), note Eckhart has modified Avicenna's "substance of the universe" to the "substance of God".

⁵ *Ibid.* (LW I, 271,2-5): 'Hinc est quod homo procedit a deo »in similitudinem« divinae »substantiae«, propter quod capax est sola intellectualis natura perfectionum substantialium divinae essentiae, puta scientiae, sapientiae, praesidentiae, dispositionis entium et providentiae et gubernationis aliarum

This is the text, Loris Sturlese argues, which exerts an influence on Dietrich's *De visione beatifica*.¹ By that argument, the treatise would have been composed between 1299-1301. For other reasons, Alessandra Beccarisi has also argued that the *De visione* was composed around 1303.² Either way, the treatise could have been read by Eckhart in the years when he began to develop his theology of the *istichheit*, which Beccarisi situates between 1303 and 1310, and either before or during his tenure during which the Parisian Questions were held (1302-1303). In those same years in Paris, Eckhart would have begun compiling his *Prologues* to the *Tripartite Opus*.³ Therefore, the dialectical ontology of the *Prologues* and the non-being of intellectual relationality appear simultaneously in Eckhart's thought, and his subsequent years are spent articulating their unity. Dietrich of Freiberg's *ens conceptionale* can shed light on the endeavour to explicate this unity.

For Eckhart, the moment when the soul breaks through to the divine image and the divine Ground – when it has fully become that image and that Ground – belongs only to the “just man,” for “only he is a just man who has annihilated all created things and stands without distraction looking toward the eternal Word directly and who is formed therein and is reformed in justice”.⁴ What Eckhart has to say additionally about the *imago* in *In Gen.*, n.115, namely that it is “a similitude of the totality of being, containing in itself the universality of beings [*universitatem entium*]”, since its “object is absolute being, not only this [being] or that [being]”,⁵ shares a great deal in common with Dietrich. Before considering the implications of the birth of the Son in the soul for

creaturarum.'

¹ See L. Sturlese, “Hat Meister Eckhart Dietrich von Freiberg gelesen? Die Lehre vom Bild und von den göttlichen Vollkommenheiten in Eckharts *Expositio libri Genesis* und Dietrichs *De visione beatifica*,” pp.193-219. The relevant text in Dietrich is *De visione beatifica* 1.2.1.1.4.1: 'Procedunt enim huiusmodi a Deo in similitudinem divinae substantiae et suarum substantialium perfectionum, quales sunt scientia, sapientia, bonitas, potentia, praesidentia, entium dispositio et gubernatio et si qua sunt similia, quae suo modo communicantur dictis substantiis spiritualibus, et sic dictae substantiae spirituales procedunt a Deo in similitudinem divinae substantiae, quae suo modo, id est modo divino et sibi proprio, talibus perfectionibus substat.'

² A. Beccarisi, “Johannes Picardi von Lichtenberg, Dietrich von Freiberg und Meister Eckhart: Eine Debatte in Deutschland um 1308,” p.522.

³ L. Sturlese, *Homo divinus*, pp.102-105. This is an earlier datation of the *Opus* undermines older assumptions, which had enabled É. Zum Brunn, for example, to argue that Eckhart shifted his emphasis between the first and second Parisian tenures – from asserting the priority and “non-being” of *intelligere* over *esse* to the absolute priority of *esse* presented in the *Prologues*. See Zum Brunn, “Dieu n'est pas être”.

⁴ *Predigt* 16b (DW III, 272,11-273,3; trans. *Teacher and Preacher*, 278).

⁵ *In Gen.*, n.115 (LW I, 270,5-271,5).

Eckhart, it will be worthwhile to have Dietrich's innovations before us.

Dietrich ascribes both universality and quiddification to operations of the possible intellect. To understand this, one must have a sense of the unique order inhabited by intellectual being. In *De visione beatifica*, the Master outlines the various degrees of that mode of noetic being, which he calls “conceptional being” (*ens conceptionale*). *Ens conceptionale* is neither *ens naturale* or *ens rationis*, for it cannot be reduced to either extra-mental natural being nor to the status of a “second intention” (*res secundae intentionis*) or *ens rationis*, which is the logical universal generated in the intellect, and traditionally distinguished from the *res primae intentionis*, which is the object of intentionality as such.¹ Dietrich defines it as “being insofar as it is in cognition or conception” (*in cognitione seu conceptione*).² Avicenna's *ma'nâ* as an essence in its simple presence to consciousness is a fair analog here for, as de Libera explains, in Avicenna the indifference of an essence to existence (universal or particular) and its intrinsic being (*esse essentiae*) are two sides of the same coin: an essence in its “proper being,” as Albert realized is simply its intrinsic communicability which is the being of the providential divine mind which produces it.³

The priority here is given to the essence as it *appears*. Therefore, *ens conceptionale* is not simply, nor even primarily, intellectual in regards to the knower. De Libera summarizes it well:⁴

[L'être conceptionnel] ne se connaît ultimement que dans la pensée d'un autre, en l'occurrence dans la pensée de celui qu'il pense. L'être conceptionnel est donc un être qui se convertit intellectuellement, qui fait retour sur soi en connaissant son principe – celui qu'il pense – et qui connaît son principe en connaissant son objet – ce que pense celui qu'il pense. Cet objet est l'être en tant qu'être.

The priority of an essence to intellect does not fall outside of thought, it has no priority apart from thought except insofar as it is first intelligible before intellectual. This is why Eckhart does not hypostasize the Ground. The *intentio* of the essence is being unfolded in the various modes of its being-known. Burkhard Mojsisch offers the rather

¹ Dietrich of Freiberg, *De origine rerum praedicamentarium* 5.6 (ed Mojsisch, 130).

² Dietrich of Freiberg, *De visione beatifica*, 3.2.9.6.1 (ed. Mojsisch, 96). A concise account is given in A. de Libera, *La mystique rhénane*, pp.210-214, n.9.

³ A. de Libera, *Métaphysique et noétique*, pp.256-257.

⁴ A. de Libera, *La mystique rhénane*, p.167.

untranslatable expression “*Sein als Bewusst-sein*”.¹ Being as *ens conceptionale* is, in other words, explicated through the various degrees of self-intellection arranged according to an ordered scale of interiority and exteriority – a remarkable synthesis of Dionysius, Aristotle and Augustine.

To my mind, this is the only way to avoid reifying the Neoplatonic doctrine of the divine ideas as causal, generated and eternal, and as comprehensive of their divided temporal passage. The implications of *ens conceptionale* extend into the fundamental difference of Scotus from his predecessors, outlined by André de Muralt and mentioned in Chapter Three, regarding his shift from reciprocal/total to concurrent/partial causation.² The former view is found in Eckhart's first *quaestio* in Paris, when he argues that time is a real category *because* it receives its entire existence from the soul.³ Likewise for Dietrich, three orders of causation are active in the production of the same thing (*idem re*), but in diverse aspects (*rationes*). A thing can be considered simply as being (*ens*), and as such depends on the first cause; as generated, or as potency or activity, it is related to the causality of “nature”; finally, as a “what” (*quid*), it depends on the activity of the potential intellect as it knows its principle.⁴ In this respect, the human intellect in its intellectuality is a total and reciprocal cause of (conceptional) being.

Regarding its object, then, the possible intellect is what “apprehends the thing in its principles, which are the principles of the form, that is, the parts of the form, which are before the whole”.⁵ The divided appearance of the essence means the possible intellect necessarily relates to itself externally, since the essence is being considered under the aspect of its universality.⁶ The manifestation of universal being in the possible intellect, however, depends on an essential communication of the agent intellect.

Since *ens conceptionale* strictly speaking is being as it is present to consciousness and, in various modes, as that cognition, the agent intellect can only be considered a

¹ B. Mojsisch, “Sein als Bewusst-Sein, Die Bedeutung des *ens conceptionale* bei Dietrich von Freiberg,” in K. Flasch (ed.) *Meister Dietrich zu Meister Eckhart*, CPTMA Beihefte, Beiheft 2 (Hambourg: Meiner, 1984), pp.95-105.

² See the suggestion by F.-X. Putallaz, *La connaissance de soi*, p.341, n.187.

³ *Quaestio parisiensis* I, n.4 (LW V, 40,12-41,2).

⁴ J. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, pp.320-321, citing Dietrich, *De origine praedicamentium* 5.36-47.

⁵ Dietrich, *De visione beatifica*, 3.2.9.7 (ed. Mojsisch, 98); idem., *Utrum in deo...*, 1.1.7 (ed. Pagnoni-Sturlese, 294,44-48); idem., *De origine rerum praedicamentium*, c.5 (ed. Sturlese, 187,223-224): ‘propria principia, quae Philosophus vocat partes formae, quas significat definitio.’

⁶ Dietrich, *Utrum in deo...*, 1.1.9 (ed. Pagnoni-Sturlese, 294,56-61).

conceptional being “in its relation to man”.¹ The essential knowing of the agent intellect can and must, however, be “communicated” to man not only as an effect of its action, but that “it might be at some time a form for us by its mode of intellection”.² A distinction from Proclus is helpful on this point: communication (*metadôsis*) is a particular mode of causation which bestows upon its effect the capacity to be participated.³ Whereas secondary causes are “productive by participation” (*kata methexin*), the First is so “primitively and by communication” (*kata metadôsin*).⁴ With Dietrich, however, the operation of the agent intellect is primarily as an *essential* cause: it instills a tension (*tentio*) in its effect, the possible intellect, toward itself because it is the essence which appears as other to that intellect.⁵ Once again, this assumes the logical priority of the intelligible to the intellectual in Proclus, but in such a way that the intelligible, by necessarily appearing as *ens conceptionale*, is substantial to the extent that it is active within the intelligible. The same essence is revealing itself as it attains to itself in these various modes. In other words, since the agent intellect is *essentially* communicated to man, for example, that tension toward the principle is that very principle “in the same aspect”,⁶ such a self-communication cannot “first have its essence or its being absolutely, absolutely, and then tend toward God by its conversion toward Him,” but rather “with its emanation, by which intellectually it emanates from God, is its conversion toward Him.”⁷ Whether it is the essentially active agent intellect or the essence which is indifferent to existence, the dichotomy of subject and object breaks down: in each of its analogous modes, the *intellectus per essentiam* is uninterruptedly relating itself to itself.

¹ Dietrich, *De visione beatifica*, 3.2.9.8.3 (ed. Mojsisch, 99-100).

² *Ibid.*, (ed. Mojsisch, 99-100): 'Et secundum hoc etiam intellectus agens aliquo modo potest dici ens conceptionale in ordine ad hominem, in quantum videlicet talis intellectus intellectio, quae est per suam essentiam, potest communicari homini, ut sic quodammodo ab homine concipiatur, non solum quantum ad effectum suum, in quantum ipse efficit intellecta in nobis, sed etiam ut aliquando fiat forma nobis eo modo intelligendi, quo ipse intelligit per suam essentiam'.

³ Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 23 (ed. Dodds, 26,26-29).

⁴ Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 56 (ed. Dodds, 54,9-22).

⁵ Dietrich, *De visione beatifica* 3.2.9.12.1-3 (ed. Mojsisch, 103).

⁶ Dietrich, *De visione beatifica* 3.2.9.11.8 (ed. Mojsisch, 103): 'Et sic eadem formalitas et intimitas est ex parte principii emanationis suae, quae fit intellectualiter, et ex parte termini suae operationis, immo est omnino idem sua emanatio et in ipsum tentio, et omnino idem est sibi principium suae emanationis et terminus seu obiectum suae operationis et sub eadem ratione.'

⁷ Dietrich, *De visione beatifica* 3.2.9.11.7 (ed. Mojsisch, 102): 'non prius habet essentiam seu esse suum absolute et postea seu natura posterius sua intellectione tendit in Deum sua conversione in ipsum, sed idem est respectus et habitudo et eadem intellectualis operatio, qua convertitur sua intellectione in Deum, eadem, inquam, cum ea, qua ab ipso eodem suo principio emanat per suam essentiam. Sua enim emanatione, qua intellectualiter emanat ab eo, est conversus in ipsum'; idem, *De intellectu et intelligibili* III.36.2 (ed. Mojsisch 208; trans. Führer, 121): 'Et ita ipsa processio est intellectio et e converso.'

Through this doctrine of the *ens conceptionale* as embracing a single essential content articulating itself diversely through the agencies which it creates by being known, Dietrich affirms that since “the essence of the intellect, whatever it is, exists intellectually, it is necessary that intellect itself through its essence [*intellectum per essentiam*] generates intellectually in itself the similitude of all being”.¹ The process of its own intellectuality becomes the object of that essential intellect as what generates the essential determinations of being; passively in the intellect “in which all things become” (*in quo est omnia fieri*) and actively in the that “in which everything is made” (*in quo est omnia facere*).²

The possible intellect is therefore the *universitas entium in potentia*, as Eckhart explained in *In Gen.*, n.115, concerning the human which can acquire the intelligible universe for itself. But it also has an active role in constituting the quiddity of things (*quidificatio entium*).³ How can the possible intellect to be at once the principle of universality in things but also an individuated power of the human soul?⁴ In Dietrich, possible intellect can be considered in two ways, in view of its status as a pure potentiality that is not substantially identical to its operation. In one sense, like its object, the *ratio rei*, it is transcendently the same in all its instances, and present only accidentally in any particular. Its universality emerges since, as an *ens conceptionale*, or as activity, it is neither a fictive being (*ens rationis*) nor a natural being; thus, taken in its essential relation to the agent intellect, the possible intellect is not a particular reality and is not individuated in its subjects, but is simply what passively constitutes the universality of things by receiving them.⁵ In the second sense, however, considered in its “natural being” or “separation”, the possible intellect is not identical to its activity, and therefore can be called an “accident” in the human soul, insofar as must “accidentally” receive the intelligible form which brings it from pure indeterminacy into existence.⁶ For Dietrich, again, the traditional logic of substance and accidents fails here, since the passivity of the

¹ Dietrich, *De visione beatifica*, 1.1.4.2 (ed. Mojsisch, 28-29).

² Dietrich, *De visione beatifica*, 1.1.4.3 (ed. Mojsisch, 29).

³ Dietrich, *De origine rerum praedicamentarium* 5.33 (ed. Mojsisch, 141,340-345): 'Cum autem ens simpliciter, quod est obiectum primum intellectus, sit ens secundum actum, alioquin non haberet rationem obiecti, igitur huiusmodi ens habet entitatem ex operatione intellectus. Et hoc est, quod communiter dicitur, quod intellectus agit universalitatem in rebus. Secundum hoc enim unamquamque rem ex propria ratione in esse quiditativo constituit.'

⁴ Cf. F.-X. Putallaz, *La connaissance de soi au XIIIe siècle*, pp.331-341.

⁵ Dietrich, *De intellectu et intelligibili*, III.8.1-7 (ed. Führer, 95-96).

⁶ Dietrich, *De intellectu et intelligibili*, II.2.2 (ed. Führer, 58).

possible intellect, in its very purity, means that as soon as it is related to the agent intellect, it becomes active in its passivity.

The agent intellect in Dietrich is, therefore, the only truly essential cause among the separate intellects, for it is originally the *ens conceptionale* that appears to them all under various modes, which is its “communication” to each. Against Aquinas, Dietrich argues that the object for the possible intellect insofar as it is made actual – insofar as it is the intelligible form – is the agent intellect itself appearing, however, in the mode of the possible intellect, namely “in the mirror of the intelligible”.¹ For Dietrich, then, two aspects of *ens conceptionale* can be isolated: (i) the agent intellect alone is *ens conceptionale* and is only known in its effects and furthermore only by that effect, and (ii) it depends on the possible intellect for its manifestation, insofar as the possible intellect is the externality of the interior agent intellect. Both correspond to the dual function of the Word with which I began, in accordance with Eckhart's interpretation of John 1.18.² Eckhart, however, is notoriously silent when it comes to providing any robust doctrine of the agent intellect. De Libera suggests that, given that each of these rare references to the agent intellect are “doxographic,” the Meister's concern is with “intellectuality” (*vernunfticheit*) as such, rather than with the difference and order of intellects.³

This absence, I shall argue, is a function of Eckhart's substituting the Indistinct One for Dietrich's agent intellect. Intellectuality as such becomes a *univocal* relationality, foreign to Dietrich's agent intellect as *alone* the essential cause but also is subordinated to the priority of the One as founding its activity and manifesting itself in and through intellectuality. As Mojsisch realizes, reason is in fact “identical with being; for these intellectual processes are real processes”.⁴

4.3: Providence and the *homo divinus* for Meister Eckhart

“Show us the Father, and it is enough for us”. Indeed, what the Father gives the Son

¹ Dietrich, *De intellectu et intelligibili*, III.36.2-3 (ed. Führer, 121); Aquinas, *ST Ia*.79.4, ad.3. Cf. F.-X. Putallaz, *La connaissance de soi*, p.337.

² *In Ioh.*, n.15 (LW III, 13,14-15): 'puta iustitia sibi soli nota est et iusto assumpto ab ipsa iustitia' and, more generally on John 1.18, nn.187-198 (LW III, 156,13-167,14).

³ A. de Libera, *La mystique rhénane*, p.302, n.87.

⁴ B. Mojsisch, *Analogy, Univocity, and Unity*, pp.111-112.

is something greater than all things. He gives him existence as Son, which is greater than all things. [...] The Father is shown to us when we are joint fathers of God, fathers of the one Image, as we said above in relation to the knower and the known.¹

Pour cette raison en effet, parce qu'elle ne consiste plus dans l'extériorité de l'être par rapport à soi, la manifestation de celui-ci n'est plus une image, une simple représentation de l'être, différente de sa réalité, elle réside au contraire en lui, c'est l'être lui-même qui se phénoménalise en elle, elle est véritablement la manifestation de l'être.²

Dietrich's polemic against the Thomistic understanding of the beatific vision, and his dismissal of the traditional categories of substance and accidents regarding every *intellectus per essentiam*, is meant to supply the wayfarer with a semblance of the vision in the life to come. The difference between theology and philosophy, explains Dietrich in the treatise *De subiecto theologiae*, is not in their object, but in how they regard the “order” (*ordo*) of God to the world.³ The worldly knowledge or theology of the philosophers regards God from the standpoint of “natural providence”, while “our science” (*scientia nostra*), which can be called theology “in the true and absolute sense,” sees God as operative in the freedom of “voluntary providence”. The one attends to the “natural properties governed by the principle of the universe, [and] strives [*attendit*] for no higher end beyond this order of nature”, while theology considers “the aspect of merit and reward, and those things which are sought for [*attenduntur*] regarding the good and holy life, and the acquisition [*adeptionem*] of eternal beatitude [...] beyond the limit of this world”.⁴ According to Dietrich, the “natural” standpoint which acquires knowledge of God as he is manifest in the given order of nature risks denying God's immediate relation to them all as creator.⁵

In the background of Dietrich's natural providence, de Libera finds the

¹ *In Ioh.*, nn.569.573 (LW III, 496,8-9; 500,8-10): 'pater nobis ostenditur, quando dei compates sumus, patres unius imaginis, sicut supra dictum est de cognoscente et cognito.'

² M. Henry, “La signification ontologique de la critique de la connaissance chez Maître Eckhart,” in É. Zum Brunn (ed.), *Voici Maître Eckhart* (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 1998), pp.175-186, at p.181.

³ Dietrich of Freiberg, *De subiecto theologiae* 3.8-9 (ed. Sturlese, 281-282).

⁴ Dietrich of Freiberg, *De subiecto theologiae* 3.9 (ed. Sturlese, 282).

⁵ Dietrich of Freiberg, *De animatione caeli* 7.5 (ed. Sturlese, 18): 'Si autem essent aliae substantiae, quas curiositas philosophorum asserit et intelligentias vocant, quarum quaelibet secundum eos est intellectus in actu per essentiam, huiusmodi, inquam, essent secundum dictos philosophos principia entium non supposito aliunde aliquo subiecto, supposita tamen actione et virtute prioris et alterioris principii, in cuius virtute et actione fundarentur et figerentur earum propriae actiones; et ideo non essent creatrices.'

transposition of the pre-noetic operation (*pronoia*) of the henads in Proclus into the Albertist framework, rendering it as the “influence” (*influentia, influxus*) of the First cause itself upon nature. This would be distinguished from the providence of “the *noetic* activity of separate beings – the Intelligences, the agent intellect and the intellect of man –, who by the conversion upon Him autoconstitute themselves in being”.¹ I would only add that the relation of this *ordo naturae* to voluntary providence can be understood as another instance of the reciprocal causation of divine, natural and intellectual orders, to the extent that the causality of the third looks to the inner operation of the intellect in its distinctive ordering (quidditative) activity.²

With Meister Eckhart these two orders collapse into a single movement of the indistinct *unum* in intellect; the reciprocity of causes in Eckhart becomes that which is between the analogical and univocal causes, found only in the Word as what knows (univocal) and makes manifest (analogical) its cause. In their unity is the blessed life which, I shall explain, enacts the uniform relation of the Indistinct One while remaining itself *a part filled by the totality of the Indistinct One*. The just man, Eckhart writes, finds God “entirely in his least part”.³ It is identical to the standpoint which holds together the dialectical thought of finite and infinite being, laid out in Chapter Two – certainly not in the discursive way which I have set out, but as a true coincidence of opposites. The *iustus* is the completion of the process of the *non aliud*, in whom creatures are liberated from the *hoc (ens)* which denies them the fullness of the common transcendentals.

Again and again Eckhart states that the blessedness God the Father so earnestly wants to bestow⁴ is attainable to the wayfarer.⁵ The work of grace, however unnecessary it may appear in his work to his medieval accusers and contemporary commentators, is in fact emphatically taught by Eckhart: the “mode of the spirit” (*die geistes art*) wherein the

¹ A. de Libera, *Métaphysique et noétique*, pp.346-347, italics added.

² Cf. Dietrich of Freiberg, *De origine rerum praedicalium* 5.1 (ed. Mojsisch, 129): ‘Cum autem non sit principium in universitate entium nisi vel natura vel intellectus, si natura non est, necesse est intellectum esse horum entium [*rerum primarum intentionum*] causale principium.’

³ *In Exod.*, n.91 (LW II, 95,2-3): ‘totus est in sui minimo’; a modification of *Liber XXIV philosophorum*, prop. 3, ‘Deus est totus in quolibet sui.’

⁴ *Predigt* 68 (DW III, 152,1-2): “Never has a man desired any one thing so sure, as God wishes to bring man to know him [Ez enbegerte nie mensche einiges dinges sô sêre, als got des begert, daz er den menschen dar zuo bringe, daz er in bekenne]”; *Predigt* 39 (DW II, 258,5-6; trans. *Teacher and Preacher*, 297): “For this reason [since all the works of “the just” are nothing else than “the Son being born of the Father”] the Father never rests, but spends his time urging and prodding, so that the Son be born in me.”

⁵ *Predigt* 67 (DW III, 133,8-134,9): Union with the personal supposit of Christ, “body and soul,” is the highest perfection attainable in this life, “having no supposit other than the personal essence of Christ”.

“interior man” lives from the Ground of God, requires the grace which first brings the “exterior man” to rid himself of the fiction of his own “me” and, secondly, sustains him in the eternal supposit of Christ.¹ Earlier, regarding the disjunction in Dietrich between this life and the life to come, I had referred the reader to Eckhart's criticism of the “learned priests” for failing to grasp the import of Christ's words – “All things I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you” (John 15.15). In the same sermon, he continues:²

So one must also understand the words which our Lord says here, 'Everything, which I have heard from my father, that have I revealed to you.' What does the Son hear from his Father? The Father cannot but beget; the Son cannot but be born. Everything that the Father has and that he is, the abyss of the divine essence and the divine nature, those he begets clearly in his only-begotten Son. That is what the Son hears from the Father, which he has revealed to us, that we might be the same Son.

The blessedness of eternal life, therefore, belongs to the Son who makes known the entirety of what is latent and hidden in the “abyssal divine essence and divine nature”. Christ has revealed the highest perfection of all, the mutual positing of Father and the Son, without which the Father is not a Father at all (for he has not engendered), and the essence is latent in itself, prior to manifestation and its own self-sufficiency as indistinction. The begetting of the Word from the Father, where all creatures have their origin, is also where grace springs forth.³ Christ has manifested this One, but not that we would remain in an external relation to knowing him simply as the Truth, for then one would remain outside of grace. Rather it is through this grace that the soul can be recalled to its Ground, “before truth or intelligibility”, where “the soul was formed in the first purity, in the impression of the pure essentiality”,⁴ which is not “satisfied” by the Persons in their indivisible “particularity,” but only when it knows “where this essence has come

¹ A. de Libera, *La mystique rhénane*, pp.256-259.

² *Predigt 29* (DW II, 84,3-9): 'Man sol daz wort alsô verstân, daz unser herre sprach: 'allez, daz ich gehoeret hân von mînem vater, daz hân ich iu geoffenbâret'. Waz hoeret der sun von sînem vater? Der vater enkan niht dan gebern, der sun enkan niht dan geborn werden. Allez, daz der vater hât und daz er ist, die abgründicheit götliches wesens und götlicher natûre, daz gebirt er zemâle in sînem eingebornen sune. Daz hoeret der sun von dem vater, daz hât er uns geoffenbâret, daz wir der selbe sun sîn.'

³ *Predigt 38* (DW II, 243,6-7): 'Ein brunne, dâ diu gnâde ûz entspringet, ist, dâ der vater ûzgebirt sînen eingebornen sun.'

⁴ *Predigt 3* (DW II, 56,1-3).

from”.¹ It is by grace, then, that the soul assumes the standpoint of the Son in its pure relationality with the One-Father.

The ground of the blessed life takes up the theory of *ens conceptionale* and *intellectus per essentiam* in Dietrich, and develops it entirely within the framework of his Christology, which makes every Son of God, by grace, into the manifestation of the divine nature as such. The satisfaction or “sufficiency” of the soul's beatitude is the same as that of the only-begotten Son, coming only from the immediate reception of the One-Father – Dietrich would concur with this, insofar as blessedness is to know the principle in the mode of the principle.²

That vision is equal to the manifestation of the essence, and therefore unites the division of pre-noetic and voluntary providence, of philosophical and Christian theology; the principle is known to the extent that it manifests itself in producing another that differs only in person, not in being, and, reciprocally, the principle is manifest to the extent that it is begotten in the one who knows it. Additionally, the manifestation of the principle as truth within the knower is equally the begetting of the knower within the being which belongs to the principle.³ For “every action and potency, from which it arises, receives that which is in itself entirely [*id quod est se toto*] from its object”,⁴ and in that sense is begotten in God to the extent that it knows God. The result, however, of the collapse of the two orders of providence, as it occurs in the human man in whom “all things are accomplished”, is in natural coincidence of the absolute maximum and absolute minimum – to borrow Cusanus' terms – which for Eckhart is the natural of the immediate *influentia* of God in all things, “God's majesty depends on my lowliness”, so that, “if a person were truly humble, God would either have to lose all his divinity and would have to abandon it completely or he would have to pour himself out and flow completely into this person”.⁵ Likewise, *Predigt* 15, the coincidence of opposites wherein “the humble man and God are one and not two” appears between “the sun in its highest part [which] corresponds to God in his unfathomable depths, in the depths of his humility”. The humble man in turn “does not need to entreat, but he can indeed

¹ *Predigt* 48 (DW II, 420,1-8).

² *In Ioh.*, n.548 (LW III, 478,7-9): 'consummatio autem et beatitudo nostra consistit in uno. Unde pater et filius et spiritus sanctus beatificant, ut unum sunt. In uno enim nulla distinctio prosus est.'

³ J. Casteigt, *Connaissance et vérité chez Maître Eckhart*, p.361 et *passim*.

⁴ *In Ioh.*, n.679 (LW III, 593,10-11).

⁵ *Predigt* 14 (DW I, 235,4-5; 237,1-3; trans. *Teacher and Preacher*, 273).

command, for the heights of the divinity cannot look down except into the depths of humility”.¹ Therefore the humble man receives the entirety of the divine essence as absolute minimum.

The self-abasement of God and the humble man coincide as the terminus of a *circulatio* that embraces the entirety of things. Therefore it is not enough to know the truth simply externally, but one must be that very truth insofar as the “complete return” of intellect upon itself is what gives rise to truth. transcendental 'truth' as posterior, though convertible with, being and unity. As I explained in Chapter Three, the divine essence (*isticheit*) is identical to the indistinct Being which is prior to its appearance in the One-Father who appears simultaneously with truth and equality which are appropriate to the Son.² For Being, Eckhart writes, is the non-other which is “commonplace and indistinct and distinguished from other things by its indistinction,” while the undivided One itself points to distinction, insofar as it is distinct from other things while remaining itself. Likewise the Ground of God and the soul, to which it attains having become entirely nothing, a “receptive *intellectus*,” is identical to the indistinct One which unites and distinguishes the Father and Son. The immediate vision which it seeks involves moving to the “bare *isticheit*, deprived of all essence and all *isticheit*” - that is, where the *isticheit* is latent and prior to manifestation.³ This, in a sense, simply paraphrases a notion in Avicenna's *Metaphysics* VIII.⁴ True to Eckhart's transposition of Avicenna, however, this hiddenness is understood *as* the divine essence, whereas Avicenna had argued against God having any essence distinct from his pure “thatness” (*anitas*): “under the aspect of existence and essence [God] is dormant and latent, is hidden in himself, does not beget and is not begotten [...] under the aspect of the Father and of paternity, however, he

¹ *Predigt* 15 (DW I, 246,9-13; trans. *Essential Eckhart*, 190); cf. *In Ioh.*, n.555 (LW III, 484,9-485,4).

² *In Ioh.*, n.574 (LW III, 502,4): 'pater non ostenditur, in quantum pater, nisi generando'; *In Sap.*, n.89 (LW II, 422,6-7): 'Et propter hoc Ioh. 14 filio dicitur: 'ostende nobis patrem', quasi in se ipso absconditum et latentem, non foras missione procedentem'; *In Ioh.*, n.562 (LW III, 490,1-3): 'Verum autem ex sui proprietate, cum sit quaedam adaequatio rei et intellectus et proles genita cogniti et cognoscentis, ad filium pertinet, genitum quidem, non gignentem. Propter quod convenienter sancti in divinis attribuunt filio aequalitatem

³ *Predigt* 67 (DW III,133,3-8). De Libera (*La mystique*, p.255) comments: “this 'One' in the soul, the 'spark' means nothing else than the eternal fore-word (avant-propos) of representation”.

⁴ *In Sap.*, n.286 (LW II, 619,9-620,2): 'De primo ait Avicenna, [...], »primus non habet genus nec quiditatem nec qualitatem nec quantitatem nec quando nec ubi nec contrarium nec diffinitionem nec demonstrationem nec simile sibi«, »et non est communicans ei quod est ab ipso«; citing Avicenna latinus, *Liber de philosophia prima* VIII, c.5 (ed. Van Reit, 411,39-47).

receives and assumes the property of fecundity”.¹ The soul seeks what is hidden and unknowable which it can only find to the extent that it realizes or manifests the ground in itself as the *imago trinitatis*. For “the image is in its exemplar, where it receives all of its being,” as the “just is in justice itself”.²

The two orders of providence in Dietrich, the pre-noetic and the noetic, are united by Eckhart in his understanding of the complete presence of the divine infinity within each essence as idea. Creatures return to their origin through the human insofar as their essence is known as true, for that truth is the engendering of the human back into God. The blessedness of the soul is grounded in the actual unity of knower and known which, following Augustine and the Gospel, is the vision of God as truth.³ Eckhart's henological thinking is thoroughly Christological or – since the historical Incarnation is repeatedly downplayed – is best called a “metaphysics of the Word”.⁴ The mediating function of the analogical concept in Henry disappears, leaving an immediate relation to the divine transcendentals as present in every essence.

In other words, the two orders of providence are united in the Eriugenian theme of the creation of all things in the Word, where their actual being and their being-known coincide.⁵ In a recently edited sermon, *Nolite timere eos qui corpus occidunt*, Eckhart produces an Eriugenian account of the return of all things through the human:⁶

In the savouring in which God savours Himself, there He savours all things. All creatures tend toward their ultimate perfection. Now I beg of you to attend to my words by the eternal truth and by the everlasting truth and by my soul! Yet again I will say what I never said before: God and Godhead are as different as heaven and earth. [...] God becomes and unbecomes. [...] All creatures give up their life in favour of being. All creatures enter my understanding that they may become rational in

¹ *In Ioh.*, n.567 (LW III, 495,4-7).

² *In Ioh.*, n.24 (LW III, 19,13-14); *ibid.*, n.20 (LW III, 17,1-2).

³ *In Ioh.*, n.673 (LW III, 588,2), regarding John 17.3 (*Haec est vita aeterna, ut cognoscant te solum verum deum et quem misisti Iesum Christum*).

⁴ É. Zum Brunn, A. de Libera, *Maître Eckhart. Métaphysique du Verbe et théologie négative*, p.74.

⁵ For the influence of Eriugena on this account, see *OLME*, vol.1 (pp. 241-242, 246, 248-251), regarding *In Gen. I.*, nn.3.5.7, on the creation of all things in the *ratio idealis* (LW I, 186,14; 189,1) and the identity of the procession of the Word with the creation as such (190,7-191,1).

⁶ *Predigt 109* [Pfeiffer: *Predigt 56*] (DW IV, 767-769; trans. Walshe, 292-294): 'Nû merket! Alle crêatûren crêatûren hânt irn louf ûf ir hoehste volkommenheit. Alle crêatûren tragent sich in mîn vernunft, daz sie in mir vernünftic sîn. Ich aleine bereite alle crêatûren wider ze gote. Wartet, waz ir alle tuot!' For Eriugena, see *Periphyseon* IV.8, 774A.

me. I alone prepare all creatures for their return to God.

The possible influence of Eriugena on this sermon was evident to Alois Haas. He notes that, unlike Eriugena, Eckhart removes the entire eschatological framework of the *reditus omnium in hominem* by having the return to the original source (*ursprunc*) “take place here and now”.¹ Alain de Libera suggests that Eriugena's influence, which generally speaking is “still to be determined,” could have reached him either by way of Honorius Augustodunensis, whom Eckhart and Berthold of Moosburg “cite often,” or through the translation of the *Corpus dionysiacum* which had been read by many students of the Couvent Saint-Jacques in Paris, and which contained several excerpts from the *Periphyseon*.² The Dionysian inspiration, I think, is most accurate, and is interpreted by Eckhart in the framework established by the *Liber de causis*, Avicenna and Averroes. The most convincing account has been offered by Wouter Goris.³ In addition to the suggestions of Haas and de Libera, he notes Eckhart's references to “bishop Albert” in *Predigt 80, Homo quidam erat dives*:⁴

The third point: that God is originary and therefore flows out into all things. Regarding this bishop Albert says: 'In three ways He flows out into all things in common [*gemeinliche*]: with being, and with life, and with light, and especially into the rational soul in its possibility [*mügentheit*] all things and in its leading back of creatures into their first origin. This is the “light of lights”, for 'every gift and perfection flows from the Father of lights,' as Saint James says.

In the background here is clearly the *Liber de causis*⁵ - although read through a very particular lens. Goris makes it clear that Eckhart has at hand Albert's commentary,

¹ A. Haas, “Eriugena und die Mystik,” p.276.

² A. de Libera, *La mystique rhénane*, pp.62-63, n.22.

³ W. Goris, *Einheit als Prinzip und Ziel*, pp.284-287.

⁴ *Predigt 80* (DW III, 384,6-386,1; trans. *Teacher and Preacher*, 333, modified): 'Daz dritte: daz er ursprunclich ist, dar umbe ist er üzvliezende in alliu dinc. Hie von spricht bischof Albreht: drîerhande wîs vliuzet er üz in alliu dinc gemeinliche: mit wesene und mit lebene und mit liehte und sunderliche in die vernünfftigen sêle an mügentheit aller dinge und an einem widerrucke der créatûren in irn êrsten ursprunc: diz ist licht der liehte, wan 'alle gâbe und volkomenheit vliezent von dem vater der liehte', als sant Jâcobus spricht.'

⁵ The “rich man” in the parable who has “no name” is taken for God (cf. Proposition 20/21, “the first is rich through itself” [*primum est dives per se*] and Proposition 5, “the first is beyond all discourse [*narratione*] or any “delicate soul” (cf. Proposition 3 on the “noble soul” whose “divine operation” is to “arrange [*parat*] nature by the power which is in it from the first cause”).

De causis et processu universitatis II.1.1, which names the *Liber* as the “light of lights” and, especially, in referring to the light which shines in the rational soul for “its leading back of creatures to the primal origin”.¹ This goes back to the indifference or “communicability” of the essence (*intentio*), as in itself a potential for thought to give it universality, as well as Albert's particular emphasis on the co-operation of human and divine agencies, noted by the P. Wéber, in their shared theoretical measuring activity. The problem emerges, however, of how that possibility (*müingentheit*) is to be realized if the *abditum mentis* is truly identical with the “I” of the divine Ground or *isticheit* – I shall return to this momentarily.

Eckhart's understanding of the work of the Son in the return of all things is strongly informed by the *Liber de causis*. The divine operation of every “noble soul” (*anima nobilis*) from the *Liber* is made equivalent to the “identically subtle” or “delicate soul” (*ieglüchen zarten sêle*) from the parable. Elsewhere, in his commentary on John 1.11, *Quotquot autem receperunt, dedit eis potestatem filios dei fieri*, Eckhart cites the *Liber* on the “deiform man” (*homo divinus et deiformis*), who “comports himself uniformly in all things”, just as “the *De causis* says, [God] exists in everything according to one disposition”.² That uniform, deiform disposition in all things, Eckhart writes later, grants to the one “who is born a son of God and in whom the God-Son is born [...] such a one and no other is able to make signs and change nature” - the first, a reference to the Gospel (John 3.2.), the second a reference to the “divine operation” of the “noble soul” in the *De causis* which “orders nature” (*parat naturam*).³ In *De intellectu et intelligibili*, in a Chapter regarding the soul's reception of the light from the separate intelligences, Albert makes reference to the “philosophers” account of the “excellent souls [which] contain more than their proper bodies” so that “whenever these souls apply themselves to the forms of this world, the external changes obey them, just as they obey the [separate] form of the world”.⁴ The philosophers, he continues, say that such souls “operate miracles

¹ W. Goris, *Einheit als Prinzip und Ziel*, p.286, citing Albert, *De causis et processu universitatis* (ed. Coloniensis XVII/2, 61,16-24): 'Quia cum lumen primae causae tripliciter influat rebus, scilicet influentia constitutionis ad esse et influentia irradiationis ad perfectionem virtutis et operis et influentia reductionis ad primum fontem ut ad boni principium, [...] erit ipsum lumen luminum.'

² *In Ioh.*, n.112 (LW III, 97,3-6), citing *Liber de causis*, prop. 24 (23).

³ *In Ioh.*, n.322 (LW III, 271,6-8): 'sic qui nascitur filius dei et deus in ipso nascitur filius – Is. 9: 'filius datus est nobis' – talis et nemo alius potest facere signa et mutare naturam.'

⁴ Albertus Magnus, *De intellectu et intelligibili* II.11 (ed. Borgnet, v.9, p.519): 'et hoc etiam modo animae excellentium virorum plura ambiunt quam corpora propria, quando animae eorum formis mundi

[*mirabilia*] in the conversions of men and natures”.¹ Albert likely has in mind the “prophetic soul” in Avicenna, who is described in the same manner, as a soul whose power ranges beyond their own body, and glimpses the Ideas or “intentions” (*ma’ânî*).² Albert concludes: “this intuition of order (*praescientia ordinis*) certain excellent philosophers have called prophecy”. This understanding of “deification” or becoming “deiform” or “uniform” would have also been available to the Preachers through Eriugena's translation of the Dionysian *corpus* and often alongside the commentaries of Albert and Aquinas.³

An *intentio*, earlier described as a communicable essence as a potentiality for being known, then, is given a providential purpose: that all particulars may be rejoined to the Idea which is their only true being in the Word.

In a more recent article,⁴ Wouter Goris (to paraphrase his argument) notes the difficulty facing Eckhart in accepting “bishop Albert's” light of lights, which has the soul and the Ideas of things achieve their perfection the extent that the human realizes in itself the totality of intelligibles – to use Avicenna's phrase, to become a *saeculum intellectuale*. Given that Eckhart repeatedly insists that that there is a complete opposition of *esse* and *hoc aut hoc (ens)*, any such ascent, insofar as it is mediated, is antithetical to the vision of God.⁵ Furthermore, Goris argues, this reflects the priority assigned to detachment (*abegescheidenheit*), “pure passivity” in the reception of the birth of the Son in the soul.

Citing the passages from the sermon *Nolite timere* and *Predigt* 80, Goris contrasts Eckhart's Eriugenian return with the ascent of the acquired intellect in Albert's *De intellectu et intelligibili* II, c.12. For Albert, all forms are light (*lumen*) in themselves.⁶ They flow into matter from the light (*lux*) of the First cause and separate substances strive

¹ *Ibid.*, (loc. cit.): ‘et hi sunt de quibus, sicut Philosophi dicunt, quod operantur mirabilia in conversionibus hominum et naturarum.’

² Avicenna latinus, *Liber de anima seu sextus de naturalibus* IV, c.4 (ed. Van Reit, 64,33-66,59). Cf. A. Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought. Al-Ghazālī's theory of mystical cognition and its Avicennian foundation* (London-New York: Routledge, 2012), pp.79 and 103.

³ See *OLME* VI, Note complémentaire, n.6, pp.396-452.

⁴ W. Goris, “The Unpleasantness with the Agent Intellect in Meister Eckhart,” in S.F. Brown, T. Dewender, Th. Kobusch (eds.), *Philosophical Debates at Paris in the Early Fourteenth-Century* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2009), pp. 151-159.

⁵ E.g., *Predigt* 71 (DW III 221,2-3; trans. *Teacher and Preacher*, 322): “When God forms himself and pours himself into the soul, if you perceive him as a light or as a being or goodness, if you know the least little bit of him, that is not God.”

⁶ Albertus Magnus, *De causis et processu universitatis*, II.2.22 (ed. Coloniensis XVII/2, p.116,44-62); A. de Libera, *Métaphysique et noétique*, pp.261-262.

to attain “divine being” (*esse divinum*), which is to return to their ideal existence and to be “separated from matter”.¹ This can be granted neither from themselves nor in the separate “intellect of the world” which has them already, but only in the intellect of man “which receives the divine forms from matter”. This divine being is not achieved in the “acquired intellect” (*intellectus adeptus*) but only in the “divine,” “assimilated” or “prophetic” intellect which has received the totality of intelligibles.

In addition to *Predigt* 80, Goris points to the recently edited sermon 104, where Eckhart takes an unexpectedly traditional tripartite division of agent, patient and possible intellects. Agent intellect, again, is responsible for “leading creatures back to their origin”.² His association of this intellect with the divine mind is traditional enough, and he gives a predictably Eckhartian response that the “spirit should be silent and let God work”. The possible intellect is given the peculiar role of a bystander: when the “spirit looks over it [the passive intellect] and knows it is possible – that it can and could well happen, and that is called the possible [*mügeliche*] intellect”.³ Such a condition of uneasiness, for Goris, captures the essence of Eckhart's thought, in that the state of pure passivity which “could well” induce the divine grace, must simply wait for the advent of the One within the soul; a person “switches off” their own agent intellect, turns their back on the entire mediated order, and simply waits for the salvation of all things to be accomplished when God puts himself in the place of their agent intellect and “gives birth to himself in the patient intellect”.⁴ What remains, Goris concludes, is that “the perfection of man requires him to abandon the universe to its own fate”.

4.3.1: Justice and the Divine Infinity

The will of Moses had so completely become the will of God that God's honour among his people was more important to him than his own

¹ Albertus Magnus, *De intellectu et intelligibili*, II.12 (ed. Borgnet, v.9, 520).

² *Predigt* 104 (DW IV, 268).

³ *Predigt* 104 (DW IV, 571-572): 'sô sich got des werkes underwindet, sô sol und muoz sich der geist stille halten und got lâzen wûrken. Und ê diz anegevangen werde von dem geiste und von got dem geiste und von gote volbrâht, sô hât der geist ein ansehen dar zuo und ein mügelich erkennen, daz ez allez wol geschehen mac und möhte, und daz heizet diu mügeliche vernunft, aleine daz si doch vil versümet werde und niemer ze vruht enkome', cited in W. Goris, “The Unpleasantness...,” pp.157-158.

⁴ *Predigt* 104 (DW IV, 587-589): 'Sehet, allez daz diu wûrkende vernunft tuot an einem natiurlichen menschen, daz selbe und verre mê tuot got an einem abegescheiden menschen'; W. Goris, “The Unpleasantness...,” p.159.

beatitude [...]. And Moses bade God and said, 'Lord, blot me out from the Book of Life.' The masters ask: did Moses love the people more than himself? And they say: No! For Moses knew will than in seeking God's honour among the people, he was closer to God than if he had abandoned God's honour among the people and sought his own beatitude.¹

Goris' argument isolates Eckhart's thought at its most vulnerable joint, where the uniformity of action which characterizes the *homo divinis* excludes all mediation and the entire standpoint of God as Goodness;² the One is the source and the One, not the Good, is that to which creatures return.³ Eckhart's response, in fact, can be found in the most frequently used motif in both his German and Latin works: the example of Justice and the just (*iustus*). In his depiction of the possible intellect as a quietist contemplative awaiting their personal salvation, Goris has reified the birth of the Son in the soul against Eckhart's repeated intention, which is to lead the soul away from regarding God from the standpoint of Goodness or as a personal Saviour who will bestow a particular salvation to the particular passive intellect which has been made into nothing, while the possible intellect standing by anxiously awaiting the redemption.⁴ The process is always already thwarted when the blessedness is anticipated for "me".⁵ It is not that Goodness disappears altogether in Eckhart's thought; rather it has no intentional role to play in the blessed life. For Eckhart, the "boiling" or pure "formal emanation" which produces the *imago* is "the way the Good diffuses itself" and, particularly, "how willing can be a principle if the end is not grasped".⁶ The grace that belongs to the Son, therefore, is precisely that sort of knowledge.

The humble man or just man therefore embodies the standpoint of the *isticheit* as

¹ *Predigt 25* (DW II, 11,6-7; 12,2-6; translated from A. de Libera, *La mystique rhénane*, pp.288-289).

² *Predigt 9* (DW I, 153,9-10; trans. *Teacher and Preacher*, 258): "I am not happy because God is good. I shall never beg that God make me happy with his goodness because he could not do it."

³ Cf. W. Goris, *Einheit als Prinzip und Ziel*, p.287: "Aus einer Identifikation des Einen mit dem Guten hervorgegangen führt das Kreislaufdenken bei Eckhart zu einer Abwertung des Guten gegenüber dem Einen, eine Abwertung, welche bestimmte Probleme in der Seinslehre erklärt", and pp.379-381.

⁴ *Die rede der unterscheidung*, c. 23 (trans. *Essential Eckhart*, 280): "if he could maintain this state in such a way that there was neither imagining nor activity in him, and he could remain free of all activities, interior or exterior, he ought to be on his guard in case this very state itself may become a form of activity."

⁵ *In Ioh.*, n.107 (LW III, 92,10-11): 'homo, ut dictum est, accipit totum suum esse se toto a solo deo, obiecto, sibi est esse non sibi esse, sed deo esse.'

⁶ *Sermo XLIX.3*, n.511 (LW IV, 426,5-9): 'quid producit a se et de se ipso et in se ipso naturam nudam formaliter profundens voluntate non cooperante, sed potius concomitante, eo siquidem <modo> quo bonum sui diffusivum; praeterea quo modo velle principiaret fine nondum cointellecto.'

manifest, as the indistinct, uniform One that passes through all opposition. Eckhart, in *Predigt 52*, makes it clear that he is departing from “bishop Albert,” supposing that “a poor man is one who does not find satisfaction in all the things God created.” This was a view, he says, that he “once held” – perhaps referring to his constant references to Albert and the “light of lights” in *Predigt 80*. Now, however, Eckhart urges his hearers to a higher form of poverty: “poverty of spirit is for a man to keep so free of God and of all his works that, if God wishes to work in the soul, he himself is the place in which he wants to work”.¹ Just as in *Predigt 67*, there is no “supposit” in which God should work but himself; when “that [something] in the soul from which knowing and loving flow” is one with the divine Ground, “it is deprived of the knowledge that God is acting in it,” in the same way “that God is neither being nor rational [...] and does not know this or that”.² Union with this *istichheit*, therefore, is conceived by Eckhart in terms of the *Mystical Theology* of Dionysius: “being neither oneself nor someone else, one is supremely united by a completely unknowing inactivity of all knowledge” to a God which “existing beings do not know as it actually is and it does not know them as they are”.³

To know God, Eckhart writes following Wisdom 15.3, is “consummate justice” and the “root of immortality”.⁴ The process to its consummation, Eckhart argues, is not what is directly intended by the wayfarer at all:⁵

For just men, the pursuit of justice is so imperative that if God were not just, they would not give a fig for God; and they stand fast by justice, and they have gone out of themselves so completely that they have no regard for the pains of hell or the joys of heaven or for any other thing.

Therefore one who is seeking some such good, especially justice, equally and at the same time finds wisdom and [all] the other gifts,

¹ *Predigt 52* (DW II, 488,3-6; 500,7-501,1; trans. *Essential Eckhart*, 199, 202).

² *Predigt 52* (DW II, 497,4-5; trans. *Essential Eckhart*, 201).

³ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology* c.1, 3, 1001A; c.5, 1048A (trans. Luibheid, slightly modified).

⁴ *In Ioh.*, n.110 (LW III, 95,2-3).

⁵ *Predigt 6* (DW I, 103,1-4; trans. *Essential Eckhart*, 186); *In Sap.*, nn.106.108 (LW II, 442, 8-12; 444, 4-8): ‘Sic ergo quaerens tantum unum quodlibet bonum, praecipue iustitiam, invenit aequae sive pariter sapientiam et cetera dona, quae non quaesivit nec cogitavit, nec intendit, secundum illud Is. 64 et Rom. 10: invenerunt qui non quaesierunt me. [...] Sic ergo in uno quolibet invenit omnia et veniunt sibi omnia [...]. Quaerens enim iustitiam nihil intendit nec quaerit nec appetit de sapientia nec scit quod iustitia in sui perfecto sit ipsa sapientia aut sit mater sapientiae. ‘Ignorabam’, inquit, adhuc quaerens iustitiam, in sui imperfecto constitutus, quod ipsa in sui perfecto esset unum cum omnibus bonis, quousque introduceret ‘me in cellam vinariam’, Cant.2, ‘in cubiculum genitricis’ suae, Cant.3.’

which he had neither sought, reckoned or intended, according to Isaiah and Romans, “They found me who did not seek after me”. [...] Thus in any one thing he finds all things and all things come to him. [...] For anyone seeking justice intends and seeks nothing, and neither desires anything of wisdom; he does not know that justice in herself is the perfection of wisdom herself and the mother of wisdom. And so the one still seeking justice, in an imperfect state, says, ‘I did not know’ that justice in her perfection is one with all good things, until she led ‘me into the wine cellar, in her mother’s house [Sg. 2.4, 3.4].

The significance of *iustitia* in Eckhart, as for most medieval authors who draw upon Augustine, Aristotle and Anselm,¹ cannot be reduced to either its juridical, ethical or moral senses, although these are all contained within its purview. Ultimately, however, its focal meaning for Eckhart is its identity with the divine mercy (*clementia*) or will (*voluntas*); the justice of God is always “before” (*ante*) the *iustus*.² So too the divine “I” endures which is the Ground of both God and the soul, if soul would only bring itself back to the image, beyond the analogical relation of God and world, before “I went out from my own free will and received my created being”.³ Similarly, Justice remains one in itself and uniform in all just individuals, and “a half justice is no justice at all”.⁴ Like the Indistinct One, it remains at rest in itself, while manifest and operative in its several participants.⁵ Thus, in seeking justice, the *iustus* participates in the source which has justified it, or bestowed the power to be participated, and thus the Spirit emerges as the unity of the Father (*iustitia*), the Son (*iustus*).⁶ In the same passage, Eckhart provides the example of sight or knowing, where the object must engender itself within the eye or mind, that it may be “unified”.

Thus for Eckhart, as for Aquinas and Albert, it is the presence of the uncreated Holy Spirit within the soul which leads it, by faith, to seek the uncreated Truth.⁷ As such,

¹ R. Crouse, *St. Augustine's Doctrine of Justitia*, M.Th. Thesis (Toronto: Trinity College, 1956).

² *In Ioh.*, n.81 (LW III, 69,6-7); *ibid.*, n.172 (LW III, 141,7-8): ‘iustus, in quantum iustus, perhibet testimonium de iustitia, quod ipsa fuit ante ipsum et prior ipso.’

³ *Predigt* 52 (DW II, 492,3-493,2).

⁴ *In Ioh.*, n.22 (LW III, 18,16): ‘Media enim iustitia non est iustitia.’

⁵ *In Gen.* II, n.147 (LW I, 616,4-9): ‘Iustitia enim omnia, quae iustitiae sunt, per se ipsam et se ipsam totam et se ipsa sine medio manifestat, pandit et expandit et transfundit in ipsum iustum, in quantum iustus est [...]’

⁶ *In Gen.* II, n.180 (LW I, 650,1-12): ‘Sed in iustificatione impii necessario concurrunt iustitia ingentia, gignens et pariens et parens. Item oportet concurrere iustitiam non aliam, sed eandem, genitam tamen. Sicut enim nemo potest esse iustus sine iustitia, sic nec genitus iustus sine genita iustitia. Oportet iterum iustitiam gignentem sive parientem amare iustitiam genitam sive partam, prolem sive filium.’

⁷ Cf. *OLME* VI, p.428, citing Aquinas, *QD de caritate*, a.1, resp; *idem, De veritate* q.14, a.8.

the *homo divinus* is in a purely passive relation to every gift from God, to be sure, but “every and each of these [souls] are as anyone of them [the others], and consequently are all common to all [*sunt omnibus omnia communia*]”.¹ This “interior knowing” of the soul is identical to that which receives the divine Ideas in their “intrinsic principles”. This knowing, which “is rooted in the being of the soul and is something of the life of the soul,” is a life in which “all things are one; all things common, all in all and all united”.² What is perceived in that life is an order in which the “grace that is in Mary is more and more properly an angel's and is more in it – that is, the grace that is in Mary – than if it were in the angel or in the saints”.³ It is, therefore, the perspective which sees all things as one in the Word by bringing them to birth within itself as that Word.

From the standpoint of Justice, then, any particular thing is revelatory of the divine infinity.⁴ Brient is right to emphasize the importance in Eckhart's adaptations from from the *Liber XXIV philosophorum*; in particular, taking up from the propositions 2 and 3 regarding the infinite sphere and God's omnipresence to himself (*Deus totus est in quolibet sui*), Eckhart articulates his own doctrine of analogy, “in divine things each thing is in each thing [*in divinis quodlibet est in quolibet*], the maximum in the minimum”, while having the infinite sphere *and* its circumference be present at every point.⁵ Therefore the whole of God (the centre) and the whole of creation (the circumference) are present at every point. That analogical presence, I explained in the previous Chapter, is distinct from what belongs to the Son (*quodlibet in quodlibet*) but now it is clear that the Son is the unity of both modes. One is made a Son of God to the extent that any essence begets itself in the mind, is received and constituted in its intrinsic principles, therein receiving its own perfection as *intentio*. Each creature is a theophany of the Father which,

¹ *In Ioh.*, n.397 (LW III, 338,5-7): 'homo quilibet divinus et sanctus ut sic pure passive se habet et super nudo suscipit omne donum dei: sic omnes et singuli sicut unus quilibet ex illis, et per consequens sunt omnibus omnia communia.'

² *Predigt 76* (DW III, 316,5-317,2): 'In disem lebene sint alliu dinc ein, alliu dinc gemeine al and al in al und al geeiniget.'

³ *Predigt 76* (DW III, 317,6-318,2).

⁴ See E. Brient, “Transitions to a Modern Cosmology: Meister Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa on the Intensive Infinite,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 37/4 (1999), pp.575-600.

⁵ *In Ecc.*, n.20 (LW II, 248,1-4): 'Rursus tertio in divinis »quodlibet est in quolibet« et maximum in minimum, et sic fructus in flore. Ratio, quia »deus«, ut ait sapiens, »est sphaera« intellectualis »infinita, cuius centrum est ubique cum circumferentia«, et »cuius tot sunt circumferentiae, quot puncta«, ut in eodem libro scribitur.' In his edition, Cusanus has copied in the margin, 'in divinis quodlibet in quolibet, maximum in minimo'.

in being known, manifests and accomplishes itself in the knower.¹

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

This function of justice and truth as rectitude in Eckhart is applied by Cusanus to the divine “Precision” which is “the Preciseness of whatsoever thing”. As Nicholas has the unlearned man (*idiota*) explain to the philosopher, “if someone had precise knowledge of one thing, then, necessarily he would have knowledge of all things”.²

With Eckhart, the standpoint of the Good must be surpassed by metaphysics and the humble or detached soul which can know the *transcendentia* or God by “becoming” them.³ That is, insofar as it becomes the Word in which all things are created by reflecting the One-Father, or the divine *quidditas* in its diversity. Eckhart is therefore able to follow the “other way” of Henry of Ghent’s Avicennian metaphysics without recourse to the mediating “confused” analogical concepts, because the distinction of absolute *esse* and *hoc aut hoc (ens)* is comprehensive of the analogical relation between God and creatures. The assumption underlying this, however, is that of Bonaventure: that the divine being is present as the “first known”, precisely because its illumination transcends all determinations of genus and species.⁴ Truth, then, as the engendering of the knower in the principle and in the manifestation of the principle in the knower, is therefore unites the two aspects of the form which were opposed in Chapter Two, as the mediation of *hoc (ens)* and *esse absolute*. Truth is a “real relation because it receives its being entirely from the soul”.⁵ The mediating role of the analogical concept has likewise been replaced by the Word or the humble man in whom the maximum and minimum coincide, as the

¹ *Predigt 9* (DW I, 156,6-9): 'Ie mêr diu sêle erhaben ist über irdischiu dinc, ie kreftiger si ist. Der niht dan die crêatûren bekante, der endôrft niemer gedanken ûf keine predige, wan ein ieglichiu crêatûre ist vol gotes und ist ein buoch.'

² Nicholas of Cusa, *Idiota de mente*, c.3, n.69 (ed. Steiger, 106).

³ J. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, p.344: “Eckhart’s metaphysics develops into what one could call an “ethics of the transcendentals”: the creature should become an *ens, unum, verum, bonum* as such.”

⁴ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in deum*, V.4 (ed. Quaracchi, 309). The entire structure of the *Itinerarium*, beginning with the “reflection of the poor man in the desert” (*incipit speculatio pauperis in deserto*), and moving through stages of mirrors (*per speculum*) to the vision of God beyond the coincidence of the perspectives of Being and Goodness, anticipates much of Eckhart’s theology of the *homo humilis*.

⁵ *Quaestio parisiensis I*, n.4 (LW V, 40,11-41,2).

manifestation of the Indistinct *unum* or *istichheit* which traverses and grounds every finite being. With this henological perspective, which is realized in the Word and every adopted son, Eckhart is well on the way to the dissociation of the Platonic One from the transcendental *unum* that is convertible with being in Berthold of Moosburg, or in the *transcensus* of the *transcendentia* in Nicholas of Cusa where discursive metaphysics is subordinate to the pursuit of *visio*, or the *coincidentia oppositorum*.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Since God is wholly present with his whole self as much in the least thing as in the greatest, the just man, loving God in everything, would seek in vain for more or the highest thing, when he possesses the smallest thing and God entirely in that, whom alone he loves and nothing else. [...] Consequently, anyone seeing, seeking or loving the more and the less is not divine as such. And this is what the Book of the Twenty-Four Philosophers says, 'God is an infinite intellectual sphere, whose circumferences are as many as its points,' and 'whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere,' and who 'is entire in his smallest part'.¹

I have attempted to follow the scarlet thread running through the Meister Eckhart's writings, implicit already in his answers to eager Dominican novitiates and postulates in the mid-1290s (*Die rede der underscheidung*). The absolute maximum and minimum coincide: "the deeper and lower the depth is, the higher and more immeasurable the exaltation and the heights, the deeper the fount, the higher the springs; height and depth are the same".² This coincidence appears with a novel identification of God and the common which, I have argued, relies on the harmonization of Peripatetic transcendental metaphysics and Procline henology. The divine self-relation, passing through the absolute maximum and minimum, produces a notion of creation as the "gathering up of being" (*collatio esse*).

This "gathering up" has been understood progressively through three Chapters. The first described the dialectical ontology of the common and the particular, of substance and accidents. Creatures as accidents in comparison to the divine substance were excluded from the commonality of the divine being to the extent that they are secondary forms which only give *tale esse* or *hoc (ens)*. All things depend on the divine self-sufficiency but appear as simply equal to that sufficiency insofar as they *are* at all. In this, Eckhart holds a curious middle way between the Averroist emphasis on the radical dependency of accidents upon their substance along with the decidedly non-Averroist view of the complete futility of secondary causes to achieve the common being which

¹ *In Exod.*, n.91 (LW II, 94,11-95,3). 'Sic ergo vir iustus amans deum in omnibus, cum deus sit se toto totus et tantus in minimo sicut in maximo, frustra, habens minimum et in ipso totum deum, quem solum amat et praeter ipsum nihil, quaereret maius sive maxima. [...] Et sic per consequens videns, quaerens, et amans plus et minus non est divinus in quantum huiusmodi. Et hoc est quod Libro XXIV philosophorum dicitur: »deus est sphaera« intellectualis »indefinita, cuius tot sunt circumferentiae, quot puncta«, et »cuius centrum est ubique et circumferentia nusquam«, et qui »totus est in sui minimo«.'

² *Die rede der underscheidung*, c.23 (trans. *Essential Eckhart*, 282).

they seek.¹ Diversity, then, falls back into the monism of *esse*.

The transition to the next Chapter can be explained in light of Eckhart's articulation of his Eucharistic theology in the terms of the *Liber XXIV philosophorum*: moving from the *Sermo Paschalis* of 1294, where God is the "infinite, intelligible and *incomprehensible* sphere," whose presence in the sacrament of the Altar is the "height" of "incredible" and "wonderful" things, to the "*infinite intellectual* sphere" of the *In Exodum* (quoted above) which is "wholly present" in its least part.² Eckhart has moved to a standpoint where the once "incredible" presence of God in the Host is now "in the least part of the consecrated Host and in every substantial form, which by its whole self through its essence and through its 'what' [*quod quid*] is in the least part of its subject".³

Eckhart's shift from the intelligible to intellectual sphere coincides with a Procline articulation of intellectual self-return which, like the "pushing-out" of life, is wholly present in each part (*quodlibet in quodlibet*). Substituting for the irreconcilable opposition of common and particular, then, is the dialectical logic of the *indistinct and distinct*. This is really no opposition at all, insofar as the Unity that grounds distinction remains indistinctly or *uni-formly* related to each. This is enabled by the particular relationality obtaining between an intellect which receives the entirety of its being from its object. Eckhart in turn modified Dietrich's notion of the *analogical* essential cause to render dialectic *univocally* between the Father and the Son. Therefore the "outward thrust" of "life" or "light" for Albert the Great and Ulrich of Strasbourg becomes the complete intellectual self-relation of the Indistinct One as operative and actual in the Trinity.

Crucially, Eckhart does not, like Berthold of Moosburg, his successor in Cologne, oppose this *negatio negationis* of the One to the One which is convertible with being.⁴ For this reason, the logic of the transcendentals and Trinitarian theology could be unfolded together; the essence corresponding to the former and the Father to the latter. Thus, with Eckhart, unlike with the Franciscan tradition, the source of productivity is

¹ On these two doctrines in Latin Averroism, see R. Imbach, "Le traité de l'eucharistie de Thomas d'Aquin et les averroïstes," pp.185-193.

² *Sermo Paschalis a. 1294 Parisius habitus*, n.1 (LW V, 137,3-5). *In Exodum* n.91 is quoted above.

³ *In Exod.*, n.92 (LW II, 95,4-6).

⁴ J. Aertsen, "Ontology and Henology in Medieval Philosophy (Thomas Aquinas, Master Eckhart and Berthold of Moosburg)," p.136: "Eckhart's thought must be regarded as an original synthesis of the two approaches to reality that Berthold of Moosburg opposes to each other."

irreducible to any personal supposit. Commentators should refrain from emphasizing the anteriority of the Ground as if it were simply another supposit.

When the One *appears* it is always already fecund and in a relation to the Son, who alone *knows* and *manifests* that essence, in accordance with John 1.18, “*Deum nemo vidit unquam; unigenitus, qui est in sinu patris, ipse enarravit*”. The engendering of the knower in the being of that which it knows, and the manifestation of that essence in the knower, was shown to correspond in Eckhart’s transcendental determination of ‘true’ in Chapter Three. However, since the essence is not reducible to its appearance, but remains abstractly beyond, or anterior to, its being-known, it is simply as unknowing, or as *indistinctly or uniformly be-ing*, that one is united to the indistinct. The reflection of the essence, which is its constitution, is completed in an incomprehensible knowledge of the incomprehensible. The *homo humilis* is given a providential role as the *locus* of this dialectic since humility comprehends both the absolute maximum and minimum.

In other words, the Son knows only the Father who is the One, but the One is there already constituting that revelation of the Father in the Son. Rendered in these terms, one can both produce and resolve the philosophical problem presented by Wouter Goris. The *homo humilis* in Eckhart resembles the perfected, or divine *intellectus adeptus* in Albert and Avicenna, and Christ in Eriugena; however, it appears that the collection of possible intelligibles which belongs to the classic conception of the Peripatetic ascent, of the *rationes seminales* in Eriugena, and all theories of the divine ideas or *intentiones* generally, is utterly antithetical to Eckhart, for whom *any particular essence* gets entirely in the way of one’s knowing God.¹ For Goris, then, this means that the agent intellect in Eckhart’s thought *must* be excluded in favor of quietist passivity, since all agency and particular acts of abstraction are working against the divine uniformity in their very distinction.

The answer is in the ambiguity in Eckhart between Procline henology, a metaphysics of the transcendentals, and the application of essential causation to both natural and voluntary providence. The strictly existential, pre-noetic providence of the gods in Proclus is rendered as the *essential* intellectual self-return of the First in Eckhart. Therefore, according to the necessity of causation, if someone were to empty oneself of oneself, God must begin working *ex nihilo*. Eckhart does not speak of the agent intellect

¹ Predigt 5b (DW I, 88,2-5).

because, for him, the henology of the divine essence substitutes for it. The agent intellect is replaced by the Father as the One standing in relation to its equal; the (indivisible-transcendental) One is that which appears and that whereby it (the indistinct) is known. The divine essence is wholly present in every essence and is constituted diversely in thought, but remains wholly unknowable in each. Every essence, therefore, becomes *infinitely knowable; each essence is revelatory of the Father, or the One*.

Goris is, of course, correct that each essence *as particular* is still excluded from the divine commonality and infinity. The Father begets himself in the soul as his Son only insofar as the soul is cleansed of images (*entbildet*), then formed in the image of the God (*îngebildet*), and finally transformed into the divine uniformity (*überbildet in der götlichen einförmigkeit*).¹ Similarly, the *iustus* is one who has been “informed by and transformed into justice” (*der in die gerechticheit îngebildet und übergebildet ist*).² Cusanus’ conjectural method, wherein scientific reason infinitely approaches the asymptotic particularity of each created thing *as created*, when infinity becomes a predicate of the *world*,³ and not God or the Word, is still well ahead. The creature, as such, is always a pure nothing. It is this nothingness, *this particular nature*, which one must rid from oneself so that, by grace alone, one may become what God is by nature. In that uniformity, one has everything under the mode of not-having.

Faith becomes intellectual, then, insofar as the relation of ‘truth’ which manifests the Father by engendering the knower *in principio* demands the initial perception of God as “Good” or as an “efficient or final cause” be transcended; “it is for the less enlightened to believe and the enlightened to know” that God, “in his Ground,” is filled with joy (*vröude*).⁴ Taken up into the image, the blessed soul becomes a pure reflection of the Father and in that equality passes into the unity of essence while remaining distinct in origin. The birth of God in the soul is, therefore, not the soul’s participation in the Triune life of God, but the engendering of God within himself.⁵ Beatitude is when God begets himself in the soul, which is “conformed [*conformando*] to him and transformed [*transformando*] into him”.⁶

¹ *Predigt* 40 (DW II, 278,4-7); cf. *Predigt* 39 (DW II, 253,5-254,1).

² *Predigt* 39 (DW II, 252,2-3).

³ E. Brient, *The Immanence of the Infinite*, p.184.

⁴ *Ibid.*, (253,2-3).

⁵ *Predigt* 6 (DW I, 109,2-110,7).

⁶ *In Gen* II., n.180 (LW I, 650,1-3).

This perpetual disappropriation of self, to “become who I was when I was not yet,” is the distinguishing feature of Eckhart’s thought from Dietrich of Freiberg. The pairing, and contrast, of the two appears in several poems and documents from the period. In one, the author contrasts Dietrich's emphasis on the activity of intellect and Eckhart's call “to suffer God supernaturally”.¹ Another poem distinguishes them, more accurately, in terms of Eckhart standing at the source, uttering “a singular word, without form in itself, that is for itself its own meaning”, and Dietrich's attempt “to speak what pertains to its meaning”.²

Maître Eckhart parle de l'être nu./ Il dit un mot unique [*ain ainiges wörtlin*], sans forme en soi./ Tel est pour soi son propre sens;/ auquel rien ne s'ajoute ni se retranche./ C'est un bon maître, qui peut parler ainsi.

Maître Dietrich parle de ce qui relève du sens/ Il place l'image de l'âme dans son propre soi [*selbeshait*];/ là elle connaît Dieu sans son être-soi [*istichait*].

For Eckhart, this “selfhood” (*selbeshait*) has already said too much, speaking of truth from the outside. Detachment is not simply a movement of the will; as de Libera writes, “*Abandon* est le nouveau nom de la pensée en acte”.³ Detachment and justice, then, are the movement of thought thinking the Indistinct *istichait*, the pursuit and the presence of the Indistinct One in thought. For the *iustus*, “informed and transformed into Justice [...] no why is formed,” no distinction exists between God and his activity in all things.⁴

Therefore, there is no opposition for the *iustus* between the the indivisibility of each essence and its existence within the indistinct unity of the divine being. Similarly, for Meister Eckhart, one finds no opposition between a Neoplatonic “henology of the One,” and a Christian “metaphysics of Being” (Gilson). For the plenitude of the divine being is established by the intellectual self-return of the *essence* (*istichait; ego*) indicated by the divine name, *Ego sum qui sum*. All of this occurs between the poles of purity and plenity within the divine being. In other words, Eckhart accepts Aquinas’ correction of

¹ See L. Sturlese, “Alle origini della mistica speulativa tedesca,” pp.56-57.

² W. Wackernagel, “Vingt-quatre aphorismes,” p.98. Others verses, penned by a nun along the Upper Rhine, speak of Meister Dietrich, who bade the soul to return “*in principio*,” while it is Meister Eckhart who spoke of the “nothingness” of God as already present. See A. de Libera, *La mystique rhénane*, pp.57-58.

³ A. de Libera, *Penser au Moyen Âge*, p.346.

⁴ *Predigt* 39 (DW II, 254,1-2); cf. *Predigt* 52 (DW II, 492,1-2): ‘Dô ich stuont in miner êrsten sache, dô enhâte ich keinen got, und dô was ich sache mîn selbes.’

the Platonic method from the standpoint of the transcendentals: being and goodness are convertible, and in fact being has conceptual priority over unity and goodness insofar as knowledge depends on the actuality of the thing known.¹ Crucially, Aquinas subordinates the transcendental standpoint of the “common,” in which being is prior in order of our concepts in metaphysics as the science of *ens commune*, to the Platonic way which looks to separate and subsistent cause of *ens commune*. The most proper name of this cause, in virtue of its “common” effect, Aquinas argues, is *esse ipsum*, for no determination is more universal.² However, this already assumes the plenitude of being as it has been founded on the self-relation of the divine simplicity in Question 3 of the *prima pars*, to its perfection in Question 4.

Eckhart collapses the common and causal because the determination of unity as “the negation of negation,” as it stands in an immediate relation to being, “purifies” as the “apex of the purest affirmation” because it negates all finitude, which is identical to createdness and goodness.³ When the one which is convertible with being is identified with the one that is separate from being, the transcendentals as a whole become the “*propria*” of God and not of creatures; *ens commune* and its metaphysical determinations become theological. Aertsen is right that the identification of the transcendentals with the Transcendent in Eckhart means that the “one” as the negation of negation does not “break through” the transcendental level – as it does in Berthold and Cusanus.⁴ Eckhart makes no indications to this effect. Aertsen is wrong, however, to try to contain it within the traditional transcendental standpoint, where “one” had functioned as only a negation of division. Aertsen is aware of the shift from the “undivided” to the “indistinct,” but the theological standpoint must be allowed to make its own claims. The *positive* role of the “one” means that it acquires a fecundity of its own, passing through each of the other determinations *indistinctly* to ground each of them in their opposition.

¹ J. Aertsen, “Ontology and Henology,” p.129. On Gilson’s reading of Eckhart, see pp.120-121.

² Aquinas, *ST*, Ia.13.11.

³ *In Ioh.*, n.562 (LW III, 490,6-491,3).

⁴ J. Aertsen, “Ontology and Henology,” p.139.

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