

In der erde als in dem himel:
The God-Creature Relation in Meister Eckhart

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

at

Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
August 2016

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For my family and for Kathleen.

Pages 19-21 in particular are dedicated to the Baptist faith of my grandmother, Elsie Walker, who died secure in the knowledge that her grandson was writing on the Book of Exodus.

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Abstract

This thesis aims to show the immediacy of the God-soul relation for Meister Eckhart. Although Eckhart teaches that the soul must cease to be a creature and become one with God, there seems to be no motion proper to creatures by which they cease to be creatures, nor any qualification of God's oneness such that it could be more or less in creatures than it already is. The first chapter of the argument will set up the problem by showing that God for Eckhart is most properly understanding, and is one with creatures as the pure awareness through which creatures are thought. The second chapter will show that Eckhart does not teach any particular method to unite the soul with God, and affirms oneness with God as much in return to creatures as in any turn away from them. God is one even with the soul apart from God.

List of Abbreviations Used

InGen.1 *Expositio Libri Genesis*

InEx *Expositio Libri Exodi*

InIoh *Expositio sancti Evangelii secundum Iohannem*

ProcCol *Processus contra Magistrum Eckhardum* with numeral

QuPar *Quaestiones Parisienses* with numeral

S. *Sermo* with numeral

BgT *Daz buoch der götlichen trøstunge*

Pr. *Predigt* with numeral

RdU *Die rede der unterschiedunge*

VeM *Von dem edeln menschen*

DW *Deutsche Werke* with numeral for volume

LW *Lateinische Werke* with numeral for volume

n. *paragraph* with numeral

Acknowledgements

I would not have completed this thesis without the help of many people. Too many people, in fact, to name.

Three people were directly involved in the production of this thesis – most prominent of these is my supervisor, Dr. Wayne Hankey, through his advice, patience, and for his many forms of encouragement. The other two, Dr. Eli Diamond and Dr. Michael Fournier, both read an earlier version of this thesis and also gave helpful advice. All three have taught seminars that contributed to my knowledge of this thesis' subject matter and helped me in many ways besides. Insofar as it is good, this thesis is purely their work, insofar as it is bad, this thesis is purely mine and not theirs.

There could be no better environment in which to work than the Dalhousie Classics Department, and I am very grateful for the help and support of everyone in it. Every single thing I have done in the department has been made possible by Donna Edwards. I greatly enjoyed working as a teaching assistant under Dr. Christopher Grundke, Dr. Peter O'Brien, and Dr. Fournier. I have learned classical languages from Dr. Emily Varto and Paul McGilvery, as well as the professors already thanked, and German from Brigid Garvey in the Dalhousie German Department and the late Klaus Grötsch in the Canadian Year in Freiburg programme.

I have been kept fed and clothed by my parents Daniel and Valerie Walker, the aforementioned departments, and the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

I consider all the graduate students here friends, and am grateful for their company and support throughout this project. The same goes for many other friends and communities, and above all my family and my girlfriend Kathleen Sullivan. Their emotional support has been and continues to be invaluable.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Ioh. 20:17 "ascendo ad patrem meum." Ubi nota quod omnis perfectio et desiderium animae sanctae est accipere omnia mediante deo, deum autem sine medio. Hoc est ascensus. Secundo nota quod pater est nomen amoris respectu generationis filii, non autem creationis, respectu cuius est potius dominus. Tertio patris est unitas. Hoc autem appetit anima: unum esse cum deo. Quarto anima appetit nullo formari creato, sed solo deo.¹

This quotation, typical for Eckhart, summarizes the peculiarity and radicality of his theology in three points. First, the soul should not access God in a mediated fashion, whether by love through a virtuous life or by knowing God to be cause of creation. Inasmuch as the soul should know or love any creatures, it is because they are in Him, and the soul should have Him immediately and wholly without need of them. Second, the soul should have God simply by being one with Him, not by way of relation. The soul should be more one with God than the Son is one with the Father. Third, the soul must cease to be creature altogether and become God. Eckhart's teaching directs his students out of themselves, out of the world of creations and mediations, and into God Himself.

Of course, being God always belongs to God and is never a work of creatures, and whatever is of God is perfect and cannot be diminished, so Eckhart's teaching must show

¹ Sermo (S.) 14, *Ascendens Iesus in unam navim*, n. 151 (LW 4, 142): "John 20:17: 'I ascend to my Father.' Note here that all the perfection and desire of a holy mind is to receive all things by the mediation of God, and to receive God without mediation. This is the ascent. Secondly, note that the father is called love respecting the generation of the Son, but not respecting creation, in which he is more lord. Thirdly, oneness is the Father's. This is what the soul wants: to be one with God. Fourthly, the mind wants to be formed by no creature, but by God alone." All translations are my own, using *Meister Eckhart: Die deutschen und lateinischen Werk*. The German and Latin works are abbreviated to DW and LW, respectively, followed by an Arabic numerals for the volume and page number. Latin works will also be cited by paragraph number. I have read many of Eckhart's works first in English, and am thus indebted to the following English translations of Meister Eckhart's works: *Meister Eckhart: Works*, trans. Evans; *The Best of Meister Eckhart*, ed. Backhouse; *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher*, ed. McGinn; and *Meister Eckhart: Selected Writings*, ed. Davies. I am also indebted to Weiss's parallel German translations in the *LW*.

how God is always perfectly one with the soul, and how this oneness is equally immediate when the soul perceives itself to seek or even lack God as when the soul perceives itself to have God. Generally, when Eckhart discusses what is called "ascensus"² in the passage above, the dominant metaphor is not of motion, or even of a perfection in the sense of improvement on imperfect goods, but of simplification and clearing away. Eckhart says that the soul has the "sâme gotes,"³ and that God is in everything: "Got ist in allen dingen. Ie mê er ist in dingen, ie mê er ist ûz den dingen: ie mê inne, ie mê uze, ie mê inne."⁴ Even in the creation of many imperfect creatures, God retains His oneness and purity, and likewise the soul can see God's purity immediately, even in those imperfect creatures. Eckhart's approach to God, inasmuch as God is above, can be called "from above" as much as "upwards," in that it sees the human situation from the perspective of God rather than that of humans seeking God.⁵

In acknowledging the loftiness of Eckhart's teaching, however, the lowness of his concern and of his primary audience cannot be overlooked, particularly as regards his German works. Although Eckhart was an accomplished scholastic philosopher in the Dominican order, holding their chair in theology twice from 1302 to 1303 and from 1311 to 1313 and holding the title of vicar general in between,⁶ he is also closely associated with contemporary movements whereby the centre of religious piety left the educated, often wealthy institutions of the church for less educated lay groups. These groups included in

² S. 14, n. 151 (LW 4, 142): "Ascent."

³ Von dem edeln menschen (VeM), (DW 5, 111): "God's seed."

⁴ Predigt (Pr.) 30, *Praedica verbum* (DW 2, 94): "God is in all things. The more he is in things, the more is he is out of them: the more in, the more out, the more in."

⁵ Ruh, *Meister Eckhart: Theologe, Prediger, Mystiker*; 11.

⁶ Linge, "Mystery, Poverty and Reason in the Thought of Meister Eckhart," 470.

the most extreme cases such heretics as the Cathars and Albigensies, which the Church sought to suppress, as well as many powerful but doctrinally dubious movements which the Church sought to use the Dominican and Franciscan orders to contain.⁷ Eckhart himself as a preacher was very influential for mystics in Germany and the Netherlands, including such local heretics as the Free Spirits.⁸ This led to the condemnation of his teachings. Nonetheless they continued to influence mysticism throughout the region, including between orders.⁹ Given this history, it is important to see that in teaching the immediacy of union with God, Eckhart also accomplishes the pastoral goal of making God accessible without the need for particular kinds of knowledge, and by extension making Him accessible outside of the ecclesiastical and academic establishments that had control over that knowledge. Eckhart had many occasions to defend his practice of preaching to the uneducated, even at the risk of spreading heresy:

Dar zuo spriche ich: ensol man niht lēren ungelērtē liute, sō enwirt niemer nin gelēret, sō enmac nieman lēren noch schrīben. [...] Sant Johannes sprichet daz heilige êwangelium allen geloubigen und ouch allen ungeloubigen, daz sie geloubic werden, und doch beginnet er daz êwangelium von dem hœhsten, daz kein mensche von gothie gesprechen ma; und ouch sint sīniu wort und ouch unsers herren wort dicke unrehte vernomen.¹⁰

Eckhart was further able free access to God from particular forms of knowledge and practice through extensive use of the method ἀποφατική, or negative theology.

⁷ Ibid. 467.

⁸ McGinn, "The *Traktat von der Minne*," 179.

⁹ Ibid. 181.

¹⁰ *Daz buoch der götlichen træstunge* (BgT), (DW 5; 60, 61): "To that I say, if one should not teach unlearned people, then no-one would learn anything at all, and then no-one would teach or write. [...] Saint John gave the holy gospel to all believers and to all nonbelievers, that they become faithful, and yet he begins it in or from? (which is better?) the highest, which no man here can say of God; and his words and even our Lord's words are often taken in error."

ἀποφατική describes God, and, to varying extents, the soul in its knowledge of Him, as indescribable in order to show Him in showing the inadequacy of creatures, including particular forms of knowledge, to represent or contain Him.¹¹ Typically, the method works in conjunction with affirmative theology by allowing for the relation of created things to God, then denying that they are sufficient to know God. In Eckhart's work, ἀποφατική can be seen by his juxtaposition of God and creature, directing the soul not to take any creature as good, nor even good itself as good, but to relate to everything only for God's sake:

Wan ein rehte volkomen mensche sol sich selben sô tôt gewenet sîn, sîn selbes entbildet in gote und in gotes willen sô überbildet, daz alliu sîn sælicheit ist, sich selben und allez niht wizzen und got aleine wizzen, niht wellen noch willen wizzen dan gotes willen und got wellen alsô bekennen, als got mich bekennet, als sant Paulus sprichet.¹²

The temptation in treating undifferentiated union of the soul with God is so pure, so one, and so beyond any means of access that it becomes unclear how the soul could even know that it does not know God. This temptation leads certain figures, such as Bach,¹³ to put God so deep in the soul, before not only thoughts but the capacity to think, that between Him and the creature that seeks Him there is not even the suggestion of a commonality to justify seeking Him. Of course, it is true that neither the claim "God is good" nor the claim "God is that by which there is good" represents God fully truthfully, but the latter claim acknowledges a true relation between God and creature even as it avoids misrepresenting God by saying anything specific about Him. The extreme negative position, "God is not

¹¹ Otten, "In the Shadow of the Divine," 447.

¹² BgT, (DW 5, 21): "For a properly perfect man should be so dead to himself, so unformed in God and transformed in God's will, that all his salvation is to know neither himself nor anything and know only God, not to will or want to know anything but God's will, and to want to know God, as Saint Paul says, 'as God knows me.'"

¹³ Bach, *Meister Eckhart: der Vater der deutschen Spekulation*, 83.

good," is not any more perfect a representation for omitting this relation. While in its union with God the soul is no longer distinct from God, and therefore is no longer soul, the soul is informed by and has access to this unknowability in itself and through every creature, which is why Eckhart can talk about not knowing God in the first place. If God were so confined to the ground of the soul that this groundedness had no expression or evidence in the soul as creature, there could be no argument made at all. Against this temptation a priority here will be showing how Eckhart identifies as authentically common between God and soul universals like oneness, understanding, and, to a lesser extent, being, that are beyond thought and act not because they are the negation of thought and act but because they are implicit in every thought, act, and creature. Above all, this will shown to be true of understanding.

The project here is to ground the immediacy of God as it manifests itself in Eckhart's preaching and less philosophical rigorous works, generally in German, in his more scholarly Latin works. Although early enthusiasm for Eckhart scholarship in nineteenth-century Germany tended to see Eckhart as a German mystic opposed to Latin orthodoxy, or even as anticipatory of the Lutheran Reformation,¹⁴ it is now generally accepted that his German works derive their content from his Latin scholastic works: "Une caractéristique étonnant de ces sermons est de transposer pour un auditoire non universitaire l'essentiel des thèses soutenues à Paris contre les théologien fransiscains."¹⁵ Of particular interest in the German works is the *Liber Benedictus*, composed of *Daz buoch der götlichen træstunge* (*BgT*) and the *Von dem edeln menschen* (*VeM*). These works are

¹⁴ Davies, *Meister Eckhart: Mystical Theologian*, 13-14.

¹⁵ de Libera, *Maître Eckhart et la mystique rhénane*, 9.

the longest and most detailed treatments of the God-soul relation. Of particular interest in the Latin works is *Quaestio Parisiensis I (QuPar. I)*, one of Eckhart's more extreme works, in which he subordinates being to understanding in God. In the *BgT* Eckhart bases the motion from the soul to God in his philosophy of image and likeness, which he claims extends also to the will – to desire is to be like, and two things that are like are like because of the ways in which they are one, but are unlike in the ways in which they are two. The more like two things are, the more one they are, and the nearer they approach not being like at all. The soul, insofar as it desires because it is like, desires to be the pure oneness of God, and to not be like at all. In *QuPar. I*, God, as understanding, is a pure oneness in which both the one and the like are preserved, so that even image as image and likeness as likeness, which apart from their exemplars are nothing at all, are grounded in the oneness of understanding. For Eckhart, God is always implicit in the motion from creature to God, because the oneness of God contains both God apart from creature and creature apart from God.

Chapter two will look for the unity of God and the soul in Eckhart's Latin works on the soul as the image of God. These works include commentaries on such verses as the creation of the human in Genesis and the name of God in Exodus, as well as the abovementioned *QuPar. I*. Next, the chapter will look at the ways the soul for Eckhart is not God, but creature, drawing clarification from the *Processus contra Magistrum Eckhardum (ProcCol. 1 & 2)*. Eckhart claims that inasmuch as the soul is a creature, it is not God, and in order to unite itself to God the soul must purify itself of all creatures and particularities. Chapter three will interpret Eckhart's descriptions of the movement of soul from creatures to God in his German works. This will reveal a dynamic in Eckhart's work

that moves between opposing God to creature and affirming God's ubiquity in creation. Because God's universality comprehends the particularity of both God and creatures, Eckhart teaches that the soul is no less grounded in God in being a creature, or even in being separated from God, than in the motion out of creatures and into God that Eckhart teaches. Because these motions and teachings are themselves particular, Eckhart recognizes that they are just as creaturely and superfluous as the creatures from which they teach the soul to move. Eckhart teaches, then, not in order to unite the soul to God, but rather as the self-expression of an eternal union with God that seeks to express itself as fully as possible in time. This union can express itself by moving the soul out of creatures and into God, but it expresses His universality as fully by showing how the soul is one with God even when it is separated from God and united with creatures. For Eckhart, the value of every motion and teaching rests in the inexpressible oneness of God, but expresses itself by way of teachings and motions.

Chapter 2: Divine Image and Creature

2.1 Introduction

If Eckhart's teaching is to be understood as directing the soul toward union with God, and the associated motion described, it must be established what it is that is united with what, through what it is to be united, and in what sense it is to be united. What is the soul outside of union with God in the first place? What does the soul have in common between itself in God and itself outside of God? Such questions are common to Christianity, particularly for Christology and soteriology, when it is asked how Christ can be both God man, or how the soul can be both saved through God *and* responsible for itself, but here in the study of Eckhart these questions are intensified because of his insistence on the immediate possibility of this union. If Eckhart taught that the soul could bring itself closer to God through particular godly actions or teachings, the soul apart from God that initiated those particular actions and the soul with God that enjoys those particular actions' fruits would clearly have those actions in common. Instead, however, Eckhart teaches that these particular actions are only good if the soul is united with God in the first place. Thus the more creaturely aspects of Eckhart's teaching must be engaged not by gradually or instrumentally ascending to God through progressively less creaturely means, but in the light of this immediate relation.

Here it is taken as granted that union with God is intended for, or at least through, the human soul, and that the human soul is uniquely suited for union because of its unique relation to God as made after God's image. Thus this chapter begins by looking at Eckhart's commentary on the seminal text for human as image of God in Genesis, then considering what God is to be imaged, exactly what the image is in the soul, and the structure of the

soul as it relates to the image. At each step themes within Eckhart's work that seem to complicate the matter will be considered, challenged, and incorporated into the thesis that understanding is the original image and place of union. In God, understanding is even higher than being. When God creates the soul in His image, He creates it as understanding. Moreover, God and the soul are most one in understanding because understanding is the highest form of oneness. Understanding exceeds other kinds of likeness because it transcends the image-exemplar distinction in thinking it.

2.2 The problem with image and creature

In the *Expositio Libri Genesis (InGen.1)*, the similarity of the soul to God is seen in the very process of creation. In agreement with Plato, God's creation of each individual creature is by its idea, the same as that by which the soul thinks it¹⁶. Although creatures can seem to come to be as the result of external actors and for external purposes, the creatures receive the whole of their "quiditates"¹⁷ ultimately through their ideas. Indeed, the creature is only able to proceed from the external action or fulfill the external purpose because of what they are in their idea – "Adhuc autem ipsa rerum ratio sic est principium, ut causam extra non habeat nec respiciat, sed solam rerum essentiam intra respicit."¹⁸ The Son plays a key role here as one of Eckhart's interpretations of the beginning in which God creates, here in the sense of the unified idea of everything. The Son is the image in the sense of prototype for all of creation, which means that all creation is a kind of imaging.

¹⁶ InGen.1, n. 5 (LW 1, 189).

¹⁷ Ibid. n. 3 (LW 1, 187): "Whatness," "being what they are."

¹⁸ Ibid. n. 4 (187): "But furthermore the idea of things is so the principle of things that it neither has nor refers to any external cause, but only to the essence within them."

That creation is by knowledge, and therefore understanding, explains why particular beings can come from divine simplicity: "Sed natura dei est intellectus, et sibi esse est intelligere, igitur producit res in esse per intellectum. Et per consequens: sicut suae simplicitati non repugnat intelligere plura, ita nec producere plura immediate"¹⁹. Understanding remains one in understanding each thing because it does not share the particularity of its object, instead understanding each under universal categories, above all under being. Furthermore there is no division even in the things as they are thought by understanding, as forms are not truly distinct in the Son: the form of fire is not separate from the form of water, but even their opposed natures like heating and cooling are one.²⁰

Under this interpretation, then, every creature is an image, and moreover an image of God through the Son. The soul distinguishes itself from other creatures not simply in imagehood but in the kind of image that it is, which Eckhart clearly states in commenting on "faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram"²¹ to be understanding. While the ideas of creatures are images of something *in* God, and are restricted by particular relations in nature between them, the understanding has no specific idea but rather is the image of God prior to the imaging of ideas, in and outside of the Son, although in a way analogically similar: "natura vero intellectualis ut sic potius habet ipsum deum similitudinem quam aliquid quod in deo sit ideale"²². Eckhart's language here seems to identify the understanding with God, noting that the understanding enables the human to

¹⁹ Ibid. n. 11 (194-195): "But the nature of God is understanding, and for God being is understanding, so God creates everything in being through understanding. And it follows from this that just as understanding understands many things without losing its simplicity, God creates many things immediately."

²⁰ Ibid. n. 11 (195).

²¹ Genesis 1:26 "Let us make man after our image."

²² InGen.1, n. 115 (LW 1, 270): "In truth the understanding nature as such has as likeness the divine self more than some idea in God."

contain all form in itself, as does God, and making it "capax perfectionum substantialium divinae essentiae, puta scientiae, sapientiae, praesidentiae, dispositionis entium et providentiae et gubernatorionis aliarum creaturarum"²³." Furthermore, just as the divine act of creation is not of individual forms but the being of the whole, so too is the proper object of understanding one, absolute being. "Intellectus enim, in quantum intellectus, est similitudo totius entis, in se continens universitatem entium, non hoc aut illud cum praecisione."²⁴

But surely the human is not so glorious in every respect. The understanding may image God as the unity prior to creation, but aspects of the human like body are particular, being more like the creatures that derive from particular ideas in the Son. This is expressed in Eckhart's treatment of the first person plural "faciamus,"²⁵ which, quoting Maimonides,²⁶ he says includes both God and the angelic understandings with whom God takes counsel in creating the human. What is lower in the human, like body, must be created by and for the sake of what is higher, understanding, so God must consider the composition of the members of the body through the angelic understandings in creating it.²⁷ The question of will is more difficult here, but still seems to pertain to the soul as image without being primary to its imagehood as understanding:

Dicunt expositores ex hoc verbo *faciamus* significari hominem pro sui dignitate prae aliis creaturis factum quasi ex consilio divino. Quod quidem verum est, si intelligamus hominem factum de consilio, quia fecit ipsum

²³ Ibid. n. 115 (271): "Capable of the substantial perfections of divine essence, namely of knowledge, wisdom, presidency and disposition over beings and providence and governance over other creatures."

²⁴ Ibid. n. 115 (272): "For intellect, inasmuch as it is intellect, is like the whole of being, containing in itself the universe of beings, not this or that more than the other."

²⁵ Gen. 1:26: "Let us make."

²⁶ For more on Eckhart's extensive use of Maimonides, see McGinn's introduction to *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher*, ed. McGinn, 15.

²⁷ InGen.1 n. 115 (LW 1, 273-274).

consiliativum, secundum illud Eccli. 15: 'deus ab initio constituit hominem et reliquit eum in manu consilii sui.'²⁸

Eckhart himself interprets the claim that God deliberated in making the human will as a metaphor to show how the human free will derives from God's free will. The free will still belongs to the particular act of the soul's creation, but also gives it god-like power, setting it apart from creatures because creatures are moved by external necessities while the soul is free to move itself and other creatures independently. In quoting John of Damascus Eckhart seems to affirm that the soul is image in being understanding, freely choosing, and having control over itself and its works, but at the same time this freedom is not comparable to the perfection of understanding. First, this is clear because Eckhart quotes Maimonides to say that this freedom is not the intention of the soul's creation, but rather on account of what was already true of it. "De hoc non sic intelligendum est, quasi deus 'creavit homines propter hoc, sed narravit naturam' hominis"²⁹ Second, this freedom is directed "ex se ipso forma sibi inhaerente,"³⁰ meaning that it pertains to the soul's particular creation, rather than the indistinction of the understanding above the forms it contains. Thus the will seems at best to be a secondary form of imaging and perhaps only a special creation that derives its uniqueness from understanding, like the body.

Thus according to Eckhart's account in *InGen.1*, both God and the soul share understanding as their nature, and derive from it their primacy over creation. Each creature

²⁸ Ibid. n. 120 (275-276) "Commentators say that by this word "let us make" it is meant that the human is made, on account of its status above other creatures, as if by a divine deliberation. This is indeed true, if we understand that the human is made by deliberation because it is itself deliberative, according to Ecclesiasticus 15: 'He Himself made man from the beginning, and left man in the hand of his own counsel.'"

²⁹ Ibid. n. 120 (276): "It is not so to be understood from this as if God 'created men for the sake of this, but describes his nature.'"

³⁰ Ibid. n. 120 (276): "Out of itself, from a form inhering in it."

is presided over by understanding in the idea from which it derives its being, first through the unity of the Son as idea of everything and then in a divided form as the idea of itself. Just as God creates every particular creature by imaging His own understanding through ideas, God creates the particularities of the human will and body on account of understanding, because the primacy among creatures that a free will gives reflects the primacy of understanding over all creatures. The soul's imaging God seems to be in understanding, which it shares in God's nature, thus providing a clear basis for union between the two.

In his systematic treatment of Eckhart's philosophy, however, Joseph Bach gives a very different interpretation of the divine image, arguing that Eckhart's image of God is an indescribably simple *Seelengrund* to which God is immediately present, and that Eckhart holds against both the Franciscan and his own Dominican scholastic traditions that understanding and will respectively are only the powers of this ground: "Die Gottähnlichkeit der Seele liegt nicht in ihren Kräften, sondern in ihrem Grunde. In dem Seelengrund (imago, mens) ist Gott unmittelbar."³¹ These powers of the soul are one in the ground of the soul but divided in their work, and thereby distinguished from it – there is no working in the image as ground of the soul. This *Seelengrund*, despite the difficulties in reconciling it with the *InGen.1*, is supported by many moments in Eckhart's work, perhaps the most notable such moment being the Predigt (Pr.) 52, *Beati pauperes spiritu*,

³¹ Bach, *Meister Eckhart: der Vater der deutschen Spekulation*, 83-84: "The God-likeness of the soul is not in its powers, but in its ground. In the ground of the soul (imago, mens) God is immediately present."

where Eckhart explicitly asserts against "etliche meister"³² that understanding and will are put on equal footing subordinate to a purer union with God:

Nû ist ein vrâge, war ane sælicheit allermeist lige. [...] wir sprechen, daz si niht enlige an bekennenne noch an minnenne; mêr: einez ist in der sêle, von dem vliuzet bekennen und minnen; daz enbekennet selber niht noch enminnet niht alsô als die krefte der sêle.³³

To support this interpretation Bach cites Pr.102, *Ubi est qui natus est rex Iudaeorum?* among other German sermons. Although this position does seem to break from the scholastic tradition attested in *InGen.1* with its extensive citations and discussions of authorities, it does not suffice to draw a divide between Eckhart's Latin and German works to explain it. Many other German sermons speak of the image as intellect, like such as Pr. 16b, *Quasi vas auri solidum*, in which the soul is most united with God in the understanding, as God's image and the highest power:

Hie ist got âne mittel in dem bilde, und daz bilde ist âne mittel in gote. [...] Hie ennimet daz bilde niht got, als er ein schepfer ist, sunder ez nimet in, als er ein vernünftic wesen ist, und daz edelste der natûre erbildet sich aller eigenlîchest in daz bilde.³⁴

It is denied that the image is identical with God here, noting instead that God is actually more noble in the soul than the soul in God. Given that God is understanding in the soul, Eckhart would seem to say that, as the divine understanding, God is higher than anything in the soul, presumably including both the understanding that defines the soul and any other nonunderstanding *Seelengrund*.

³² Pr. 52, (DW 2, 495): "Certain teachers."

³³Ibid. (495-496): "This is the question – where salvation most lies. [...] we say that it lies not in knowing nor loving, and moreover that something is in the soul from which both knowing and loving flow; it neither knows nor loves of itself as do the powers of the soul."

³⁴ Pr. 16b (DW 1, 268): "Here God is immediately present in the image, and the image immediately present in God. Here the image does not take God as creator, but takes God as God is and understanding nature, and the noblest of its nature fashions itself most properly to itself after God's image."

Rather than being simply opposed as different moments in Eckhart's career, or given unequal weight so that the one is ignored in favour of the other, it is necessary to find how these arguments work together, particularly as his pseudographers seem to have recognized this as a tension in need of resolution. In *Knowledge and Love*, for instance, a sermon attested by Jostes and added by Evans to what is otherwise mainly a translation of Pfeiffer's compilation, the usual set of arguments are made subordinating will to understanding and identifying knowledge with the Son before a more abstract idea of the ground of the soul is expressed.³⁵ Eckhart considers both the ground and the understanding as images of God, but where the ground corresponds to the Father, the understanding corresponds to the Son, and beyond those two pairs the will corresponds to the Holy Ghost. The ground of the soul is above understanding because it generates both understanding and will, thus transcending the understanding-will dichotomy that Eckhart seems to refute in Pr. 52.

Despite its neatness, this apocryphal sermon and many others like it cannot be accepted as actually resolving anything in Eckhart's own thought, particularly as this use of the trinity seems quite at odds with the clear place the Son is given in *InGen.1*. Its arguments are taken here only as giving some indication that these positions were recognized as being in need of synthesis, and some suggestion of how this synthesis might take place. The actual work of synthesizing these ideas and working out exactly how the soul images God, on the one hand as understanding and, on the other, as unknowable one will be done here, drawing on Eckhart's better-attested works and directed by key points of

³⁵ *Meister Eckhart: Works I*, trans. Evans, 116-118.

apparent ambiguity – first, what understanding is in God, second, what kinds of image the understanding and the ground are, and third, given its ambiguous state as a power of the soul seemingly similar to understanding in its capacity for godliness but rarely put on the same level by Eckhart himself, what the will is.

2.3 What the understanding is in God

As noted before from the *InGen. I*, God's creation of the world is intellectual, and God's perfect knowledge of all creatures as one is at the same time God's creation of all beings as one. Further, understanding is not simply an external activity by which created being comes to be, it is also vital to God's internal life as that through which the Son and Holy Ghost emanate. The Son proceeds out of the Father as Word and the idea of everything deriving from the understanding as thought, not, as in the Jostes sermon, as the understanding to the Father's superintellectual ground. Thus it seems natural, despite their distinction in human perception, to suggest that being and understanding are themselves one for God. On this point, Eckhart indeed argues in the answer to *Quaestio Parisiensis I: Utrum in deo sit idem esse et intelligere (QuPar. I)*.³⁶ He begins by arguing from divine simplicity that there can be no relations of cause and effect, power and act, or essence and existence in God. If understanding is like God's activity, and being like God's existence or the potential of that activity, as Eckhart seems by times to argue, then any interruption of the two as distinct would mean on one hand that God was partially imperfect or on the

³⁶ In terms of Eckhart's history and politics, de Libera, *Maître Eckhart et la mystique Rhénan*, 39-43 notes that although some scholars take the *Quaestiones* as differentiating Eckhart from the Dominicans and Thomas by unseating being as primary in God, Thomism at the time was defined less by the importance of being and more by the importance of intellect as opposed to will. Indeed, the only contemporary rebuttal to *QuPar. I* came from the Franciscan Duns Scotus.

other partially existent.³⁷ The claim that follows, however, is much more audacious: "Tertio ostendo quod non ita 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."³⁸ Inasmuch, then, as there can be any causal relationship within the divine simplicity, being is actually the subordinate.

Eckhart's initial arguments for putting understanding above being here seem to be simple appeals to authority, quoting "in principio erat verbum"³⁹ and "ego sum veritas"⁴⁰ from Scripture, but more than authority is at play in the appeal to such ideas as word, truth, and image. In human psychology a distinction can be made between thought things and real things, as false things can be imagined,⁴¹ although this only proves that the two are distinct, as it still implies that being precedes understanding as that to which it must appeal. Divine understanding does not exceed being by erring from it, with the strongest proof for being proceeding from understanding coming from an analysis of images and ideas:

Ens ergo in anima, ut in anima, non habet rationem entis et ut sic vadit ad oppositum ipsius esse. Sicut etiam imago in quantum huiusmodi est non ens, quia quanto magis consideras entitatem suam, tanto magis abducit a cognitione rei cuius est imago. Similiter, sicut alias dixi, si species quae est in anima, haberet rationem entis, per ipsam non cognosceretur res cuius est species; quia si haberet rationem entis, in quantum huiusmodi duceret in cognitionem sui et abduceret a cognitione rei cuius est species.⁴²

³⁷ QuPar.1, n. 1, 2 (LW 5, 37-39).

³⁸ Ibid. n. 4 (40): "Third I say that it now does not seem to me, that because God is God understands, but rather because God understands, God is, because God is both mind and understanding and understanding is the ground of being."

³⁹ John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word."

⁴⁰ John 14:6 "I am the truth."

⁴¹ QuPar.1, n. 7 (LW 5, 43).

⁴² Ibid. n. 7 (43-44): "For a being in the mind, as it is in the mind, does not have the idea of being and as such rushes to the opposite of being itself. Thus also an image, insofar as it is so, is not a being, for as much as it is thought as an image it ceases to represent that of which it is the image. Likewise, as I have said at other times, if the form in the soul had the idea of being, that of which it is the idea could not be thought through it; for if it did, insofar as it were so it would represent itself and not that of which it is the form."

This passage establishes a few things. First, in its first argument it treats being as belonging to the same category of things as images, words, and ideas – it, like the others, in itself shares nothing with that to which it is applied, so that the thinking of any particular is diametrically opposed to the thinking of its being. To be simply being without referent is as odd as being simply image, or simply idea. Second, it establishes thoughts that exceed being, because when images are thought as themselves, cease to be what they are because their being depends on being thought as different from what they are. By comparison, an unthinkable being cannot be found, and inasmuch as it is conceived, it only shows again the power of understanding to exceed its own being by recognizing and thus transcending the limit of its own power of recognition.

Note, however, that this is not a human attainment of divine understanding itself – first, the power of understanding to think images apart from the exemplars from which they receive their being that even in the human there can be some thought without being, but all being comes from God's understanding; second, the argument earlier in *QuPar. I* still holds that there can be no operation in God subordinate to God's substance, like a thought to understanding. Thus Eckhart concedes "Tertio accipio quod hic imaginatio deficit. Differt enim nostra scientia a scientia dei, quia scientia dei est causa rerum et scientia nostra est causata a rebus."⁴³ Nonetheless this argument indicates that it is perfect understanding that cannot be imagined, and, just as importantly, it establishes being and images as belonging properly to the understanding, subordinate to or equal to the Son.

⁴³ Ibid. n. 7 (44): "Third I accept that the imagination fails here. For our knowledge differs from the knowledge of God, because the knowledge of God is the cause of things and our knowledge is caused by things."

The distinction of being and understanding leads to the conclusion that God cannot truly be at all, as being is known through creatures. It is created, and understanding is its cause. The effect cannot exist in the cause as effect, as then being would be its own cause. Indeed, the beingless image is precisely the way in which things come to be, as is attested by the "omnia per ipsum facta sunt."⁴⁴ But what is to be made of that name of God even better known, "sum qui sum?"⁴⁵ In the *Expositio Libri Exodi (InEx)*, "sum qui sum" is interpreted, much in the same way as at the beginning of *QuPar.I*, as about divine simplicity and perfection – quoting Avicenna, Eckhart distinguishes God from other beings in that God's only quality is that He is.⁴⁶ A slew of fairly traditional arguments follows from this premise. Because God is defined by being, He is the only necessary existent. Because God is the only necessary existent, all other existents must come from God. Likewise qualities that are associated with God, like goodness, wisdom, and life, must all derive from God's pure being.

Although this line of arguments' initial emphasis on purity seems to contradict its conclusion with the whole diversity of creation and divine perfections, Eckhart takes the repetition of "sum"⁴⁷ to indicate that the purity is affirmation's excluding all negativity from itself. Pure being can give rise to all diversity because it is so pure that it is pure even of the restriction that it be limited to itself. Because God exists without respect to quality or relation to other beings, He is no more defined by lacking other beings than He is defined by having them. Thus God's pure being transcends its purity and affirms beings outside of

⁴⁴Ibid. n. 4 (41). John 1:3 "All things were made through [the Word]."

⁴⁵ Ex. 3:14 "I am who I am."

⁴⁶ InEx, n. 15 (LW 2, 21)

⁴⁷ Ibid. n. 16 (LW 2, 21): "I am."

itself, giving birth to the Trinity and creation. This creation through pure being is metaphorically described as God boiling in Himself, then boiling out into creation.⁴⁸ The closest the discussion comes to understanding here is the mention of wisdom⁴⁹ among God's divine perfections, and the argument strongly suggests that God's wisdom derives from His being rather than the reverse.⁵⁰ There is a different interpretation of this passage in *QuPar.1*, however. *QuPar.1*'s interpretation shows that the passage only metaphorically predicates being of God.

Like *InEx*, *QuPar.1* interprets "sum qui sum" as excluding from God any sort of quiddity or character. Its interpretation differs from *InEx*'s, however, because it does not take the verb "sum" as literally implying actual being, necessary or otherwise. Instead, *QuPar.1* takes the relative pronoun "qui" as the operant word.⁵¹ Relative pronouns receive their definitions from their antecedents, having no content in themselves, but in the formula "sum qui sum" the "qui" has no antecedent at all, and therefore no positive content. No particular quality or name can describe God, other than Himself, not even being. "[S]um qui sum" does not describe being so much as it describes the purity of being in which God is totally independent of all definitions, creatures, and relations:

Ita dominus volens ostendere puritatem essendi esse in se dixit: 'ego sum qui sum'. Non dixit simpliciter 'ego sum', sed addidit: 'qui sum', Deo ergo non competit esse, nisi talem puritatem voces esse.⁵²

⁴⁸ Ibid. n. 16 (21-22).

⁴⁹ Ibid. n. 21 (28): "Wisdom."

⁵⁰ Ibid. n. 21 (27-28).

⁵¹ *QuPar.1*, n. 9 (LW 5, 45).

⁵² Ibid. n. 9 (45): "Thus the Lord, wanting to show the purity of being in himself, said 'I am who I am.' He did not say simply 'I am,' but added 'who I am.' Therefore being is not in God, unless by that you mean the purity of being."

This corresponds to the pure being that boils over in *InEx*. Here, however, it is the understanding that is pure:

Sicut enim dicit Aristoteles quod oportet visum esse abscolorem, ut omnem colorem videat, et intellectum non esse formarum naturalium, ut omnes intelligat, sic etiam ego nego ipsi deo ipsum esse et talia, ut sic causa omnis esse et omnia praehabeat, ut sicut non negatur deo quod suum est, sic negetur eidem quod suum non est.⁵³

Intellect's divinity, and its claim to the "sum qui sum," is its emptiness of any being and priority over it. Where being has to be fully present in creation, and in some sense to take on its particularities, understanding is always over and above whatever is thought, at once comprehending it all but never by losing itself to the idea.

2.4 Understanding and oneness

In *Maître Eckhart: Le procès de l'Un*, Pasqua argues for a distinction in Eckhart's theology between the pure Godhead, above all thoughts and distinctions, and the distinct, thinkable names and perfections that are often associated with God, like the Trinity, being, and understanding. The Godhead is the oneness of the Trinity. It is also the source of understanding, and through understanding, of being. This Godhead, inoperant, and so distinct as to be called not even God, is the true goal of Eckhart's mysticism.⁵⁴ Likewise the Godhead is not dependent in the Trinity, but rather the Trinity depends on it, in order that the persons may be one while still being distinct while the Godhead remains totally

⁵³ Ibid. n. 12 (47, 48): "For just as Aristotle says that, vision must be colourless in order that it see all colours, understanding too must not have natural forms, in order that it understand them all. And I deny God being itself and all such things in order that as cause of all being he has everything before it is, and that just as nothing is denied God which is his, may all be denied the same which is not his."

⁵⁴ Pasqua, *Maître Eckhart et le Procès de l'Un*, 33-34.

indistinct in itself. Understanding, according to Pasqua, is intermediary, retaining some priority over being in God while remaining subordinate to the Godhead:

Tourné vers son origine, l'Intellect <<voit>> le non-être de l'Un qui se confond avec la Dêité, tourné vers le bas, il <<voit>> le néant des créatures alors même que l'Être surgit auquel Dieu s'identifie : on reconnaît le schéma plotinien du passage hypostatique de la monade à la dyade, de l'Un-qui-n'est-pas à l'Un-qui-est, c'est-à-dire au *Noûs* qui rassemble en lui tout ce qui est.⁵⁵

Although Pasqua acknowledges that his position is contradicted by other scholars and, seemingly, by Eckhart himself, he maintains that understanding itself cannot be confused with the Godhead because the Godhead is ineffable. In places where Eckhart seems to identify God and understanding, Pasqua argues that Eckhart is not referring to the Godhead that precedes God's divinity, but to God's essence.⁵⁶

It is unclear, however, whether the distinction between Godhead as unity and understanding as God is really valid here. After all, the understanding itself has been shown to contain no being, and, as was seen in the commentary on Genesis, is the basis both for the unity of creation and for God's unity in creating. Pasqua's seeking a level of abstraction above understanding can be chalked up to drawing a hard distinction between understanding as that which contains thoughts, and the purity of understanding, which is totally one and ineffable. In *InGen*, Eckhart does not oppose understanding's unity to its thinking, but argues that understanding retains its simplicity even as it thinks the ideas of creation.⁵⁷ Indeed, just as understanding contains thoughts without being thought, Pasqua's

⁵⁵ Ibid. 38: "Turned towards its origin, the understanding "sees" the nonbeing of the One which joins with the Godhead, turned downward, it "sees" the emptiness of the creatures as being rises to that with which God is identified: one sees the Plotinian schema of the hypostatic motion of the monad to the dyad, of the nonbeing One to the One that is, that is to the *Nous* which gathers in it all that it is."

⁵⁶ Ibid. 43.

⁵⁷ *InGen* n. 11 (LW 1, 194-195).

unity-as-Godhead is the source of distinctions without becoming indistinct.⁵⁸ Thus being associated with thought should not preclude understanding's unity.

Both Bach and Pasqua subordinate the understanding to the unity of God because understanding is a work. If understanding is an external act of thinking or knowing, then, God cannot be perfectly one in depending on distinct thoughts. As has been seen at the start of *QuPar.1*, Eckhart shares this concern. This must be taken not as proof that the Godhead is not understanding, however, but rather that understanding is not an operation at all. This is reflected in his discussions of the generation of the Word and creation from understanding, which avoid the language of operation or any other sort of change of state or relation to the external. In *InEx*, treatment of *sum qui sum*, as was seen before, both creation and the Trinity come from the boiling of divine purity in which the distinction of positive and negative collapses, but neither emerge from this purity as the result of any intention or as adding anything to it. Rather, the boiling is totally reflexive: "Vita [...] qua res in se ipsa intumescens se profundit primo in se toto, quodlibet sui in quodlibet sui, antequam effundat et ebulliat extra."⁵⁹ Both the Trinity and creation have this "boiling over" as their origin, but the boiling itself relates only to itself, and is in no way affected by what derives from it. Thus God creates creatures without working, and this should be taken as the model for how understanding thinks thoughts.

In the answer to *Quaestio Parisiensis 2: Utrum intelligere angeli sit suum esse* (*QuPar.2*), which implicitly discusses the understanding in both the human and angelic

⁵⁸ Pasqua, *Maître Eckhart et le Procès de l'Un*, 39.

⁵⁹ *InEx* n. 17 (LW 2, 22): "Life [...] by which a thing, rising into itself, pours itself forth first into the whole of itself, all into all, before it pours and boils outwards."

creatures, understanding is referred to as operation, but in such ways that it is set apart from operations as they are generally known. First, it shares nothing with its object, meaning that where most operations are by depending on their objects for being, understanding cannot be;⁶⁰ second, the understanding is not qualified by ideas as a subject with accidents would be, but rather contains them as their place.⁶¹ Although understanding is named here as operating by coming to understand objects and ideas, this seems only to apply to understanding in angels and humans – when Eckhart talks about understanding having an object, he says "Ergo intelligere *quod* [emphasis added] est ab obiecto,"⁶² a relative clause which may be taken either as repeating a universal fact by way of aside or as further defining the understanding discussed. At the end of the answer, too, the divine understanding is called that from which all being comes while the human understanding is that which is caused from beings.⁶³

Thus there is no need to draw a distinction between understanding and the perfect unity of the Godhead, because understanding as Eckhart conceives of it is not an act that is at all removed from its agent, particularly as it occurs in God. It is not knowledge that derives from something, nor is it even some sort of imaginative knowledge that fabricates something, rather it is the ineffable, underlying awareness by which things are known to be or not to be, never leaving itself or losing itself to its knowledge but coming into and having the whole of knowledge through having itself. This is known in the human understanding, albeit imperfectly, as creatures are continually being related to it so that it

⁶⁰ QuPar.2, n. 2, 3 (LW 5, 50).

⁶¹ Ibid. n. 5 (51).

⁶² Ibid. n. 3 (50): "Therefore understanding *which* is by its object."

⁶³ Ibid. n. 10 (54).

does not seem to stand on its own. Nonetheless it is perfectly true in God. Understanding is above being because images, relations, and being itself are understood by not-being, and, in underlying everything without limit but remaining in itself without alteration, it is perfectly pure and one, thus satisfying Pasqua's insistence on the primacy of one as the Godhead. In any case, however, the oneness of the Godhead is knowable ultimately through understanding only, and understanding does not so much know particulars as understand indefinitely, so there is no real basis to distinguish the two within or without. Eckhart himself admits to taking like liberties in his terminology: "Et si tu intelligere velis vocare esse, placet mihi."⁶⁴

From the arguments in *QuPar.1* that the Godhead is pure understanding, in *InEx* that all creatures and the Trinity itself proceed from this purity, and in *InGen.1* that creatures are distinct ideas thought through the Son, a relatively clear picture of the God-creature relation can be drawn. Creatures proceed out of the Godhead like thoughts out of the understanding in which they are grounded, deriving their particular existences from His simplicity while that simplicity remains one with itself and undivided by them. Creatures relate to God as His images, receiving their whole being from Him and adding nothing of their own to it. A creature exists only insofar as it is in God. Because the creature adds nothing of itself to itself apart from what it receives from God, insofar as it is a creature apart from God, the creature is nothing at all. *QuPar.1*'s image-argument, however, shows that even creatures insofar as they are pure creature apart from God are in God through the power of understanding. Because God is understanding before God is being, not only

⁶⁴ *QuPar.1*, n. 8 (LW 5, 45): "And if you want to call understanding being, that would please me equally."

whatever is, but whatever is thinkable remains in God. God includes in His perfect oneness even such beingless things as images apart from their originals, even though an image, when considered apart from its original, is not an image at all. Creatures insofar as they are pure creatures are similarly thinkable but without being, separated from God as their source. If images as images can still be in understanding, then, creatures as creatures can likewise still be in God, even though they are defined by the absence of God. God's universality cannot be qualified by anything in creatures, not even by their directly negating His universality. The importance of this self-negating universality will be shown in the chapter to come.

2.5 The image in the human

In response to Bach's claim, and those like it, that the image in the soul simply negates all operation, creatureliness, and distinction in its ground, a closer examination of the texts referring to this reveals that God in the ground is only occasionally called "image" – indeed, we will see that what makes this transformation so extraordinary is that it is without distinction, and therefore exactly not image, but that ultimate perfection which the image in the soul anticipates. Rather than "likeness" or "image," this is referred to in terms like the "birth of God in the soul," or "resting of the soul in God." Both this and the image are presented as distinct in Pr. 102, *Ubi est qui est rex Iudaeorum*:

Got ist in allen dingen wesentliche, wirkliche und gewaltliche, m̄r: er ist alleine gebernde in der s̄le. Wan alle cr̄at̄uren sint ein vuoztaphe gotes, m̄r: diu s̄le ist natiurliche n̄ch gote gebildet. Diz bilde muoz gezieret und volbr̄ht werden mit dirre geburt. [...] Des enwerdent die cr̄at̄uren niht enpfenlich, in den daz bilde gotes niht enist, wan der s̄le bilde geh̄eret sunderliche ze dirre ewigen geburt, diu eigenliche und sunderliche in der

sêle geschihet und geborn wirt von dem vater in dem grunde und in dem inwendigsten der sêle, dar nie bilde îngelûhte noch nie kraft îngeluoete.⁶⁵

The natural image of God, associated here with the powers of the soul, is not the pinnacle of Eckhart's mysticism but rather anticipatory of it. It may ground the soul in the sense of being that by which and for which it is created, but not in the sense of being fully united with God prior to its creation as image.

In *Daz buoch der götlichen trœstunge* (*BgT*), Eckhart explains that the relation of the image to unity with God as a sort of perfection – likeness is an imperfect kind of oneness, because it is like by being one with that which it is like, but differs from oneness in remaining distinct from that which it is like. The more perfect an image or likeness is, the more closer it comes to oneness. Perfect likeness is not likeness at all, but unity, and from the perspective of unity, likeness is simply distinction:

Und dar umbe hân ich gesprochen, daz diu sêle in glîchnisse hazzet und enminnet niht glîchnisse als in ir und durch sie, sunder si minnet sie durch daz ein, daz in ir verborgen ist und wâr 'vater' ist, ein begin âne allen begin, 'aller' 'in himel und in erde.'⁶⁶

This relation is dynamic, and grounded in the *BgT*'s contention that likes are attracted to likes.⁶⁷ Because the soul is like God, it wants to cease to be like God and become one with God. The more the soul is made in God's image, the more it strives to become one with God and to cease to be an image.

⁶⁵ Pr. 102 (DW 4, 410): "God is in all things in essence, activity, and power, but he gives birth in the soul alone, because, although all creatures are vestiges of God, the soul's very nature is formed in God's image. This image must be perfected and adorned when God gives birth in it. [...] Those creatures that are not made in the image of God cannot receive this birth, for the Father gives birth in the ground and the innermost parts of the soul, where no image has shone and no power has seen."

⁶⁶ *BgT*, n. 21 (DW 5, 34): "And thus I have said that the soul in likeness hates, and does not love, likeness as in and through itself, but loves it through the one that is hidden in it and is its true 'father,' a beginning without beginning, 'of everything' 'on heaven and on earth.'"

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* (18).

The *BgT* begins with an explanation of likeness to God, but that likeness is not understanding. Furthermore, Eckhart never calls this kind of likeness an image. In pt. 1, where Eckhart first establishes that likeness is a kind of unity, one can be like God in virtue through such divine perfections as goodness, justice, truth, and wisdom, by being good, just, true, and wise.⁶⁸ Insofar as one is just, one receives the whole nature of justice not as created, but as begotten, using the same language of generation that describes the relation of Father to Son – the good as good, Eckhart says, is not a just man, or a just angel, or any sort of creation at all. Besides this kind of identity, in the same passage Eckhart discusses the powers of the soul, principally will and intellect,⁶⁹ which in the *InGen. I* are the image of God themselves but here are described as the way in which the likeness of the just to justice is accomplished. These powers uniquely bridge the gap between the transcendent justice and the creature that receives it, as they are powers of the soul but "mit nihte niht gemeine enhânt"⁷⁰ and belong neither to place nor to time. Note that this parallels the distinction of imagehood in the creation of soul and the creation of creatures – while the likeness of virtue is the perfection of particular divine qualities, just as the Son contains all creatures in one as the perfect idea, but still as creature, the latter is by the pure unity from which those virtues proceed.

Although they are the ones explicitly likened to God here, there are other problems with treating these virtue-likenesses as the divine image proper. First, they do not belong to the soul as soul – as seen before, with respect to justice the just is precisely not human.

⁶⁸ Ibid. n. 7 (10).

⁶⁹ Ibid. n. 8 (11).

⁷⁰ Ibid. n. 8 (11): "Have nothing in common with nothing."

Second, they are variable – the just may be more or less just, and in the way that one is like justice one might as well be unlike justice. There may be some, still created in God's image, who are not like God in this respect at all. Thus this likeness cannot belong to the soul as created image. The variability of this likeness is further showcased in the case of the godly person who, becoming aware of their own capacity for selfishness, is ashamed for their creatureliness on account of their non-creatureliness.⁷¹ The will and understanding, however, remain constant throughout these variations – no matter whether a man is just or unjust, for instance, he is so through the same power of the will to have any desire. Thus the will and the understanding are more like the divine image in belonging to the soul's creation, rather than to a particular perfection that the soul can have or lack.

2.6 The image-relation

So what separates the likeness of the good to goodness from the likeness of understanding to God? Wackernagel points out in *Ymagine Denudari* a peculiarity of Eckhart's use of the word "bilde" in German – compared to the Latin "imago" and "exemplar," among many other words it is used to translate, in the "bilde" of Eckhart's original German there is no distinction between image as that which portrays the image, or in modern German the "Abbild," and the original image portrayed in the former, or Urbild.⁷² This is a case of autoantonymy, a phenomenon in translation wherein a word like Latin "altum" seems to have two opposed meanings like "high" and "deep," but actually has the one meaning of degree respecting two complementary extremes, like "far

⁷¹ Ibid. n. 12-13 (19).

⁷² Wackernagel, *Ymagine Denudari: éthique de l'image et métaphysique de l'abstraction chez Maître Eckhart*, 16.

vertically." Rather than being either the image or the exemplar, the bilde is the difference and communication between the two. Not only does the image take all its being from the exemplar, but the exemplar is fully in the image, as is shown in the *Expositio Sancti Evangelii secundum Iohannem (InIoh)*:

Rursus quinto ex dictis patet quod imago est in suo exemplari. Nam ibi accipit totum suum esse. Et e converso exemplar, in quantum exemplar est, in sua imagine est, eo quod imago in se habeat totum esse illius, Ioh. 14: 'ego in patre, et pater in me est.'⁷³

Thus the good really is goodness in the sense of the two sharing their whole being, just as the Son derives the ideas of all creation from the Father while being united with the Father. But what about the exemplar-image relation itself? Does it belong to the being of either? And does the same go for the powers of the soul?

Given that God is the exemplar and the soul the image, teaching that the latter receives the full nature of the former seems to imply the heresy that humans are naturally uncreated and divine. Eckhart defended himself against such accusations of heresy *Processus contra Magistrum Eckhardum (ProcCol)*. In *ProcCol. I*, to refute the accusation that the *BgT* teaches that the human simply becomes God, he uses three premises to explain the importance of the qualifier "in quantum" in "bonus, in quantum bonus,"⁷⁴ translating "der guote, als verre sô er quot ist"⁷⁵. The first premise defines "in quantum" as excluding from the term everything not formally proper to it – for instance, although God's understanding and being are one, the activities are determined by the forms through which

⁷³ InIoh n. 23-24 (LW 3, 19): "Fifthly, from what has been said it is clear that the image is in its exemplar. For there it receives its whole being. And on the other hand, the exemplar, inasmuch as it is exemplar, is in its image, by the image having in itself the exemplar's whole being, John 14: 'I am in the Father, the Father is in me.'"

⁷⁴ ProcCol.1 n. 81 (LW 5, 277).

⁷⁵ BgT (DW 5, 9): "The good, insofar as he is good."

they come, e.g. while in God understanding and being are the same, God understands evil through the understanding but is not evil through being.⁷⁶ The good man, then, is united with God through goodness only insofar as he is good and not a man. The second premise is that the good “in quantum” good really is one with goodness, but where this oneness is univocal in the Trinity, it is analogical between God and the God's image.⁷⁷ Things that are univocally like share the same being, but things that are analogically like have different modes of being, with the one depending on the other. The good man depends on God's goodness for his goodness – just as a healthy man's urine is not healthy in itself, but is healthy because it represents the health of the man who produced it, so too the good man only has goodness by imaging God's goodness.⁷⁸ Analogical likeness is still a kind of unity. The analogical image receives the whole of the exemplar's meaning as an image and therefore can itself be an exemplar to other images, as when a good man images God's goodness to others through good acts. The exemplar “in quantum” exemplar also depends on its image in order to be an exemplar. Nonetheless the exemplar and image remain different in that the shared form that constitutes the image is proper to the exemplar but received in the image.

This is further elaborated in the third premise, where the exemplar is considered not under the form which it exemplifies, but *in quantum* exemplar. This is given in a syllogism: because the acting and the begetting (of which the exemplar is an instance) lends all that is in it to the act and to the begotten,⁷⁹ and the begetting, *in quantum* begetting, does

⁷⁶ ProcCol.1 n. 81 (LW 5, 277).

⁷⁷ Ibid. n. 82 (278).

⁷⁸ Davies, *Meister Eckhart: Mystical Theologian*, 103-106.

⁷⁹ ProcCol.1 n. 83 (278).

not receive its nature from anything else and is therefore not begotten,⁸⁰ the begetting and begotten *in quantum* themselves are one thing, although they remain two in relation.⁸¹

Eckhart also addresses the relation of oneness to otherness in images when he comments on the commandment against images in *InEx*, where he notes the tension between this position and that of Genesis. Before showing how God and creature are unlike and how they are like, he finally argues that their likeness and unlikeness are most closely associated: "Rursus etiam nihil tam dissimile et simile conjunctim alteri – de tertio – quam deus et creatura."⁸² Eckhart begins this argument by showing the circular relationship of distinction and indistinction⁸³ – indistinction or sameness are by definition indistinct from everything, including distinction, but in another respect are distinguished from distinction because they lack all distinction. Likewise, because God's perfection is fundamentally opposed variation in degree, to become more like God is only to show how unlike God one is in being more or less like God.⁸⁴ Then it moves on to arguments about the relation of idea to thing, fittingly, as in Genesis it is this through which the God-creature relation is established.⁸⁵ That the idea is at once not the thing and that by which the thing is the thing is illustrated with three examples – the heat which, fully present in fire, makes fire fire, while existing only potentially in the sun and without defining it;⁸⁶ colour as it is painted on a wall and as it is in the eye, so that the more the eye had colour in the sense that the

⁸⁰ Ibid. n. 84 (278).

⁸¹ Ibid. n. 85 (279).

⁸² Ibid. n. 117 (112): "Then again, nothing is so jointly like and unlike than God and creature."

⁸³ Ibid. n. 118 (112, 113).

⁸⁴ Ibid. n. 119 (113).

⁸⁵ Ibid. n. 120 (113, 114).

⁸⁶ Ibid. n. 123 (116).

wall had it, the less it would see colour in the wall;⁸⁷ and finally, the relation of the Father to the Son, who are the same: "et tamen pater ipse non is qui filius nec paternitas est filiatio, sed magis opponuntur."⁸⁸ In *Théologie négative et Connaissance de Dieu chez Maître Eckhart*, Lossky argues that this example, as a pure distinction without any content other than itself, is the paradigmatic instance of likeness in difference for Eckhart.⁸⁹

The good creature, although created as apart from the pure simplicity of God in being a creature, for practical purposes is goodness itself in being good. It remains distinct, however, under the relationship of begetter and begotten. Moreover, it is clear that this distinction of relation is only possible through understanding, as evidenced not only from its presence in the generation of the Trinity and of creation through its ideas in *InGen*, but from the relation of images and likeness to understanding. The image belongs to understanding most properly because the image as image does not exist outside of understanding, as in *QuPar.1*. What is shared between the *exemplar* and *imago* is above thinghood, as are the *exemplar* and the *imago* themselves. Thus understanding is that through and from which all other images are, and therefore the primary image in the soul. It may even be called the "exemplar of exemplars" as in the oneness and purity of being that overcomes the image-distinction fully contains exemplarhood and is the basis for all other likeness-relationships. In *Sermo (S.) 29, Deus unus est*, there is also precedent given for the motion of likeness toward oneness discussed in the *BgT*. After establishing divine

⁸⁷ Ibid. n. 125 (116-117).

⁸⁸ Ibid. n. 126 (117): "And yet the Father himself is not he who the Son is, nor is Fatherhood Sonhood, but they are more opposed."

⁸⁹ Lossky, *Théologie négative et Connaissance de Dieu chez Maître Eckhart*, 275. Duclow, "Whose Image is This?" 24, also sees the relation of Son to Father as the paradigmatic instance of the image-exemplar relation.

simplicity in the first half of the sermon and that God's oneness is understanding, Eckhart argues that such concepts as oneness, likeness, image, and relation "non sunt propriae nisi in deo sive in divinis."⁹⁰ After arguing that all follow unity, and therefore God, Eckhart's second argument is that unity can only be known in creatures through understanding:

Secundo, quia omnia husmodi dicuntur unuin multis, quod nusquam est et nunquam nisi in intellectu, nec est, sed intelligitur. Igitur ubi esse non est ipsum intelligere, nunquam est aequalitas. Sed in deo ipsum est esse quod intelligere solum.⁹¹

Thus understanding is the proper place of images, and that which exceeds the exemplar-image relation by containing it. But images, according to the account of the *ProcCol.1*, are still like their exemplars only by analogy. And is understanding not also what was originally argued to be the image of God in the soul? If understanding exceeds this relation, must it be separated from God as image by relation, as was true for goodness in *ProcCol.1*?

In *Living without Why*, Connolly reads Eckhart as allowing for some sort of genuine univocity between the human and divine understandings:

God's Word or Image will also essentially be *intelligere*, intellect, and the term will be used univocally of both God and Word. Eckhart's audacious claim is that an aspect of the human understanding – and indeed a particular use of that aspect – is identical with, ie, non-distinct from, this Word and therefore from its Source.⁹²

Given that God is understanding, that God creates the soul as understanding in the divine image, and that the soul is united with God as understanding in its ground, this position makes intuitive sense. But it must be stressed that this can at best be said of an *aspect* of

⁹⁰ S. 29 n. 302 (LW 4, 268): "Are not actual unless in God or in the Godhead."

⁹¹ Ibid. n. 303 (269): "Second, because all are in this way said to be one in the many, which is nowhere and never except in the understanding, and is not, but is understood. Thus where being is not understanding, there is no sameness. But in God alone being is what understanding is."

⁹² Connolly, *Living without Why: Meister Eckhart's Critique of the Medieval Concept of Will*, 145.

the human intellect, as the understanding in which the soul is image cannot be identical with the divine, empty understanding in which the soul is united with God. First, this is because unity with God in the ground admits nothing of image, and second, because the understanding in the human is obviously short of perfection. The human understanding does not render perfect knowledge. It often makes mistakes, and the knowledge it does have, it learns from creatures. Most fundamentally, where for God being is a creation of the divine understanding, Eckhart says in *QuPar.2* that the human understanding depends on beings: "Cum igitur nostrum intelligere ab ente causetur, descendit ab ente et per consequens tendit in non-ens nec esse habet."⁹³

In the *ProcCol*, one of the most frequently addressed topics is whether anything in the soul, and above all intellect, is the uncreated image, prompting Eckhart in explaining later passages often to simply refer the reader to earlier explanations. These explanations deny that there is anything uncreated in the imperfect human creature while still allowing for the uniqueness of understanding in principle. In the explanation of a claim in *Pr. 13*, *Vidi super montem Syon agnum stantem*, a distinction is drawn between the Son as true image, and the soul, which is only created after God's image and likeness. The Son's understanding, is a perfect, uncreated image of God, but the soul has a created understanding and is only like this image:

Filium quidem suum unigenitum quem genuit, qui est imago, vestivit (se ipso, non secundum se ipsum), ut esset increatus, immensus, qualis et pater; hominem autem, utpote creatum, fecit ad imaginem, non imaginem, et 'vestivit' non se ipso, sed 'secundum se' ipsum.

⁹³ *QuPar.2*, n. 10 (LW 54): "Since our understanding is caused by a being, it descends from the being and, by consequence, tends toward non-being and has no being."

Quod autem in eodem articulo dicitur quod "intellectui est ita praesens illud quod est ultra mare sicut locus sui corporis," utique verum est, quia intellectus abstrahit ab hic et nunc.⁹⁴

In other explanations, the understanding in itself retains the power to be uncreated through its purity of being, although it does not achieve this in the human soul: "[...] verum est quod anima intellectiva ad imaginem dei et genus dei, Act. 17; quod si ipsa esset purus intellectus, qualis esset deus solus, esset increata nec esset anima."⁹⁵ This thought is taken the furthest in the claim that all that the Father gives to the Son's human nature, including unity with the Godhead, is given to the soul. Eckhart explains this by dissociating humanity from the individual soul and the giving of that humanity from the individual soul's receiving it.⁹⁶

The human understanding, insofar as it is pure understanding and not human, is uncreated and one with God's. God's understanding and human understandings differ not by mode of being, but by perfection. While the good man depends on goodness outside of himself, the understanding in me, *in quantum* pure understanding, is the same understanding as in you and the same understanding as in God. But the "in quantum" excludes all impurity from the understanding – "in quantum" in the human, the understanding is impure, because it depends on being and on creatures. Granted, *QuPar.1* shows that understanding extends beyond being in the thinking of image insofar as it is

⁹⁴ ProcCol.1 n. 137, 139 (299): "For his only begotten Son, whom he begat, who is image, he clothed as himself, not after himself, so that he is uncreated, immense, like the Father also is; man, however, as created, he made in his image, and 'clothed' not as himself, but after himself.

What, however, is said in the same passage, that "that power is present to the understanding which is as much over the sea as the place of its own body" is certainly true, because the understanding is abstracted from here and now."

⁹⁵ ProcCol.2, n. 18 (322): "It is true that the understanding soul is after the image and kind of God, Acts 17; and that if the soul were pure understanding, as only God is, it would be uncreated and not the soul."

⁹⁶ ProcCol.1 n. 139, 140 (299-300).

image, but this only works for those things, like image and truth, that exist in understanding while corresponding to being. When these things are thought as correspondences, the understanding that corresponds to being takes the place of being, and understanding exists on its own. This shows that there is understanding *in quantum* understanding apart from beings, but in the divine mind the image would be known first and all beings second. In fact, the purity of understanding that God and the soul share knows beings without any thinking at all. If and how the understanding can purify itself of the human is to be discussed in the next chapter.

2.7 What the will is

The will, however, seems in the *BgT* to feature more prominently in likeness to God than the understanding. After all, the good do not understand goodness but will it. The *BgT*'s transformation of the image, too, appears as a transformation of the will – drawing on Seneca and other philosophers, Eckhart argues not only for willing perfections like justice and truth, but for willing all things that happen because they are God's will. Because unity with God is the ultimate goal, the perfectly good love the good not insofar as it is good, but insofar as it is the will of God:

Ein sôgetân mensche is sô einwillic mit gote, daz er allez daz wil, daz got wil und in der wîse, sô ez got wil. Und dar umbe, wan got etlîche wîs wil, daz ich ouch sünde hân getân, sô enwölte ich nicht, daz ich sie nicht enhæte getân, wan sô wirdet gotes wille 'in der erden' daz ist in missetât, 'als in dem himel,' daz ist im woltât.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ BgT, (22): "Such a man is so one in will with God, that he wills all that which God wills, and in the way that God wills it. Therefore, if God in any way wills even that I have sinned, then I will not will that I had not done so, so that God's will may be done 'on earth,' that is evil deeds, 'as in heaven' that is in good deeds."

If wills naturally will the good, then they should not be able to will evil – especially if they are perfect. But Eckhart also speaks of the perfect will as willing its own imperfection: "Dar umbe wunschte sant Paulus, daz er von gote gesundert wære durch got und durch gotes willen und durch gotes êre."⁹⁸ In these moments, the will attains the *puritas essendi* of the understanding in union with God, losing its particularity and, like the understanding thinking image as image, negating its own object in willing it.

Nonetheless, Eckhart rarely describes the will as equal to understanding. There is certainly no claim that God is good before being to compare with the claim of understanding in *QuPar.1*, and *InGen.1* discusses the free will as an accident of understanding at the end of its commentary on image. He is more explicit about the subordination of the will to the understanding in several Latin works, including *InIoh* and his answer in *Processus Coloniensis 2 (ProcCol.2)* concerning a non-extant sermon: "Verius tamen est quod libertas sit in intellectu et ut in radice, in voluntatem autem formaliter. [...] Intellectus autem pertinet ad rationale per essentiam, voluntas autem, utpote appetitus, pertinet ad rationale per participationem."⁹⁹ The will does not access God directly, but through the understanding, as where the will follows God under one of the divine names, namely Good, the understanding knows God as God is. Although God is simple, and therefore wholly good, the will only loves God *in quantum* good, while the understanding is actually what makes the will's loving good possible – will, as seen before, does not distinguish the cause from the thing, while understanding knows both and creates

⁹⁸ Ibid. n. 14 (21): "Therefore Paul wished that he be separated from God by God and God's will and God's honour."

⁹⁹ ProcCol.2 n. 49 (LW 5, 328): "It is more true that freedom is in understanding, and there as in its root, but in the will only formally. [...] The understanding pertains to the rational through its essence, but the will, as appetite, pertains to the rational through participation."

the latter. Indeed, the understanding knows God as good before the will loves God as good.¹⁰⁰

The negative, self-transcending power of the will in the *BgT*, moreover, does not preclude the superiority of the understanding over it. Because the will does not distinguish the *imago* from the *exemplar*, there is no way that it on its own can move from the one to the other. Likewise, if the human were pure will, even good will, it would not cease to be human. Rather, the will transcends itself in a union seated and established in the understanding – where the understanding is pure and without even being, the will can adopt a perspective above good and things where it practically ceases to be will at all. Thus the perfected will proceeds from the perfected understanding just as the human free will proceeded from its understanding, perhaps not being equal to understanding in that union but nonetheless being preserved to the extent that there is a divine will to be united with.

2.8 Conclusion

The human capacity to be united with God is their shared purity of understanding. Eckhart sets this out in *InGen.1*, where God creates the soul in God's image as understanding, and then demonstrates it in other Latin works by linking understanding and unity. In *QuPar.1*, understanding exceeds being because, in thinking image as image, it is capable of thinking thoughts that are once beingless and true. This association with likeness then becomes the basis for human perfection and motion towards God in the *BgT* – the soul, in desiring its like, desires oneness as the ground of its likeness.

¹⁰⁰ InIoh, n. 675 (LW 3, 589).

Understanding is where oneness is accessed, and where God is as the cause of all things and the perfection of all divine likenesses. The oneness of human and divine understandings transcends analogical likenesses like goodness because understanding knows the image and exemplar of analogical likenesses as separate beings. Thus the union of God and the soul as understanding must exceed all other types of image, including all of creation and all kinds of perfection. The understanding in the human soul does not distinguish itself from other powers and likenesses in being perfect or united with God in the world of time, creatures, and sin. Rather, unlike these, this understanding is in itself inhuman and uncreated, and, insofar as it is pure and inhuman, the same in God and the soul. Any unity with God that the soul can attain, then, must be attained first through the perfection of understanding and the transformation of all lesser likenesses, and second through the soul's purifying itself of its own creatureliness.

Chapter 3: Teachings and Motions towards God

3.1 Introduction

The first part of chapter two showed that God is fundamentally understanding, and that God creates the soul in God's image primarily as understanding. In God, the purity of understanding generates the Trinity and generates creatures as images in the Son. Understanding recognizes creatures because it thinks them and images and contains them as likenesses in its pure oneness. God and the soul share understanding univocally, without variation. Other kinds of likeness to God, such as goodness and justice, are lesser than understanding because they are only analogical and varied between individual souls. Indeed, the understanding divides the unity of these likenesses because it knows them as images and distinguishes the image from the exemplar.

The second part of chapter two, however, found that human understanding still falls short of God's. If the human understanding were perfect it would be the same as God's, but in becoming perfect it would also cease to be human, because the human is a creature and God's understanding is uncreated. The phrase *in quantum* qualifies the identity of the divine and human understandings – human understanding is divine only by excluding from itself everything that is not understanding, including humanity. Any way to God that Eckhart proposes, then, must be a way that human understanding dissociates itself from humanity and other creatures.

Pure understanding seems to preclude motion altogether, however, because the qualifier *in quantum* divides between the creature that moves through distinct, finite states and the purity which excludes every particular state from itself. On one hand, there can be no teaching nor increasing the pure understanding, because it is already perfect. On the

other, the soul as creature cannot become pure understanding, because becoming implies having not been, which is proper to creatures. Even if such a motion were possible, the human understanding would not affect its understanding *in quantum* understanding. It would only lose itself *in quantum* human. The most Eckhart should be able to teach, then, is that pure understanding is somewhere in the soul, and that the human understanding can be no more or less pure than it already is. Nonetheless Eckhart does teach that the soul must reduce itself to the purity of understanding in many works, including *Die rede der underscheidunge (RdU)*, *Daz buoch der götlichen træstunge (BgT)*, and the *Vom edeln menschen (VeM)*. How is this motion possible, and what can the soul gain by undertaking it?

The simplest answer is that Meister Eckhart does not really want to unite the soul with God, but only to teach it that it is united with God. The human soul *in quantum* human cannot unite itself with God. The soul can only learn that, *in quantum* understanding, it is God, and that, *in quantum* human, it is nothing at all. The soul gains a new, pessimistic perspective on itself as creature, but does not come any closer to God by doing so. In *Meister Eckhart*, Oltmanns denies that God's uniting the soul to Himself, often called the "Gottesgeburt,"¹⁰¹ is brought about through some psychological process. Any suggestion that the soul achieves unity with God through following Eckhart's teachings stems from pseudo-Eckhartian works. Although Eckhart teaches the perfection and desirability of union with God, he does not teach the soul how to achieve it, but only how God achieves it for the soul. Eckhart's followers attempted to resolve this apparent problem in his

¹⁰¹ "Birth of God"

teaching by showing a clear path from creatures to union with God. According to Oltmanns, such false paths only distract from Eckhart's actual interest in teaching the soul insofar as it is human that it is already united with God insofar as it is pure understanding:

Es wäre ein ganz vergebliches Bemühen, nach den verschiedenen Stellen, an denen E. von dem Durchbruch in Gott spricht, das einheitliche Bild eines seelischen Vorgangs herausstellen zu wollen, so daß die Stufen dieses Vorgangs sich überall decken. Bei E. decken diese Stufen sich gar nicht; sie zeigen also eher einen Weg, den er den Lernenden führt, um ihn eine rechte Ansicht von der Gottesgeburt gewinnen zu lassen, als den Weg, den die Seele erst nacheinander zu gehen hat, wenn Gott in ihr geboren wird.¹⁰²

For Oltmanns, Eckhart's work teaches a perspective that evaluates everything with relation to its eternal unity with God and negates the objects of temporal life. The break between the God and temporal creature results in an unattainable desire to escape the creature and unite with God. This desire, which Oltmanns calls the "dialectic of freedom," defines the human condition – the soul insofar as it is creature looks to ground itself in God, but it finds God only through negating itself.¹⁰³ Although its desire cannot be fulfilled, the soul cannot reject it, because it also knows that creatures apart from God are nothing at all. Thus the soul loses itself as much in turning toward itself as creature as in turning away from itself into God.

In order for the soul to want to escape creatures, however, it must first be aware that creatures are nothing insofar as they are creatures. Eckhart's work cannot presuppose this awareness universally. If Eckhart teaches that the soul should want to purify itself of

¹⁰² Oltmanns, *Meister Eckhart*, 68: "It would be a totally vain effort to try to expose, in the many places in which Eckhart speaks of the emergence of God, a unified picture of the soul's operation such that the steps connect. They do not connect at all in Eckhart; instead they show a way along which he leads his student in order to give him a correct view of the birth of God, a way which the soul is to take only once God is born in it."

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* 97-102.

creatures and unite itself with God, he must be teaching souls that would otherwise have thought themselves content with only creatures. How does the unaware soul come to awareness of God in itself? Given that awareness seemingly affects neither the birth of God in the soul nor the soul's creaturely existence, why then should that soul want to be aware of God at all? Eckhart describes several different psychological processes by which the soul becomes aware of God. This chapter will proceed by comparing these accounts to see what is common between them. This chapter will also consider those passages that Eckhart explicitly dedicates to awareness of God in the soul, and what that awareness's relation to God is.

3.2 Unity with God's will in *Die rede der unterschiedunge*

Swâ der mensche in gehôrsame des sînen ûzgât und sich des sînen erwiget, dâ an dem selben muoz got von nôt wider ingân: wan sô einz im selber niht enwil, dem muoz got wellen glîcher wîs als im selber. Swenne ich mînes willen bin ûzgegangen in die hant mînes prêlâten und mir selber niht enwil, dar umbe muoz mir got welle und versûmet er mich an dem teile, sô versûmet er sich selber. Alsô in allen dingen, dâ ich mir niht enwil, dâ wil mir got.¹⁰⁴

Written as a response to questions about holy living, *Die rede der unterschiedunge* (RdU) teaches that the soul can purify itself of creatures by practicing indifference to them. This indifference extends not only to particular creatures, but to the soul itself and its own will – the less the soul exercises its will, the more God's will takes its place, and the closer the soul comes to God.

¹⁰⁴ RdU (DW 5, 187): "Whenever a man goes out of himself in obedience and falls away from himself, God must come into him: because such a man wills nothing for himself, God must will for him in the same way. Whenever I go out of my will and into the hand of my prelate, willing nothing for myself, God must will for me, and if he fails to will for me at any point, he fails to will also for himself. Thus in all things in which I will nothing for myself, God wills for me."

Eckhart suggests many different disciplines by which the soul can practice ceasing to will. In each method, the soul cultivates the sense of willlessness it has under particular circumstances, such as in the emptiness of a monk's cell, and then maintains that willlessness under all circumstances. The soul that obeys its master, for instance, is good because it does not act in its own interest, but in accordance with orders beyond its control.¹⁰⁵ The less it wills its actions, the less will it has, and the more God wills on its behalf. At the same time, however, the soul must be careful not to will its master's orders for their own sake, or because they are good in themselves, because in willing these things it would still be willing particular creatures, and thus fall short of the will of God. Instead, the soul unites itself with God by acting at all times as if it were obeying something against its own will. The good will acts neither by its own will, nor is it made good by subjecting itself to the right creatures, but by rejecting both. It does not suffice even to will nothing, if one wills nothing intentionally. The good soul is not opposed to action but rather indifferent to it, practicing self-denial in both action and inaction: "Und als wâriu gehôrsame niht ensol haben 'ich wil alsô', alsô ensol niemer von ihr gehœret werden 'ich enwil niht'; wan 'ich enwil niht' ist ein wâriu vergift aller gehôrsame."¹⁰⁶ Likewise those who claim that they are not as close to God in a church as in their cell, even if the cell is more "godly" in its emptiness, are actually removed from God in both places, because they have God by virtue of external circumstances.¹⁰⁷ Being with God is having God internally, being with God everywhere and in all activities, so one must be able to take whatever

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. (187-189)

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. (189): "In true obedience neither 'I will this' nor 'I will not' be heard from the soul, as 'I will not' is truly poisonous to all obedience."

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. (192-195)

closeness to God one experiences in one's cell into the wider world. Thus the soul unites itself to God by indifference to created circumstances.

Indifference is not a simple absence of desire, however – even the temptation to sin is valuable in that the soul grows in virtue by hating and resisting it.¹⁰⁸ A soul without the impulse to sin is incapable of the depth of goodness which that tempted will achieves in opposing temptation for God's sake. Are there two kinds of will, one united with the divine will and one subordinate to it? It is not as simple as the one differing from the other in being godly, because the will that acts on its sinful temptations is hardly any better than the temptation itself. Eckhart distinguishes between "diu neigunge ze den sünden" and "wellen sünden,"¹⁰⁹ and identifies the latter as the true sin. Indeed, even a good intention is sinful if it is good for the sake of an inclination rather than for the sake of God. The will is good by being indifferent to its inclinations, much in the same way as the good monk is indifferent to his cell. Just as the monk falls short of God if he believes he depends on the emptiness of his cell to be indifferent, but benefits from the emptiness when he cultivates that indifference internally, the will falls short of God when it follows its inclinations, but benefits from its inclinations when it learns to serve God by opposing them.

Although the circumstance is external and the inclination is internal, both belong to the world of creatures. Eckhart says that the inclination "ist vil lichte natiurlich, als manic mensche von natüre zornic oder hôchvertic ist, oder swie daz sî, und enwil doch die sünde niht tuon."¹¹⁰ The soul uses both kinds of creature to unite itself with God by learning to

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. (212-214)

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. (214) "The inclination to sin," "intending to sin."

¹¹⁰ Ibid. (213): "The inclination is probably natural, as many a man is angry or proud by nature, but still does not want to sin."

serve God in spite of them – a truly good soul has God indifferently to whether they are in the cell or in the market, or whether they are tempted to pray or to curse. The external act seems to be yet a third such creature:

Ich mac aller menschen arbeit tragen und alle armen spîsen und aller menschen werk wûrken und swaz dû erdenken maht. Gebrichet dir niht an dem willen dan aleine an der maht, in der wârheit, vor gote hâst dû ez allez getân, und enmac dir daz nieman benemen noch dich des geirren einen ougenblik wan wellen tuon, als balde ich mac, und haben getân, daz ist vor gote glîch.¹¹¹

Just as a good intention is good in spite of associated circumstances and in spite of its inclinations, the good intention is equally good when it comes to nothing as when it comes to something. Likewise, God requires of all people the same perfect intention to do all goods, whether they can do everything or nothing. If a king's and an orphan's wills are both good, they will both help others as much as they can, and God will approve of both equally. God's concern only for the intent behind an action also shows that the action and intention are ultimately good or bad through their service not to their apparent beneficiaries, but to God. Obviously it is much better for the hungry if a king feeds them as much as he can than if an orphan feeds them as much as she can, but for God they are both equally good because the king's and the orphan's souls are both one with God.

The soul can even unite itself with God through a past sin – the more sincerely the soul repents of its sin for the sake of God, the more the soul's will is united with God's in hating sin, and the more happily God forgives it.¹¹² Neither external circumstances, nor

¹¹¹ Ibid. (217, 218): "I can work for all men, and feed all the poor, and work the works of all men, and whatever else you may think of. So long as your will lacks only power, in truth, in the eyes of God you have done it all, and none can take this from you nor hinder you even slightly, for intending to do as soon as possible and having done, are the same in the eye of God."

¹¹² Ibid. (236-238)

internal inclinations, nor external and past actions can separate the good soul from God. The good soul does not seem to be indifferent to external actions in the same way as it is indifferent to circumstances and inclinations, however. It sincerely intends to do good in the world, and does so as much as it is able, and it sincerely hates its past sins. If the soul is one with God internally, regardless of external creatures, why should it involve itself in the external world at all?

The soul intends good in the world of creatures despite being united with God internally because it relates to creatures through God. God, while unaffected by creatures, wills them in creating them. Thus the soul that is truly united with God wills good in the world because it wills what God wills. Eckhart argues for this return to creatures in the same passage as he discusses the union of God and the soul at its most intimate:

Diz wærlîche haben gotes liget an dem gemüete und an einem inniclichen vernünftigen zuokêrenne und meinenne gotes, niht an einem stæten anegedenkenne in einer glîchen wîse, wan daz wære unmügelîch der natûre in der meinunge ze habenne und sêre swære und aller beste niht.¹¹³

At the pinnacle of union, the good soul does not even think about God, but has God prior to thinking and willing. At this stage, creatures are no longer a threat to the soul's indifference because God is deeper within the soul than any creature's influence extends. Like a man dying of thirst who, wherever he is and whatever he is doing, fixes his attention on water, the soul remains fixed on God in its understanding and its will no matter what the soul's circumstances are or in what acts it is engaged. The soul can be still closer to God, however, when it finds God in the circumstances and acts themselves: "Der mensche

¹¹³ Ibid. (205): "This true possession of God lies in the heart, and in an interior intellectual turn toward and love of God, not in a steady thinking in the same way, for that would be impossible for nature to have in thought, very difficult, and of all not the best."

ist verre mêt vor got gelobet, wan er alliu dinc götlîche nimet und mêt, dan diu dinc an in selber sint."¹¹⁴ The soul is so one with God that it knows all creatures as expressions of God's will, just as God knows them in creating them.

Even though the good soul is perfectly good without any external works, it recognizes good works and bad works as good and bad by knowing them as creatures through God. Because the soul knows good works as good, it intends to do all the good works it can. Because it has all the goodness of God through union with Him, however, it does not suffer if its good intentions do not come to fruition. Connolly, drawing an oft-drawn¹¹⁵ comparison between Eckhart and Buddhism, says that Eckhart's good will differs from other wills because it lacks "eigenschaft," or "attachment." Because the good will is attached to God, and not to the outcomes of its actions, it is at peace in failure as well as in success: "to react with agitation or anger is to cling to the result we wanted, in a sense to make an idol of it."¹¹⁶

In conclusion, the *RdU* shows two motions of the soul – there is a motion out of creatures to God, and a motion through God back into creatures. In the first motion, the soul learns to join itself to God by distancing itself from creatures. It practices self-denial through obedience to its master and resisting its own inclinations, and works to retain the same sense of detachment from creatures in every circumstance, be it the church or the marketplace. In the second motion, the soul is so united with God that it sees all creatures and circumstances as appearances of God Himself. The good soul is so united with God

¹¹⁴ Ibid. (207): "The man is far more praiseworthy before God when he takes everything as divine, and more than it is in itself."

¹¹⁵ See Radler, "Losing the Self: Detachment in Meister Eckhart and its Significance for Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," 111.

¹¹⁶ Connolly, *Living without Why: Meister Eckhart's Critique of the Medieval Concept of Will*, 173.

that it carries Him with it into creation, knowing creatures through Him and doing good for His sake. Although the soul is already united with God through detachment of the will, Eckhart says that willing nothing is no more the proper outcome of union than willing the good, so long as whatever is willed is willed through God. Further, the soul, insofar as it is in the world, is incapable of totally ceasing to will:

Wan, dem reht sol sîn, dem muoz ie under zwei dingen einez geschehen: eintweder er sol got nemen und lernen haben in den werken, oder er sol alliu werk lâzen. Wan nû der mensche niht in disem lebene mac gesîn âne werk, diu menschlich sint, der vil ist, dar umbe sô lerne der mensche sînen got haben in allen dingen und ungehindert blîben allen werken und steten.¹¹⁷

Although total inactivity is perfect for the good soul in principle, continued existence of the human creature over which the good soul retains control necessitates that the soul see the human creature through God and care for it for the sake of God. Having creatures through God is no less perfect than having God and nothing else, because the perfection of union comes from God unqualifiedly.

Oltmanns' position, namely that Eckhart teaches that God is in the soul, but does not teach a way for the soul to unite itself to God, seems clearly refuted in the *RdU*. The less the soul wills for itself as a creature, the more God's will enters into it. Simply by not willing anything else, the will seems to join itself to God's by default. The *RdU* does not give any theoretical explanation for how this comes to be, however – why does the human will unite itself with God's so readily?

¹¹⁷ Ibid. (211): "One among two things must happen to those who want to be good – either they should receive God and learn to have God in all their works, or they should leave all their works behind. Because in this life humans cannot be without many human works, humans must learn to have their God in all things, and to remain having God in all works and states."

3.3 Likeness, suffering, and transformation in *Daz buoch der götlichen træstunge*

If the soul is to turn its will to God whenever it turns its will away from creatures, God's will must be more natural to the soul's will than any the love of any creature. Thus desire for God must be fundamental to how the will works. In *Daz buoch der götlichen træstunge* (*BgT*), Eckhart claims that the will works by desiring that which it is like:

Alliu neigunge, lust und minne kumet von dem, daz im glîch ist, wan alliu dinc neigent und minnent ir selbes glîch. Der reine mensche minnet alle reinicheit, der gerehte minnet und neiget ze gerehticheit; der munt des menschen sprichet von dem, daz im inne ist, als unser herre sprichet, daz 'der munt sprichet von der vûlle des herzen,' und Salomôn sprichet, daz 'des menschen arbeit is im in dem munde'. Dar umbe ist daz ein wâr zeichen, daz niht got, sunder diu crêatûre ist in des menschen herzen, der noch ûzer neigunge und trôst findet.¹¹⁸

Although Eckhart speaks of likeness as the cause of love as if it were common knowledge, and gives no explanation for this claim in the *BgT*, it runs counter to the general experience of desiring something – the thirsty, for instance, are not so much watery in their moment of thirst as dry and lacking water. Furthermore, if the soul loves things more the more like the soul they are, the soul should be perfectly satisfied with itself, because however much like the soul any creature is, the soul is surely like itself more and in the same way. Waldschütz and Radler both take the claim to be a transformation of older Neo-Platonic axioms that relation¹¹⁹ and knowledge¹²⁰ are only from like to like. Radler also shows that this transformation contributes to Eckhart's end of showing that will, knowledge, and being

¹¹⁸ *BgT* (DW 5, 18-19): "All inclination, desire, and love comes from that which is like him, for all things are inclined to what is like themselves. The pure man loves all purity, the just loves and is inclined to justice; the mouth of man speaks of that which is in him, as our Lord says that 'the mouth speaks from the fullness of the heart,' and Solomon says, 'man's work is in his own mouth.' Therefore it is a true sign that not God, but rather creature is in a man's heart who finds inclination and consolation outside himself."

¹¹⁹ Waldschütz, *Meister Eckhart: Eine philosophische Interpretation der Traktate*, 89.

¹²⁰ Radler, "'In love I am more God:' The Centrality of Love in Meister Eckhart's Mysticism," 182.

are equal and interdependent, and that Eckhart's claim that like loves like is informed by the inverse claim that love makes the lover like the loved. This second claim seems more clearly true than the first – although the thirsty do not acquire water externally simply by wanting it, the more they desire water the more closely they identify themselves with it internally through desire. The thirsty want to be where water is, and when one is so thirsty that one is at the point of death one will value water as highly as one's whole life. Ultimately, the thirsty want not only to be like water, but to unite water to themselves by drinking it. Thus the force of Eckhart's claim is not that the soul loves what is like it in just any way, but that the soul is like the object of its love internally, within the mind that loves.

This interpretation of Eckhart's claim about desire finds support in the other instances of Eckhart making the same claim in his work. Neither when Eckhart claims likeness to cause love in the *BgT*, nor when he claims the same in *Predigt* (Pr.) 10, *In diebus suis*, and *Sermo* (S.) 40, *Diliges deum tuum ex toto corde tuo*, does he give an example of love as addressing a lack, as was the case with the thirsty man. Instead, Eckhart illustrates the connection of love to likeness through the virtue of justice. Eckhart further shows that love stems from likeness within the soul when he justifies the relation of love to likeness in S. 40:

Nota primo, quod quis vere diligit, utique *ex toto corde* diligit. Iustitiam enim nemo vere diligit neque novit nisi iustus, tum quia 'patrem nemo novit nisi filius,' tum quia secundum philosophum 'nihil movetur ad aliquid, nisi habeat aliquid eius in se, ad quod movetur.'¹²¹

¹²¹ S. 40, n. 389 (LW 4, 335): "First note that what one truly loves, one loves *with the whole heart* (Matt. 22:37). For no-one loves justice except the just, because 'no-one knows the Father except the Son' (Matt. 11:27) and according to Aristotle 'nothing moves to anything unless it has something within it of that to which it moves.'"

The creaturely soul loves creatures out of likeness not because it lacks or needs them, but for the same reason that the just loves justice. Both the just and creaturely souls identify themselves with the object of their love. To return to the example of the thirsty man, the thirsty does not want water simply because he has no water – there are all sorts of things that the thirsty man does not have, like fish, but he has no need or want of them. The man wants water because his will recognizes water as a part of him in the sense of being necessary for his survival. The just love justice and the greedy love money because they identify themselves with the objects of their love in a similar way. Eckhart's use of a biblical passage explicitly concerning knowledge further supports Radler's position that the soul loves out of likeness for the same reason that it knows out of likeness. The soul knows and loves by having something in common with that which it loves and knows, and the soul has this in common with its object in the knowledge and love itself.

Likeness, however, is itself a species of oneness. The just soul is like justice because the soul and justice are one with respect to justice, the soul that loves creatures is like creatures because the soul and the creature are one in being creatures. On a deeper level, then, every soul must love God, because in being like anything the soul is like oneness, and God is oneness itself. S. 29, *Deus unus est*, gives the clearest account of how likeness itself derives from oneness, and how all creatures desire oneness through desiring likeness:

Notandum quod omnis creatura amat in deo unum, et ipsum a propter unum et amat ipsum, quia unus est. Primo, quia omne quod est amat et quaeret

dei similitudinem. Similitudo autem est quaedam unitas sive quorundam unitas.¹²²

Further, the soul is naturally like God because He creates the soul in His image. God creates the soul as pure understanding, which is like no creature but comprehends all creatures in that it thinks them in all their multiplicity while never ceasing to be one. When the soul cares for creatures, then, it is mistakenly seeking a kind of likeness lower than its own – oneness with God is the true object of all desires. The *BgT* corrects the soul's mistaken love of creatures by showing how creatures cannot satisfy the soul's desire. A soul that loves creatures can never be fully one with them, so it eventually loses them. When the soul loses what it loves, it suffers, and when the soul recognizes that it suffers because it loves finite creatures in place of God, it learns to turn its will to Him.

In the *BgT*, suffering loss teaches the soul to turn from creatures to God. Eckhart originally wrote the *BgT* for Queen Anne of Hungary, a patron of mysticism who survived the murder of several male family members.¹²³ Fittingly, then, Eckhart returns continually to cases of loss, often of family members, to show how the suffering that results from loss can direct the soul to God. When the soul loses its money, its health, or its friends, it learns that to love creatures is to suffer. All creatures are "zergenclîch,"¹²⁴ and are inevitably lost, and the soul that loves creatures for their own sake, rather than through God, will inevitably suffer when it loses them.¹²⁵ When the soul recognizes that suffering can bring it closer

¹²² S. 29, n. 297 (LW 4, 264): "Note that every creature loves oneness in God, and loves for the sake of oneness, and loves Him because He is one. This is because everything that is loves and seeks likeness to God. Likeness, however, is a certain kind of unity or the unity of certain things."

¹²³ Waldschütz, *Meister Eckhart: Eine philosophische Inteeation der Traktate*, 80. Ruh airs some skepticism of this in Ruh, "Kritisches zu Meister Eckharts 'Liber Benedictus': Ist die Trostschrift der Königin Agnes von Ungarn gewidmet?", 272.

¹²⁴ *BgT* (DW 5, 17) "Perishable."

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* (17)

to God, it actually welcomes it. In loss the soul can practise patience, and, just as the *RdU*'s good soul benefits from its sinful inclinations by resisting them, loss that is "borne nobly" for the sake of God is actually gain. The more the soul is willing to suffer for God, the more it unites itself with God in love.¹²⁶ Likewise, for one who is fully united with God, suffering through one's own soul becomes suffering through God, for whom it is not experienced as bad but in peace and joy.¹²⁷ Thus the suffering caused by creatures itself directs the soul away from creatures and towards God.

In the *BgT*'s first consolation, however, meditation on the loss of creatures seems to turn the soul not to God, but to other creatures. In the same place where Eckhart declares that caring is due to likeness, he gives the most practical and worldly consolation imaginable – if one has lost forty out of one hundred marks, one should not dwell on what one has lost but enjoy the sixty that remain. If one is deathly ill, one still has one's home, one's family, and ready access to food.¹²⁸ God's mercy does not allow the soul pure suffering, because no matter how many creatures the soul loses, it can always find more creatures to love.

There are several problems with this consolation. First, it is not so much a consolation as it is a threat that loss could be greater – when a man loses forty of a hundred marks, for instance and then consoles himself with the sixty marks that remain, he is really only consoling himself that he has more marks left to lose. Second, the consolation disproves its own claim that God never allows pure suffering. If the soul were to lack

¹²⁶ Ibid. (23-24).

¹²⁷ Ibid. (52).

¹²⁸ Ibid. (15-17).

Eckhart's advice that it should think on the creatures it still had, but instead dwelled on what it has lost, its suffering would indeed be pure and without consolation: "Wie möhte der getrœstet sîn und âne leit, der sich kêret ze dem schaden und ze dem leide [...]"¹²⁹ Third, and the root of the other problems, is that the consolation in no way moves beyond the source of its own loss, namely the frailty of creatures. Consolation and suffering are taken as proper to creatures, with God's apparent role being nothing more than the sender of both. Duclow explains this mode of consolation as proof of Eckhart's pastoral interest in the happiness of his audience, and the importance of changes in perspective to Eckhart's method – although this changed perspective is slight and barely consolatory, it builds to bigger changes as time goes on.¹³⁰

In in a later consolation, the *BgT* actually reverses this perspective on loss and creatures. The soul no longer consoles itself that there are always more creatures to love, but instead consoles itself that God is always with it. The soul is better off suffering the loss of a creature than being consoled with a creature, because when the soul suffers, it can more easily turn itself to God. The soul should be united with God in all things, and delight in both having creatures and lacking creatures, but suffering and the passing of creatures allows God to be known more clearly:

Und sicherliche: eigenlicher nimet man got enbernde dan nemende; wan sô der mensche nimet, sô hât diu gâbe in ir selben, warumbe der mensche vrô sî und getrœstet. Sô man aber niht ennimet, sô enhât man niht noch envindet noch enweiz man niht, des man sich vrôuwe dan got und gotes willen aleine.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Ibid. (16): "How can he be consoled and without suffering, who turns himself to the loss and suffering?"

¹³⁰ Duclow, "My Suffering is God': Meister Eckhart's *Book of Divine Consolation*," 574.

¹³¹ Ibid. (23): "And surely: one receives God more properly when lacking than when receiving; for as much as one receives, one has the gift in itself and is happy and consoled on account of it. But as much as one receives nothing, one neither has nor finds nor knows nothing to be happy about but God and God's will alone."

Suffering and sin themselves drive the soul away from creatures into God. The soul understands both having and lacking through the goodness of God, and is willing to lack all things for His sake.

The *BgT*'s meditation on suffering seems relatively basic advice, turning the soul from temporary consolations to God as the eternal source of consolations. The true intention of this turn is not simply to restore the soul's happiness by replacing a lesser consolation with a better one, however. If, as Eckhart claims, loving is a kind of identification, then to love God is not simply to have Him as a source of happiness but to be transformed out of the soul as creature and into pure God. The soul's will in loving God is of as different a character from the will in loving creatures as perfect oneness is different from likeness. When the soul loves a creature that the soul is like, the soul desires that creature for itself as something apart from itself, because likeness always includes an element of otherness. When the soul loves God by being one with God, however, there is no separation. The soul does not will God for itself, but simply wills what He wills. The love of the soul for God in oneness is so unlike the love for creatures that it does not love God for the sake of anything else, not even consolation or goodness or even goodness. Eckhart says that the soul in God should not will what is good, but simply will whatever happens because it is God's will.

When the soul is truly united with God, its love for God transcends the soul's capacity to suffer and be consoled altogether. It no longer needs God to console it in times of lacking. Instead, the soul is so one with God in will that if He wanted the soul to turn from Him towards creatures, and thus not only suffer from lacking creatures but from

lacking Him, it would do so. God is eternally one with the soul, and even the pure suffering of loving and losing creatures is good:

Und dar umbe sprach ich dâ oben, daz der guote mensche wil und wölte alle zît lîden durch got, niht gelîten hân; lîdende hât er, daz er minnet. Er minnet lîden durch got und lîdet durch got. [...] Alsô wærlîche; dem gotes sune, einem guoten menschen, sô vir gotes sun is, durch got lîden, durch got wûrken ist sîn wesen, sîn leben, sîn wûrken, sîn sælicheit, wan alsô sprichet unser herre: "sælic sint, die dâ lîdent durch die gerehticheit."¹³²

Take the man who loses 40 marks. His suffering is that he mistakenly loved a finite creature in place of God. In dwelling on the loss, he deprives himself of consolation in God. The man regains God as a consolation when he realizes that his love of the marks, which he lost, was meant for God, whom he can never lose. If the man thinks that he had lost God when he loved his marks, however, he still directs his love to something that can be lost, namely God as his consolation. The man must be so one with God that he is equally willing to be consoled by God as to suffer apart from God.

God is equally one with the soul in loving creatures as in loving God, because the unity of God exists prior to any act of willing or thinking. Eckhart shows that God underlies all the soul's activities and suffering through many images – the soul's activities and intentions are to God in the soul as colour is to the eye, or as drink is to a vessel. The eye is able to see all colours only because the colours of what it sees in no way determine or limit its essential colourlessness. The vessel is equally present whether it is full or not, but if the vessel were emptied not only of drink, but even of air, Eckhart speculates that it would shoot into the sky. In the same way, God is equally present in the soul whether the

¹³² Ibid. (44): "And that is why I said before that the good man would want to suffer for God eternally, not simply to *have* suffered; he has suffering and loves it. He loves suffering for God and suffers for God. [...] Thus, truly, for God's son, a good man, insofar as he is God's son, to suffer and work for God is his being, his life, his work, and his salvation, as our Lord said: "blessed are they, who suffer for goodness."

soul knows and loves Him or not, but the soul insofar as it is pure of creatures is totally transformed into God.¹³³ This theme is similar to the purity of understanding treated in chapter one, where understanding is the highest kind of likeness to God because it can think all divisions, likenesses, and images without corrupting its simplicity. In the *BgT*, however, oneness with God takes on an ethical dimension in addition to these epistemological and ontological dimensions through the teaching of the "inner work."

3.4 The inner work

Eckhart describes the *BgT*'s inner work in similar terms to the *RdU*'s good intention. Both the inner work and the good intention are perfect internally, and do not depend on external actions for their goodness, but nonetheless express their goodness in external works as best they can. Unlike intention, however, the inner work can never intend anything but good – God pulls the inner work to Him unendingly, just like gravity pulls a stone downwards.¹³⁴ The inner work wants only to do good and to suffer in God. The inner work is like intention with respect to closeness to God, but it is like inclination with respect to the necessity with which it loves God. The inner work stems from the oneness of God and the soul prior to any intention or act, but constantly tries to express itself through both intentions and acts:

Und alliu ir klage und leit ist, ob leit in sie gevallen möhten, daz diz liden durch got alze kleine ist und al ûzer werk in der zît alze kleine, daz si sich niht ganze eröugen noch volle bewîsen noch darîn bilden enmac. Sich üebende wirt si kreftic, und von milte wirt si rîche.¹³⁵

¹³³ Ibid. (30).

¹³⁴ Ibid. (39).

¹³⁵ Ibid. (39): "And her whole lament and suffering, if there can really be any suffering in her, is that this suffering in God and all external works in time are all too small, that she cannot wholly display nor fully

Eckhart explicitly identifies the inner work with the Son in the soul,¹³⁶ and uses the verbs "bilden" and "bewîsen"¹³⁷ to describe how the inner work seeks to express itself through good works and suffering. Just as God images Himself in creatures when he creates them as ideas through the Son, the inner work images God through external actions. It would be a very small leap of reasoning to say that the *BgT*'s inner work is the *RdU*'s divine will that fills the soul whenever the human will leaves it. Just like the Son, the inner work is as much divine as it is human, and just as the Son communicates itself to creatures through their ideas, the inner work communicates its goodness into creation through external acts and intentions. The inner work even has an analogue to the Son's incarnation and passion, because just as the Son takes on creatures and suffering, the inner work too is willing to suffer and separate itself from God for His sake:

Ich spriche, daz ein volkomen mensche als ungerne wöte sich von got scheiden eine stunde als tûsent jâr. Doch, wære ez gotes willen und gotes êre, daz er gotes enbære, sô wære im als lîht tûsent jâr als ein tac, ein stunde.¹³⁸

The perfection of unity with God is so intimate that it is one with God even in being separated from God, and without suffering even in suffering. Such a union seems impossible because it contradicts itself – the soul should either cease to be united with God or not suffer or be separate from God at all. The image-argument in *Quaestio Parisiensis*

prove nor image herself in them. Practicing herself she becomes powerful, and she becomes rich from goodness."

¹³⁶ Ibid. (41).

¹³⁷ Ibid. (38) "Image" and "prove." Indeed, contra Wackernagel, this passage seems to suggest "bewîsunge" as a possible Middle High German equivalent to "Urbild" in Eckhart's work.

¹³⁸ Ibid. (DW 5, 61): "I say that a perfect man would be as unwilling to separate himself from God for one hour as for a thousand years. Still, if it were to God's will and God's glory that the perfect man lose God, he would as easily do it for a day, a thousand years, or one hour."

I, however, shows how the purity of understanding allows both to be true at once. Understanding is greater than being because understanding can think things apart from those things from which the things it thinks derive their being. According to being, an image, inasmuch as it is an image, is an image because it is thought not as an image but as its exemplar. When an image is thought as an image in understanding, it ceases to be thought as its exemplar and is therefore no longer an image.¹³⁹ In order to understand an image as an image, then, understanding must know not only the image as it is known, as its exemplar, but as it is not known, apart from its exemplar and apart from understanding. Understanding is so pure, even of itself, that it can think even that which is by definition not thought. The image insofar as it is image is thought, then, as not being thought. The soul that is so one with God that it separates itself from God parallels this argument – just as the image can only be because understanding understands it as not understood, the suffering soul suffers and is separated from God only by being willed by God to be against the will of God. God's perfect oneness includes division from oneness in itself.

In conclusion, the *BgT* explains why the soul naturally moves towards God in two different ways. The first explanation is that no matter what the soul wills, it always wills its likeness, and therefore wills the oneness of God. Even in loving creatures, the soul is really loving God, although it mistakes the creature for the true object of its love. This mistake causes the soul to suffer, but in suffering the soul learns to correct its mistake, turns away from creatures, and finds consolation in God. When the soul is truly united with God, however, it is willing to suffer for Him and does not need Him as a consolation. The

¹³⁹ QuPar.1, n.7, (LW 5, 44).

second explanation for why the soul naturally unites itself with God is the inner work. God the Son is in the soul, deeper in the soul than its actions and its intentions, and He strives at all times to express Himself through good works. The inner work, like the soul that is united with God, is even willing to separate itself from God for His sake. The soul is so perfectly one with God in the inner work that it is one with God even in being separate from God. But the perfection of the soul's union with God makes Eckhart's words all the stranger when he says that inner work becomes stronger through practice, and rich through its own goodness.¹⁴⁰ If the union of the soul and God is so perfect in the inner work that the soul and God are one even when they are apart from each other, how can the inner work be weaker or stronger? How can it practice?

3.5 The *Von dem edeln menschen* and Augustine's progression

A short treatise attached to the *BgT*, the *Von dem edeln menschen* (*VeM*) elaborates on the doctrine of the inner work by contrasting two parts of the soul. The higher part of the soul, which the *VeM* calls the "innerlich,"¹⁴¹ is implanted with the "sâme gotes."¹⁴² This seed naturally grows into oneness with God, but in order to do so it requires cultivation. The soul must not only nourish the seed, but keep clear of the seed the dirt and weeds that can prevent the seed's growth. The seed is God in the ground of the soul, identical with the inner work. The dirt and weeds that the soul must clear away are creatures and desires for creatures. The growth, however, is as problematic as the *BgT*'s claim that the inner work

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. (39).

¹⁴¹ *VeM* (DW 5, 109): "Inner."

¹⁴² Ibid. (111): "God's seed."

can become stronger. If the seed is truly one with God, how can it grow to be any more one with God than it already is?

Unlike the *BgT*, however, the *VeM* illustrates how God in the ground of the soul can grow and become more godly. Eckhart, switching metaphors, quotes Augustine to describe the seed's growth of the maturation of a young man. At each stage of the young man's maturation, he gains a higher perspective on goodness and becomes closer to God.¹⁴³ First, at his mother's breast, the young man takes good people as his exemplars and does as they do. Second, the man ceases to be good by following good people and instead follows godly wisdom and teachings. Third, the man no longer needs to be taught. The man has so internalized God's wisdom that he shuns evil and loves good by his own free will. Fourth, the man loves God so much that he is equally willing to suffer bad things as to enjoy good things for God's sake. Fifth, the man turns inward, and dwells in the ineffability of divine wisdom. In the final stage, the man's soul is totally transformed into God's image and unites itself with Him.

Waldschütz takes the whole progression as degrees of removal from creature, while God remains in its ground as always attained.¹⁴⁴ In each stage, the soul knows God through a more abstract and universal category than the next. Good people are good because they follow good teachings, good teachings are good because they teach good actions, and good actions are good because they are God's will. God's will is good because it comes from God's wisdom, and God's wisdom is good because it comes from God Himself. In the rest of the *VeM*, too, Eckhart describes the same path of development with other metaphors of

¹⁴³ Ibid. (111, 112).

¹⁴⁴ Waldschütz, *Meister Eckhart: Eine philosophische Interpretation der Traktate*, 172.

clearing away – God emerges in the soul like the sun emerging from behind cloud or like a carving emerging from within a block of wood.¹⁴⁵ It would seem that the soul gains nothing from the steps that it could not more fully gain from ceasing to seek any good at all, especially as the last step is very clearly the eternal ground of the soul in God. Waldschütz argues that the steps are all independent ways of knowing God, and that the steps' order does not reflect temporal or causal sequence, but degree of intimacy:

Viel eher sind diese Stufen Modi, Weisen des Werdens dessen, was wir schon sind; Weisen, die sehr wohl nicht in einem Nacheinander, sondern in einem Nebeneinander zu sehen sind, als Grade der Erlangung des Wesens.¹⁴⁶

While the last step – being the image of God – is as accomplished at the beginning of the progression as the end, the other steps clearly lead from one to the next. The soul that learns good teachings, for instance, learns it from the example of other people. Furthermore, the lower steps are only godly at all because they lead to higher steps. The soul that follows good teachings for the sake of the teachings, rather than for the sake of God, is no more one with God or removed from creatures than the soul that follows bad teachings. The inner man benefits from following good teachings not because the teachings are good, but because through following the teachings the soul comes closer to God's will. Thus the stages of the progression really do seem to lead one to another through time. Why must this progression take place, if the soul is already perfectly one with God in the divine seed?

¹⁴⁵ VeM, (DW 5, 113).

¹⁴⁶ Waldschütz, *Meister Eckhart: Eine philosophische Interpretation der Traktate*, 174: "These steps are much more modes or ways of becoming that which we already are; ways that are really to be understood not as one after another but one alongside another, as grades of having one's being."

The *BgT*'s description of the inner work shows that the progression through different relations to creatures does not bring about union with God so much as it proceeds out of a prior union with God. The inner work is always perfectly one with God internally, but it expresses that oneness by recreating itself externally. In the same way as the inner work expresses its union with God by intending good, the inner man moves through the progression from creatures to God because he sees creatures through God and wants to relate creatures back to Him. The inner man's progression from awareness of God through the example of good people to awareness of God as His image is another such expression of union with God. The inner man, united with God prior to any particular thought or action, expresses himself in the soul by bringing it to knowledge of God. The awareness that the inner man achieves through his progression does not unite him with God, rather it is a natural expression of the unity with God that the inner man eternally possesses. At each stage, then, the awareness of God that the soul attains does not unite the soul to God, but reflects a pre-existing unity. At the final stage of awareness, when the soul is transformed into God, the soul sees its eternal union with God through the inner man clearly. With the inner man, the soul is aware of its union with God by knowing that it has no need to be aware of God at all.

Eckhart confirms that awareness of God is a secondary expression of prior union with God at the end of the *VeM*. Against those who say that soul is saved not by having God, but by knowing that it has God, Eckhart insists that the soul's union with God is more perfect than any kind of knowledge. The soul is one with God beyond any particular thought or kind of knowledge. In order for the soul that is one with God to know that it is one with God, it must leave the immediacy of its union to know it through the medium of

its knowledge.¹⁴⁷ Eckhart takes the story of the nobleman as an allegory for this – the soul's union with God is the nobleman's going out to receive a kingdom, while the soul's knowing that it is one with God is the nobleman's return to his old land.¹⁴⁸ The inner man does not come to have God because he becomes aware of God, rather he wants to become aware of God because he already has God.

What goes for the inner man's awareness of God goes also for Eckhart's own teachings. The more Eckhart teaches his students that the soul is one with God, the more he teaches his students that they do not need to learn that they are one with God. Eckhart's greatest teaching, then, seems to be that his teaching has no value at all. At the same time, the progression of the inner man explains why Eckhart teaches despite the superfluity of his teaching. Both the awareness that Eckhart conveys by his teaching and the awareness that the inner man conveys to himself through his progression are not meant to perfect the soul, but flow out of the union of God in the soul as its natural self-expressions.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter began with a problem – if the soul is only ever one with God insofar as it is not soul but God, how can the soul become one with God? Even if the soul could cease to be itself, what would it gain from doing so? Oltmanns proposed that Eckhart does not actually teach in order to unite the soul with God, but in order to make the soul aware of God within it. The soul that heeds Eckhart's teachings does not cease to be a creature, but comes to know itself and all creatures as dependent on God. In the *RdU*, however,

¹⁴⁷ VeM (DW 5, 116-119).

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. (118).

Eckhart clearly spoke about the power of the soul to unite itself with God by cultivating indifference. The soul is so able to unite itself with God that it needs only to relinquish its own will for God's will to take its place. The *BgT* showed that the soul is able to unite itself with God because the desire for God is latent in the will. Because the will always desires what it is like and is like what it desires, and God as pure oneness is the perfection of all likeness, the will's desires are best satisfied in God. In loving God, the soul becomes perfects its likeness through total oneness with God. When the soul learns that desiring creatures only causes the soul to suffer, it ceases to love creatures, frees its will of creatures altogether, and becomes one with God as the proper object of the soul's love.

Just as quickly as the chapter's initial question was solved, however, the *BgT*'s teaching of the inner work and *VeM*'s teaching of the inner man revealed a new problem for Eckhart's theory of union. Even before the soul moves to unite itself with God, God has already united Himself with the soul perfectly in its innermost ground. No work or motion can make this union more or less perfect. It would seem from this perfection that the soul has no need to move to God at all. The soul does not even benefit from knowing that it is one with God, because the knowledge of union with God is worthless when compared to having God Himself. Knowledge and teachings are themselves external creatures, and can be compared with God just as unfavourably. Whatever Eckhart teaches about not taking creatures in themselves, then, he must also teach about not taking his teachings in themselves. Thus Eckhart reverses his claims about what it means to have God – in the *BgT*, for instance, the soul that is truly one with God has God equally when it separates itself from God and suffers as when it is consoled by uniting its will to God.

Although Eckhart teaches against the power of his teachings to unite the soul with God, he still has a reason to teach in God's desire for self-expression. The soul turns outward and into creatures not to perfect its union with God, but to express the perfection of its union by recreating it in creation. The union of God in the soul images God in creation by showing how creatures are nothing in themselves, and how they receive their worth, both in God and in themselves, through God. The godly intention in the *RdU* recognizes both inclination and act as being good insofar as they are related to God, and evil insofar as they are taken as good in themselves. The Augustinian progression reveals at each of its stages that what was taken as good in the previous stage was not good in itself, but received goodness from the higher, the highest of which is simply being one with God. Thus the union of God in the soul, when imaging itself in creature, does so by opposing itself to creature in creature.

It should last be noted that Eckhart's many different ways of describing the soul-God relation and directing the soul towards it are all equally viable because of God's immediacy in the soul. The union of God and the soul can express itself by subordinating any creation at all to God, and doing so directly – Eckhart's insistence that God is always immediately present is what makes the progression so jarring.¹⁴⁹ In any state of suffering, the soul can always find God in itself simply by reflecting on God as the origin both of the goodness the soul seems to have lost and as one, as the basis for its willing the suffering as its like. God can be seen as the ground of every creature, even insofar as it is a creature

¹⁴⁹ Ruh, *Meister Eckhart: Theologe, Mystiker, Prediger*; 130.

and not God, because oneness and understanding comprehend even self-contradictory things.

Because Eckhart teaches both that unity with God cannot be achieved more or less in creatures, and that unity with God must be expressed through the relentless negation of creatures' ability to affirm that same unity, one might easily mistake Eckhart's whole teaching to amount to nothing more than pessimism about all creatures. In the motions towards God that Eckhart teaches, the soul moves from one stage to another not because future stages will bring it to God, but because past stages were inadequate and God's perfection is suggested by rejecting them as inadequate. Rather than an ascent, the motion seems more like an orbit – the soul is always turning towards God by turning away from the last turn it made, but the soul can never turn into God directly and succeeds only at moving to a new position equally distant from God. In the highest forms of union with God, the soul returns through God to the same creatures and suffering that it originally sought God in order to escape. It is important to note, however, that Eckhart does not see this pessimistically or as a source of suffering, but of joyful tranquility, as even though the soul never moves closer to God, in each motion it always has God fully:

Und wan daz wâr ist, sô spriche ich: allez, daz der guote mensche lîdet durch got, daz lîdet er in gote, und got is mit im lîdende in sînem lîdenne. Ist mîn lîden in gote und mitlît got, wie mac mir danne lîden leit gesîn, sô lîden leit verliuset und mîn leit in gote ist und mîn leit got ist?¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ BgT (54): "And because this is true, I say this: all that the good man suffers for God, he suffers in God, and God is with him suffering in his suffering. If my suffering is in God, and God suffers with me, how can suffering then be pain to me, when suffering loses its pain and my pain is in God and my pain is God?"

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Chapter two showed how Eckhart distinguishes between different kinds of image and likeness. All creatures are images of God through their ideas in the Son, and humans share in divine perfections like goodness by being more or less good. These images are lesser images, however, because they are only analogical, being like God but not sharing God's mode of being. *Expositio Libri Genesis* calls understanding the image of God after which God creates the soul, setting understanding above all other images. Unlike creatures, understanding is perfectly one and undivided. God creates the world through understanding, and just as God remains perfectly one in creating distinct creatures, Eckhart argues that understanding remains one in thinking distinct thoughts. He describes how perfect oneness can still generate distinctions in the *Expositio Libri Exodi*, where the purity of *sum qui sum* boils over into creation and the Trinity by relating to itself only. *Quaestio Parisiensis 1* shows in yet another way how understanding supersedes other kinds of image. While images are not distinguishable from their exemplars as things, the understanding thinks images as images and distinguishes them from their exemplars. Lesser images like creatures, then, need the understanding in order to be images at all.

The *Processus Colonienses* and *Quaestio Parisiensis 2* then qualified how the human and divine understandings could be one. Eckhart says that if the human understanding were perfect, it would be uncreated and one with God's, but it is imperfect in that it depends on beings to think. *QuPar.1* established that God is because God understands, and identified being as a creature, but humans only understand by way of being, and often understand it wrongly. Thus being, and all the creatures created after it, separate the human understanding from God. This distinction, and the need to overcome

it, informed chapter three's reading of Eckhart on motion from the human soul to God. Each work examined presented a different idea of how the soul could have God, but in each reading the informing principle was that the soul must come to a divine perspective on creatures as creatures. From this perspective creatures are so meaningless in themselves, and so wholly dependent on God, that they add nothing to God's being or goodness that is not already had more perfectly in oneness with God.

In *Die rede der underscheidung*, Eckhart teaches his students to seek God by unattachment to all creatures. This goes most of all for the creatures and places that seem the most holy, like acts of piety and a monk's cell, because these creatures are the most easily thought to have their own godliness instead of receiving it from God. One may know God more clearly in one's cell than in the marketplace, but true godliness is knowing that God is indifferent to all places and times. This leads Eckhart to teach that even a sinful act can be salutary if one repents of it, because in repenting of sin one acknowledges the distinction between God and one's own creatureliness. In *Daz buoch der götlichen træstunge*, suffering and loss play a role similar to that of sinfulness in the *RdU*. When the soul suffers the loss of some good, it realizes that it should love not that which it has lost, but God, because God is the source of all goods. More radically even than his teaching on sin in the *RdU*, Eckhart teaches in the *BgT* that the soul should not love God because of God's goodness, or even because of God's being God. The truly perfect soul is so one with God that, if it were God's will, that soul would will itself to sin or even to be separated from God. In the *Von dem edeln menschen*, Eckhart teaches a progression to God through ascending forms of goodness in creatures. In the first stage the soul knows good people as good, in the second stage it knows the wisdom by which good people do good as good, and

in the third it wills the good of its own volition. In the fourth stage it moves out of goodness itself, loving God equally in good things and bad. In the fifth it has no need of things at all, but rests in God's wisdom, and in the final stage it leaves even its own creation behind and is united with God as God's image.

At the same time as Meister Eckhart teaches motion away from creature and into God, he also teaches that God is present in the creature at the beginning of the motion, albeit obscurely. This also means that both the motion and the teaching of the motion are no more godly than the creature from which the soul moves. Eckhart undoes his own work in the *BgT*, first teaching the soul how to avoid suffering by uniting itself with God, and then teaching that the soul should be willing to separate itself from God and to return to suffering for the sake of God. He undermines his teachings still more clearly at the end of the *VeM*, saying that the knowledge that the soul is one with God adds nothing to the perfection of that oneness, because the knowledge itself is a creature. Because God is pure oneness, beyond such divisions as creature and creator, to know God through created knowledge is to know God imperfectly.

Although Eckhart denies that his teachings communicate actual knowledge of God, he explains in the *BgT*, *VeM*, and S. 12 why these teachings are still good to teach. He uses terms like the inner work and the noble man to show how God is embedded in the soul, and how, just as God's boiling over generates creation, this oneness with God is driven to express itself in creation. The inner work is the source of every outer work's goodness, so no outer work can add anything to it, but because it is good it tries to communicate its goodness to every outer work it can. Likewise, S. 12 explains that part of having divinity is communicating the divinity that one has received in mercy. Even the Son must

communicate his divinity, first when the Father creates all creatures through him, and second when he begins to act and to teach as Christ. Even if Eckhart's teachings cannot perfectly unite the soul to God insofar as the soul is a creature, they nonetheless derive from God's perfect unity with the soul in its ground.

The greatest concern in this thesis has been showing that for Eckhart God is one with the soul in any state, be it the most wise and holy or the most ignorant and miserable. Chapter two showed that the understanding by which the soul thinks is the same pure unity by which God generates the Trinity and creation. Further, it showed that this identity of God and the soul is opposed to the creatureliness of the soul. The soul is not one with God in having any particular knowledge, which is itself a creature, but rather in the purity of understanding that precedes its knowing. Because of this purity, which in *InGen.1* and *InEx* communicates itself to creation while remaining perfect in itself, in chapter three God grounds the soul as much when it knows and loves creatures as when it loves only God and knows God as its ground.

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