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# A Companion to Meister Eckhart

*Edited by*  
Jeremiah M. Hackett



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## MEISTER ECKHART IN 20TH-CENTURY PHILOSOPHY

Dermot Moran

The manner in which Meister Eckhart has been viewed by scholars has changed considerably over the centuries.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the bull *In agro dominico* of 27 March 1329 already points towards the future directions that Eckhart research would subsequently take. There Eckhart is described in threefold manner as “from Germany, a doctor of sacred theology (as it is said) and a professor of the Order of Preachers.”<sup>2</sup> These characterizations of Eckhart—his connection with the German philosophical and mystical tradition, his status as a University of Paris master and scriptural exegete, and his role as a theologian and vernacular preacher for the Dominican order—continue to frame the debate.

The revival of Eckhart during the 19th century uncovered many more Eckharts. Indeed, the basis for Eckhart’s growing popularity in the 20th century was laid during the 19th century when Eckhart was rediscovered by the romantics and by the idealists. Eckhart was initially revived by the eclectic engineer, Catholic romantic, Franz von Baader (1765–1841), a friend of Schelling, who discovered Eckhart through his reading of Boehme. Baader inspired Hegel to refer to Eckhart in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, quoting Eckhart’s saying that the eye with which we see God is also the eye with which God sees us.<sup>3</sup> The 19th-century revival broadly represented Eckhart as a speculative, dialectical thinker. He was seen (with Albertus Magnus) as one of the first German philosophers, a forerunner to the Protestant Reformers, “the father of German

<sup>1</sup> See Ingeborg Degenhardt, *Studien zum Wandel des Eckhartbildes*, (Studien zur Problemgeschichte der antiken und mittelalterlichen Philosophie) 3 (Leiden: 1967).

<sup>2</sup> See “*In agro dominico*,” edited by Marie H. Laurent in his “Autour du procès de Maître Eckhart. Les documents des Archives Vaticanes,” *Divus Thomas* Ser. III, 13 (1936), 435–47; translation in Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn, *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises and Defense* (New York: 1981), see esp. 77.

<sup>3</sup> See G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, ed. G. Lasson (Hamburg: 1966), 257. See also Jean-Louis Vieillard-Baron, *Hegel et l'idéalisme allemande* (Paris: 1999), esp. 62–63, and Ernst Benz, *Les sources mystiques de la philosophie romantique allemande* (Paris: 1987).

speculation"<sup>4</sup> (i.e. German idealism). Perhaps, more important (as Josiah Royce confirmed), because it was more influential, was Arthur Schopenhauer's (1788–1860) account of Eckhart's quietist overcoming of the will that compared him with the Indian Buddhist Sakyamuni in his *World as Will and Representation*.<sup>5</sup>

In the 20th-century, philosophical interest in Eckhart continued to expand on his influence and originality as the pre-Cartesian discoverer of subjectivity and infinity,<sup>6</sup> harbinger of modernity, mystic preacher<sup>7</sup> of loss of self, "detachment" (*Abgeschiedenheit*), going out from oneself, "innerness" or intimacy (*Innerlichkeit*), and living "without the why" (*ohne Warum*), themes that continue to bring Eckhart into comparison with Eastern philosophy. Eckhart is presented as having anticipated Descartes with his turn to subjectivity, and with his conception of the divine being as generated by His own self-understanding, which Richard Woods refers to as Eckhart's "Cartesian revolution."<sup>8</sup> One also finds during the 20th cen-

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Josef Bach, *Meister Eckhart der Vater der Deutschen Spekulation. Ein Beitrag zu einer Geschichte der deutschen Theologie und Philosophie der mittleren Zeit* (Vienna: 1864) and, somewhat earlier, Ludwig Noack's chapter on Eckhart in his two-volume, *Die Christlich Mystik nach ihrem geschichtlichen Entwicklungsgange im Mittelalter und in der neueren Zeit dargestellt*, vol. 1 (1853), 280–96, which presents Eckhart as a mystic influenced by Dionysius the Areopagite.

<sup>5</sup> See Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: 1969), 614–16, and Andrew King, "Philosophy and Salvation: The Apophatic in the Thought of Arthur Schopenhauer," *Modern Theology* 21, 2 (2005), 253–74.

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Eckhard Wulf, *Das Aufkommen neuzeitlicher Subjektivität im Vernunftbegriff Meister Eckharts* (Tübingen: 1972); Burkhard Mojsisch, "Dieses Ich.' Meister Eckharts Ich-Konzeption. Ein Beitrag zur 'Aufklärung' im Mittelalter," in *Das Licht der Vernunft. Die Anfänge der Aufklärung im Mittelalter*, ed. Kurt Flasch and Udo R. Jeck (Munich: 1997), 100–09; and Elizabeth Brient, *The Immanence of the Infinite: Hans Blumenberg and the Threshold of Modernity* (Washington, D.C.: 2002), 147–83.

<sup>7</sup> Kurt Ruh, *Initiation à Maître Eckhart. Théologies, prédicateur, mystique* (Fribourg: 1997), has given the most detailed study of Eckhart as one of the Western mystics. See also John D. Caputo, "Fundamental Themes in Eckhart's Mysticism," *The Thomist* 42 (1978), 197–225.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Woods, *Eckhart's Way* (London: 1986), 54. For a full bibliography of Eckhart works and studies see Niklaus Largier, *Bibliographie zu Meister Eckhart*, (Dokimion 9, Nouveaux suppléments à Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie) (Fribourg: 1989). For Eckhart's links with Japanese Buddhism see in particular the work of Shizuteru Ueda, a Kyoto professor and student of Nishitani. Ueda studied at Marburg. See his *Die Gottesgeburt in der Seele und der Durchbruch zur Gottheit. Die mystische Anthropologie Meister Eckharts und ihre Konfrontation mit der Mystik des Zen-Buddhismus*, (Studien zu Religion, Geschichte und Geisteswissenschaft) 3 (Gütersloh: 1965) and, more recently, "Eckhart und Zen am Problem 'Freiheit und Sprache'," *Beihefte der Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 31 (Cologne: 1989), 21–92. Earlier, Rudolf Otto had compared Eckhart with Eastern mysticism in his "Meister Eckhart's Mystik im Unterschiede von östlicher Mystik," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* NS 6 (1925), 325–50 and 418–36.

tury a renewed interest in Eckhart's conception of the dialectical relation between human and divine intellect.<sup>9</sup> During the 20th century, however, interest in Eckhart broadened and diversified: Eckhart has been discussed as the Thomist scholastic; Neoplatonic negative theologian;<sup>10</sup> Rheinisch mystic;<sup>11</sup> freethinker;<sup>12</sup> accused heretic, and even feminist, Marxist;<sup>13</sup> ecologist who respects God in nature;<sup>14</sup> the apostle of freedom and "letting be;"<sup>15</sup> postmodern transgressive deconstructionist;<sup>16</sup> postmetaphysical

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, Josef Bach, *Meister Eckhart der Vater der Deutschen Spekulation. Ein Beitrag zu einer Geschichte der deutschen Theologie und Philosophie der mittleren Zeit* (1864); Gottfried Fischer, *Geschichte der Entdeckung der deutschen Mystiker, Eckhart, Tauler u. Seuse im 19. Jahrhundert* (1931); and Emanuel Hirsch *Die idealistische Philosophie und das Christentum* (1926). H.S. Harris's intellectual biography of Hegel, *Hegel's Development* (1972/1983), contains asides regarding Hegel's relationship to Eckhart, Boehme, Baader, and alchemy. Recently, Cyril O'Regan has published a massive and groundbreaking study of the mystical roots of Hegel's philosophy of religion, *The Heterodox Hegel* (1994). For a recent study see Theo Kobusch, Burkhard Mojsisch, and Orrin F. Summerell (eds.), *Selbst, Singularität, Subjektivität: vom Neoplatonismus zum deutschen Idealismus* (Amsterdam: 2002).

<sup>10</sup> See for instance E. Zum Brunn and A. de Libera, *Maître Eckhart. Métaphysique du Verbe et théologie négative* (Paris: 1984).

<sup>11</sup> See Jeanne Ancelet-Hustache, *Master Eckhart and the Rhineland Mystics* (New York and London: 1957). See also James M. Clark, *The German Mystics: Eckhart, Tauler, and Suso* (Oxford: 1949).

<sup>12</sup> Norman Cohn in the *Pursuit of the Millennium* (London: 1957) connects Eckhart with the Brethren of the Free Spirit. See also Robert Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages* (Berkeley: 1972) and Walter Wakefield and Austin Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: 1991). The basis of the connection is that Pfeiffer included in his edition the text known as "Schwester Katrei" ("Sister Catherine") which had a wide circulation in the Middle Ages and was associated with the Brethren of the Free Spirit. The disputed text "Schwester Katrei" can be found in Franz-Josef Schweitzer, *Der Freiheitsbegriff der deutschen Mystik. Seine Beziehung zur Ketzerei der Brüder und Schwestern vom Freien Geist, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des pseudoeckhartischen Traktates "Schwester Katrei,"* (Arbeiten zur Mittleren deutschen Literatur und Sprache) 10 (Frankfurt: 1981), 322–70, and is translated by Elvira Borgstädt in *Meister Eckhart. Teacher and Preacher*, ed. B. McGinn (New York: 1986), 347–84.

<sup>13</sup> See Alois Haas, "Meister Eckhart im Spiegel der marxistischen Ideologie," in his *Sermo Mysticus: Studien zu Theologie und Sprache der deutschen Mystik* (Fribourg: 1979). Leslek Kolakowski sees Eckhart as part of a movement which sought a dialectical resolution between human self-fulfillment and divine fulfillment; see his *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Origin, Growth and Dissolution*, vol. 1 (Oxford: 1978), see the chapter entitled "The Origins of Dialectic."

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, the chapter "Spiritual Ecology" in Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology: the Search for a Livable World* (London: 1992), esp. 125–26, which cites the work of Matthew Fox on Eckhart as seeing creation as the expression of the divine.

<sup>15</sup> See Udo Kern (ed.), *Freiheit und Gelassenheit. Meister Eckhart heute* (Munich: 1980).

<sup>16</sup> See John D. Caputo, "Mysticism and Transgression: Derrida and Meister Eckhart," in *Derrida and Deconstruction*, ed. Hugh Silverman, *Continental Philosophy* 2 (1989), 24–39, and Caputo, "The Prayers and Tears of Devilish Hermeneutics: Derrida and Meister

theologian; the Eastern sage and the Zen Buddhist enlightened master.<sup>17</sup> Eckhart also represents an important figure for contemporary theologians and philosophers of religion. He has often been championed by those wanting to counterbalance the more rigid prescriptions of the neo-Thomist revival with the challengingly paradoxical conception of the transcendent yet immanent God seen as a flowering of negative theology.<sup>18</sup> He has been embraced for a more positive outlook than typically possessed by medieval theologians, due to the absence of a sustained concentration on sin, evil, and the consequences of the Fall.<sup>19</sup> In this vein, the American former Dominican and now Episcopal priest Matthew Fox (b. 1940), a student of Marie-Dominique Chenu (1895–1990), interprets Eckhart in terms of what he, following Chenu, calls “creation spirituality,” an optimistic anthropological outlook that dwells not on original sin but rather on the createdness of human beings in the image of the divine, with an inborn likeness to God.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Eckhart’s liberating conception of spirituality has been embraced for shaking off the overly defined conception of the divine found in ontotheology (“So therefore let us pray to God that we may be free of God,” Sermon 52<sup>21</sup> *Beati paupers spiritu*) and offering a

deeply charitable and loving way of living in witness to the divine<sup>22</sup> that seems to overcome the dangers inherent in the institutionalization of religion. In this regard Eckhart has even been called insightfully a “mystic of everyday life.”<sup>23</sup>

Twentieth-century *philosophers* of very different outlooks have been attracted to Eckhart, including existentialists (Karl Jaspers), phenomenologists (Martin Heidegger), Marxists (Ernst Bloch),<sup>24</sup> and postmodern theologians (John D. Caputo, Michel Henry), among many others (e.g. Josiah Royce). He has been embraced by thinkers such as Rudolf Otto, Martin Buber, and Erich Fromm. The existentialist psychiatrist and philosopher Karl Jaspers presents Eckhart as overcoming the subject–object divide;<sup>25</sup> others see him as developing a conception of the epistemological subject.<sup>26</sup> In the United States, Josiah Royce lectured on Eckhart at Harvard in 1915–16 and compared him to Bergson.<sup>27</sup> Hans Blumenberg, Karsten Harries, and Elizabeth Brient associate Eckhart with Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64) as mystics involved in bringing about the breakthrough to modernity through their manner of thinking the nature of the infinite,<sup>28</sup> through the discovery of subjectivity in the modern sense.<sup>29</sup> Other commentators (e.g. Kurt Flasch) emphasize Eckhart as a kind of proto-Kantian philosopher who

Eckhart,” in John D. Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics: On Not Knowing Who We Are* (Bloomington: 2000), 249–64.

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, the articles collected in the special issue, *Chrétiens, bouddhistes, marxistes se mettent à lire Maître Eckhart: qui donc est Maître Eckhart? La vie spirituelle* 124 (1971), 1–93. Already, in the last decade of the 19th century, Karl Eugen Neumann (1865–1915), who translated the Buddhist Pali canon, published a study, *Die innere Verwandtschaft buddhistischer und christlicher Lehre. Zwei buddhistische Suttas und ein Traktat Meister Eckharts, aus den Original-Texten übersetzt und mit einer Einleitung und Anmerkungen* (Leipzig: 1891). Subsequently Eckhart was linked with Eastern mysticism by Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) in his *West-östliche Mystik, Vergleich und Unterscheidung zur Wesensdeutung* (Gotha: 1929), trans. *Mysticism East and West: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism* (New York: 1932), and D.T. Suzuki, see his “Meister Eckhart and Buddhism,” *Mysticism Christian and Buddhist* (New York: 1971), 3–38, among others. See also Reiner Schürmann, “Trois penseurs du délaissement: Maître Eckhart, Heidegger, Suzuki,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 12 (1974), 455–77; vol. 13 (1975), 43–60. The most recent study is Hee-Sung Keel, *Meister Eckhart: An Asian Perspective*, (Louvain Theological & Pastoral Monographs) (Louvain: 2007).

<sup>18</sup> See Vladimir Lossky, *Théologie négative et connaissance de Dieu chez Maître Eckhart*, 2nd ed., *Études de philosophie médiévale* 48 (Paris: 1973).

<sup>19</sup> See Richard Woods, *Eckhart’s Way* (London: 1986), 45.

<sup>20</sup> Matthew Fox, *Creation Spirituality: Liberating Gifts for the Peoples of the Earth* (San Francisco: 1991). See also his *Passion for Creation: The Earth-Honoring Spirituality of Meister Eckhart* (Rochester, Vt.: 2000).

<sup>21</sup> “Her umbe sô bitten wir got, daz wir gotes ledic warden,” DW II, 493; translated in Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn, *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises and Defense* (New York: 1981), 200.

<sup>22</sup> See Ellen Chris Fanizzi, “Subverting the *Ordo Caritatis*: Meister Eckhart’s Vision of Love” (PhD Dissertation: Boston College, 2000).

<sup>23</sup> Diemar Mieth, “Meister Eckhart. Authentische Erfahrung als Einheit von Denken, Sein und Leben,” in *Das “Einig Ein.” Studien zu Theorie und Sprache der deutschen Mystik*, ed. Alois M. Haas and Heinrich Stirnimann, *Dokimion* 6 (Fribourg: 1980), 11–62.

<sup>24</sup> See Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight, vol. 3 (Cambridge, Mass.: 1995), 1274ff.

<sup>25</sup> Karl Jaspers, *Von der Wahrheit* (Munich: 1947). See Heribert Fischer, *Meister Eckhart*, 8–9.

<sup>26</sup> See Burkhard Mojsisch, “Mittelalterliche Grundlagen der neuzeitlichen Erkenntnistheorie,” in *Renovatio et Reformatio. Wider das Bild vom “finsternen” Mittelalter. Festschrift für Ludwig Hödl zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Manfred Gerwing and Godehard Ruppert (Münster: 1985), 155–69.

<sup>27</sup> See Josiah Royce, *Metaphysics*, ed. William Ernest Hocking, Richard Hocking, and Frank M. Oppenheim (Albany, N.Y.: 1998), 188–96.

<sup>28</sup> See H. Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, Mass.: 1985). See also Karsten Harries, *Infinity and Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: 2001), esp. 160–83, and Elizabeth Brient, *The Immanence of the Infinite: Hans Blumenberg and the Threshold of Modernity* (Washington, D.C.: 2002), 147–83. The original study linking Eckhart to the infinite is Dieter Mahnke, *Unendliche Sphäre und Allmittelpunkt. Beiträge zur Genealogie der mathematischen Mystik* (Halle: 1937; repr. Stuttgart: 1966).

<sup>29</sup> See Eckhard Wulf, *Das Aufkommen neuzeitlicher Subjektivität im Vernunftbegriff Meister Eckharts* (Tübingen: 1972). Wulf’s interpretation of Eckhart has been criticised by Udo Kern in his “*gottes sein ist mein Leben*,” *Philosophische Brocken bei Meister Eckhart* (Berlin: 2003).

understood the constitutive function of the understanding.<sup>30</sup> Still others see him, following Heidegger, as a philosopher who explores the very experience of a meditative thinking that overcomes representationalism.<sup>31</sup> The French phenomenologist Michel Henry (1922–2002) has published a number of studies on aspects of Eckhart's ontology, focusing on the particular power of a receptive passivity that bypasses the usual opposition between activity and passivity.<sup>32</sup> Given this forest of interpretations, how can we find our way to the "true" Eckhart—or is there an Eckhart for every age and taste? Assuredly, Eckhart is an extremely complicated and multifaceted thinker and there are serious hermeneutical problems associated with almost every way of interpreting him. He cannot be presented primarily either as a radical religious reformer or as a purely academic intellectual involved in scholastic dispute. Similarly, those who classify Eckhart as a mystic often hold a view of mysticism that opposes it to philosophy,<sup>33</sup> whereas, in fact, for many medieval philosophers, philosophy and mysticism cannot be opposed simply as the rational to the irrational (or super-rational). Similarly, the German vernacular sermons, although written in a different register, cannot truly be said to offer a deeper or more spiritual vision than the equally complex and inspiring Latin sermons.<sup>34</sup>

To illustrate the kinds of problems that emerge, consider that, while Eckhart does represent a distinctively German turn in late Scholastic

thought (and not just because of his use of the vernacular), unfortunately, in the 1930s and 1940s, he was presented as exemplifying race by German National Socialist ideologues, such as Sigrid Hunke (1913–99) and Alfred Rosenberg (1893–1946, executed at Nuremberg), who called Eckhart "the apostle of the Nordic West" and saw him as a "noble soul" who opposed papal dogmatism.<sup>35</sup> A balance has to be struck. The effort to interpret Eckhart as a critique of ontotheology (based largely on his *Parisian Questions*) has to be balanced with the Eckhart who in his *Opus tripartitum* espouses the classical Thomist identification of God with pure being. Indeed, much recent scholarship on Eckhart (Goris, Haas, Sturlese, de Libera, McGinn, among others) represents a more nuanced critical reaction against earlier, more one-sided characterizations of his oeuvre.<sup>36</sup>

One important advance in 20th-century scholarship on Eckhart is that it correctly approaches Eckhart not so much as an intellectual outsider but rather as belonging squarely within an older tradition of Christian theology inspired by Christian Neoplatonism, which had been renewed and reinvigorated in the 13th century by Albertus Magnus and the Cologne school. Eckhart has to be read as both belonging to and radically renewing the tradition of negative theological writers that runs from Proclus and Dionysius through Johannes Scottus Eriugena,<sup>37</sup> Maimonides,<sup>38</sup> Albertus

<sup>30</sup> See Kurt Flasch, "Zum Ursprung der neuzeitlichen Philosophie im späten Mittelalter. Neue Texte und Perspektiven," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch der Görres-Gesellschaft* 85 (1978), 1–18, and Flasch, "Kennt die mittelaltliche Philosophie die constitutive Funktion des menschlichen Denkens? Eine Untersuchung zu Dietrich von Freiberg," *Kant-Studien* 63 (1972), 182–206.

<sup>31</sup> See Erwin Waldschütz, *Denken und Erfahren des Grundes. Zur philosophischen Deutung Meister Eckharts* (Vienna: 1989).

<sup>32</sup> See the three studies by Michel Henry: "Die ontologische Grundvoraussetzung des Eckhartschen Denkens und das Ursprungswesen des Logos," in *Meister Eckhart—Erkenntnis und Mystik des Lebens. Forschungsbeiträge der Lebensphänomenologie*, ed. R. Kühn and S. Laoureux, Seele, Existenz, Leben. 6 (Freiburg and Munich: 2008), 34–45, and Henry, "Die ontologische Bedeutung der Kritik der Erkenntnis bei Meister Eckhart," *ibid.*, 46–63, and his "Hinführung zur Gottesfrage: Seinsweise oder Lebenserprobung?," *ibid.*, 64–78. See Natalie Depraz, "Auf der Suche nach einer phänomenologischen Metaphysik. Der Bezug auf Meister Eckhart bei Michel Henry," *ibid.*, 135–58 and Natalie Depraz, "Seeking a Phenomenological Metaphysics: Henry's Reference to Meister Eckhart," *Continental Philosophy Review* 10, 3 (July 1999), 303–24.

<sup>33</sup> On this topic, see Theo Kobusch, "Lesemeistermetaphysik—Lebensmeistermetaphysik. Zur Einheit der Philosophie Meister Eckharts," in *Eckhart in Erfurt*, ed. Andreas Speer and Lydia Wegener (Berlin: 2005), 246ff.

<sup>34</sup> Kurt Ruh, for instance, is not alone in finding the German sermons more spiritual. For an excellent discussion, see Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart. The Man from Whom God Hid Nothing* (New York: 2001), 20–34.

<sup>35</sup> Alfred Rosenberg's *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* (*Der Mythos des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*, 1930) was an extremely influential National Socialist text that promoted race theories and the German Christianity of thinkers such as Eckhart. On the National Socialist view of Christianity, see Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919–1945* (Cambridge: 2003), esp. 95–112, and Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, N.J.: 2008). See also the German (National Socialist aligned) medieval historian Herbert Grundmann (1902–70) who was very important in tracing the influence of Eckhart in German mysticism. See his discussion of Eckhart in *Die Grossen Deutschen* (Berlin: 1935).

<sup>36</sup> See Niklaus Largier, "Meister Eckhart: Perspektiven der Forschung, 1980–1993," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 114 (1995), 29–98 and his "Recent Work on Meister Eckhart. Positions, Problems, New Perspectives, 1990–1997," *Recherches de Philosophie et de Théologie médiévales* 65 (1998), 147–67, and Jan A. Aertsen, "Meister Eckhart," in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 3, ed. E. Craig (London: 1998), 286–88. For a helpful discussion, see Oliver Davies, "On Reading Meister Eckhart," *Eckhart Review* 11 (Spring 2002), 4–10.

<sup>37</sup> Efforts to show Eriugena's direct influence on Eckhart have been elusive; see Kurt Ruh, "Johannes Scotus Eriugena Deutsch," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 99 (1988), 24–31. For a review of the latest scholarship connecting Eriugena's *Homily on the Prologue to St John* and Eckhart, see Jeffrey Hamburger, "Johannes Scotus Eriugena deutsch redivivus: Translations of the 'Vox spiritualis aquilae' in Relation to Art and Mysticism at the Time of Meister Eckhart," in *Meister Eckhart in Erfurt*, ed. A. Speer and L. Wegener (Berlin: 2005), 473–537. Eriugena was known through Honorius Augustodunensis's 12th-century summary, *Clavis physicae*.

<sup>38</sup> See Wolfgang Kluxen, "Die Geschichte des Maimonides im lateinischen Abendland als Beispiel einer christlich-jüdischen Begegnung," in *Judentum im Mittelalter. Beiträge zum*

Magnus, and subsequently goes on to Nicholas of Cusa.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, as a Parisian academic and a Dominican theologian, Eckhart absorbed and in many ways reinterpreted the central tenets of the new Aristotelian philosophy of being promulgated by Thomas Aquinas and other neo-Aristotelians in the Paris Arts Faculty (some allegedly tainted with "Averroism"). The particular historical and social milieu of Eckhart's German sojourn, including his complex relationship with women's spiritual and devotional movements (often associated with extreme ascetic practices) of the late 13th century, must also be taken into account.<sup>40</sup> There is also a growing consensus confirming Eckhart's orthodoxy or, at least, his orthodox intent, and this has been bolstered in the late 20th century by official moves by the Dominican order to rehabilitate his standing in Rome.<sup>41</sup>

Eckhart's complex metaphorical language and particularly his use of analogy, metaphor, and evocative images have also been highlighted by scholars as new hermeneutical approaches to his complex texts, including his scriptural commentaries.<sup>42</sup>

Along with this scholarly revival of interest intent on clarifying Eckhart's cultural, intellectual, and linguistic context, there have been renewed efforts to interpret systematically his enigmatic pronouncements and to show the inner unity of his thought. The first challenge is to specify correctly the relation between Eckhart's Scholastic writings (including the questions and commentaries) written in Latin, and his more mystical sermons written in Middle High German. In the 19th century, these two

*christlich-jüdischen Gespräch*, ed. Paul Wilpert, *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 4 (Berlin: 1966), 146–66, and Hans Liebeschütz, "Meister Eckhart und Moses Maimonides," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 54 (1972), 64–96.

<sup>39</sup> See H. Wackerzapp, *Der Einfluß Meister Eckharts auf die ersten philosophischen Schriften des Nikolaus von Kues (1440–1450)*, ed. J. Koch, BGPTM 39, Heft 3 (Münster: 1962); see also the studies collected in Donald F. Duclow, *Masters of Learned Ignorance: Eriugena, Eckhart, Cusanus*, (Variorum) (Aldershot: 2006). See Brient's chapter in the present volume.

<sup>40</sup> See, for instance, Bernard McGinn, *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg and Marguerite Porete* (London: 1997). See Wegener, Marler in the present volume.

<sup>41</sup> See the report by John Orme Mills OP, "Eckhart's Standing Today," *Eckhart Review* 13 (2004), 60–64.

<sup>42</sup> See especially Frank Tobin, *Meister Eckhart: Thought and Language* (Philadelphia: 1986); Josef Koch, "Zur Analogielehre Meister Eckharts," in *Mélanges offerts à Etienne Gilson*, (Études de philosophie médiévale) (Toronto-Paris: 1959), 327–50; Alain de Libera, *Le Problème de l'être chez Maître Eckhart. Logique et métaphysique de l'analogie*, (Cahiers de la Revue de Theologie et de Philosophie) 4 (Geneva: 1980); and Burkhard Mojsisch, *Meister Eckhart: Analogy, Univocity, and Unity*, trans. Orrin F. Summerell (Amsterdam: 2001).

sets of texts (in part due to the separate editions of Pfeiffer and Denifle) were seen to represent two distinct Eckharts: on the one hand, the more careful exegete writing for his academic peers; and, on the other, the unrestrained preacher attempting to communicate to an unlettered audience. Although Eckhart's German sermons were supposedly addressed to largely unlettered religious women in convents, in fact, Eckhart preached in *both* German *and* Latin and his sermons are replete with highly technical principles and concepts drawn from a diversity of classical and Scholastic sources (often simply cited as "a master says," *ein meister spricht*), including Aristotle, Augustine, Proclus, the *Book of Causes*, Dionysius, Aquinas, Albertus, Avicenna,<sup>43</sup> Averroes, Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed* (translated into Latin around 1240),<sup>44</sup> and the mystical *Book of the Twenty Four Philosophers*. Recent scholarship has sought to reunite these diverse Eckharts, emphasizing that his sermons and commentaries are both strongly rooted in Scripture and in the Christian philosophical tradition. Further, they were pitched at a very high-level and often to learned audiences.

#### ESTABLISHING CRITICAL EDITIONS AND AUTHENTICATING BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

The explosion of scholarly interest in Meister Eckhart in the 20th century<sup>45</sup> was squarely founded on the new editions of his writings that emerged from the mid-19th century onward, especially the groundbreaking editions of the German antiquarian and literary scholar Franz Pfeiffer (1815–68) and the Austrian Dominican Heinrich Suso Denifle (1844–1905). In 1857 Pfeiffer published a two-volume edition of his *German Mystics*, which

<sup>43</sup> In "On Detachment" Eckhart is able to find a text from Avicenna, *De anima* 4.4, which recommends detachment as the highest virtue; see Colledge and McGinn, 288.

<sup>44</sup> McGinn, *Eckhart. Teacher and Preacher*, 17: "No Christian author of the Middle Ages, however, knew Maimonides better or reflected greater sympathy for his views than did Meister Eckhart." See also, *Commentary on Exodus*, 90. See the chapter by Schwartz in the present volume.

<sup>45</sup> Recent developments include the establishment of an Eckhart research center at the Thomas Institut in Köln and the setting up two societies, the Eckhart Society (UK), and Meister-Eckhart-Gesellschaft, an international society for the promotion of the study and research into the life, writings, and reception of Meister Eckhart in an interdisciplinary context. The Dominican order has petitioned Rome for the removal of the judgement against Eckhart. Pope John Paul II quoted Eckhart in a sermon which was seen as a major step towards his official rehabilitation. An *Eckhart Jahrbuch* has appeared since 2007.



included many of Eckhart's sermons and tracts written in Middle German.<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately, if unsurprisingly, this edition of 110 sermons and some 18 tracts included many spurious or unattributed works. Soon after, in 1866, Denifle published a two-volume edition of Eckhart's Latin writings.<sup>47</sup> In part, Denifle's aim was to counteract an earlier view that presented Eckhart as a pre-Lutheran reformer by emphasizing Eckhart's grounding in the Scholastic theological tradition. He claimed that efforts to read Eckhart as a pantheist showed a misunderstanding of the Catholic approach to grace. Denifle emphasized Eckhart's relation to Thomas Aquinas (although he regarded the latter as the superior thinker) but also tended to downplay the German texts in favor of the Latin. Gradually, Eckhart began to be studied through his own texts—he appears, for instance, in Auguste Jundt's history of pantheism with several sermons collected in an appendix.<sup>48</sup>

The pioneering work of Pfeiffer and Denifle was built on and corrected by subsequent scholars to provide the basis for the monumental critical editions of Eckhart's Latin and German writings that appeared in the 20th century by a heroic group of scholars, often working in adversity, including Josef Quint (1898–1976),<sup>49</sup> Josef Koch (1885–1967), Martin Grabmann

<sup>46</sup> Franz Pfeiffer, *Deutsche Mystiker der vierzehnten Jahrhunderts*, 2 vols: vol. 2, *Meister Eckhart. Predigten und Traktate*, 2 vols (Leipzig: 1857; repr. Aalen: 1962). Pfeiffer's edition posed problems due to the suspect nature of some of the attributions to Eckhart as well as in terms of the readings themselves. Many anonymous mystical texts were attributed to Meister Eckhart because of his fame or notoriety. The difficulty was compounded by the fact that Pfeiffer never published the promised volume explaining his methodology and selection process. Nevertheless, from the 1930s onward, Josef Quint built his edition, *Meister Eckhart, Predigten und Traktate* (Munich: 1955) on Pfeiffer, albeit drawing on many new manuscripts that had come to light; see Josef Quint, *Neue Handschriftenfunde zur Überlieferung der deutschen Werke Meister Eckharts und seiner Schule* (Stuttgart: 1940) and *Fundberichte zur handschriftlichen Überlieferung der deutschen Werke Meister Eckharts und andere Mystikertexte* (Stuttgart: 1969). For a discussion of the history of these editions, see Heribert Fischer, *Meister Eckhart* (Freiburg: 1974), 142–58.

<sup>47</sup> See H. Denifle, *Meister Eckharts lateinische Schriften und die Grundanschauung seiner Lehre*, (Archiv für Literatur und Kirchengeschichte des Mittelalters) 2 (1886), 417–615.

<sup>48</sup> Auguste Jundt, *Histoire du panthéisme populaire au Moyen Age et au seizième siècle, suivie de pièces inédites concernant les Frères du libre esprit, maître Eckhart, les libertins spirituels, etc.* (Paris: 1875).

<sup>49</sup> The current critical edition is the ongoing Kohlhammer edition: *Meister Eckhart: Die deutschen und lateinischen Werke*, herausgegeben im Auftrage der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft (Stuttgart: 1936; repr. 1958), 11 vols. Quint devoted his life to this project and edited four of the projected five volumes of the German works (vol. 1, 1958; vol. 2, 1971; vol. 3, 1976; and vol. 5 containing the three genuine tractates in 1963) and the fourth volume has been edited by Georg Steer (2003). For more on Josef Quint, see *Festschrift für Josef Quint*, ed. Hugo Moser et al. (Bonn: 1964). Another excellent edition, with translation into modern German, is Joseph Quint, *Meister Eckhart: Deutsche Predigten und Traktate*

(1875–1949),<sup>50</sup> Gabriel Théry,<sup>51</sup> Antoine Dondaine (1898–1987),<sup>52</sup> Raymond Klibansky (1905–2005),<sup>53</sup> and others. Quint established a list of 86 genuine sermons (including 71 found in Pfeiffer) in his first three volumes, but more have since been identified and included in volume five (sermons 87 to 105). Popular interest in Eckhart was also stimulated by the appearance of modern German translations.<sup>54</sup>

The appearance of the critical editions of his writings has been accompanied by a wealth of studies of Eckhart's life,<sup>55</sup> providing rich detail of the intellectual, cultural, and religious milieu, including the “process” around Eckhart's accusation and trial leading to his condemnation in the papal bull *In agro dominico* (1329).<sup>56</sup> Denifle, Théry, and others began what has come to be an intense and highly nuanced study of the documents surrounding Eckhart's trial.<sup>57</sup> We have learned, for instance, that Eckhart was

(Munich: 1955; 2nd edition, 1964). The normal convention is to refer to Eckhart as follows: DW = Deutsche Werke; LW = Lateinische Werke, followed by the volume number of the Kohlhammer edition.

<sup>50</sup> See Martin Grabmann, “Neue Eckhartforschungen im Lichte neuerer Eckhartfunde. Bemerkungen zu O. Karrers und G. Thérys Eckhartarbeiten,” *Divus Thomas* 5 (1927), 74–96.

<sup>51</sup> See Gabriel Théry, “Le commentaire de Maître Eckhart sur le livre de la sagesse,” *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age* 3 (1928), 321–443 and 4 (1929), 233–394.

<sup>52</sup> Dondaine edited Eckhart's *Parisian Questions* as part of the Leipzig edition *Magistri Eckardi Opera Latina*; see *Questiones Parisienses. Edidit Antonius Dondaine. Commentarium de Eckardi magisterio adiunxit Raymundus Klibansky* (Leipzig: 1936). See Armand Maurer (ed.), *Master Eckhart: Parisian Questions and Prologues* (Toronto: 1974).

<sup>53</sup> See *Magistri Eckardi Opera Latina, I: Super oratione dominica*, ed. Raymundus Klibansky (Leipzig: 1934).

<sup>54</sup> See especially Hermann Büttner's 1903 translation, *Meister Eckharts Schriften und Predigten. Aus dem Mittelhochdeutschen übersetzt und hrsg. von Hermann Büttner*. 1. Bd (Leipzig: 1903), 2. Bd. (Leipzig: 1909; repr. Düsseldorf: 1959). See also Otto Karrer, *Meister Eckhart spricht. Gesammelte Texte mit Einleitung* (Munich: 1926), trans. Elizabeth Strakosch as *Meister Eckhart speaks. A Collection of the Teachings of the Famous German Mystic*, with an introduction by Otto Karrer (London: 1957).

<sup>55</sup> Beginning with the work of Josef Koch, “Kritische Studien zum Leben Meister Eckhart. Ersten Teil: von den Anfängen bis zum Strassburger Aufenthalt einschliesslich,” *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 29 (1959), 5–51, reprinted in J. Koch, *Kleine Schriften* 1 (Rome: 1973), 247–347.

<sup>56</sup> See Gabriel Théry, “Édition critique des pièces relatives au procès d'Eckhart contenues dans le manuscrit 33b de la bibliothèque de Soest,” *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age* 1 (1926/27), 129–268, and M.-H. Laurent, “Autour du procès de Maître Eckhart. Les documents des Archives Vaticanes,” *Divus Thomas*, Ser. III, 13 (1936), 331–48; 430–47.

<sup>57</sup> See Heinrich Suso Denifle, “Actenstücke zu Meister Eckharts Process,” *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 29 (1885), 259–66 and his “Acten zum Prozesse Meister Eckharts,” *Archiv für Literatur- und Kirchengeschichte des Mittelalters* 2 (1886) 616–40. For recent studies see H. Stirnimann, H. and R. Imbach (eds.), *Eckardus*

not born in Hochheim but that "von Hochheim" was his family name. Enormous effort has been put into the social and religious context of the day and especially the social context of the sermons.<sup>58</sup> Kurt Flasch has written greatly on the social and historical background to Eckhart whom he reads as a philosopher in the context of the university and study centers of the period, rejecting any opposition between Eckhart's supposed "mysticism" and his "scholasticism."

#### STAGES ON LIFE'S WAY

It is now usual to divide Eckhart's life into his periods in Erfurt, Paris, Strasbourg, and Köln. Eckhart was born in Tambach, Thuringia, around 1260, entered the Dominican order in Erfurt as a teenager, and at least part of his formation took place at Cologne in the house founded by Albertus Magnus in 1248 (it is also possible he studied in Paris at that time—he may even have been there when the 1277 condemnation was pronounced). He first lectured on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard in the Dominican *studium generale* at the abbey of Saint-Jacques (established by St Dominic and part of the University of Paris since 1220), in 1293–94. Only the first lecture (*Collatio in libros sententiarum*) of his course on the *Sentences* survives from this period.<sup>59</sup>

Between 1294 and 1298 Eckhart was prior of the Dominican house in Erfurt and vicar of Dominican houses in Thuringia.<sup>60</sup> During this period he composed his *Talks of Instruction* (*Die rede der underscheidung*) in 23 chapters, derived from evening addresses to young Dominican students.<sup>61</sup>

*Theutonicus, homo doctus et sanctus. Nachweise und Berichte zum Prozess gegen Meister Eckhart*, Dokimion 11 (Fribourg: 1992).

<sup>58</sup> See Klaus Jacobi (ed.), *Meister Eckhart: Lebensstationen—Redesituationen* (Berlin: 1997).

<sup>59</sup> LW V, 3–26.

<sup>60</sup> See Andreas Speer (ed.), *Meister Eckhart in Erfurt* (Berlin/New York: 2005).

<sup>61</sup> The dating is based on the fact that the manuscript heading has "Brother Eckhart" (*bruoder Eckhart*) and refers to him as "vicar of Thuringia" (*vicarius von Thüringen*, DW V, 185). Pfeiffer included this text among 18 tracts he thought genuine. Quint includes it as one of his three genuine tracts, see DW V, 185–309; translated as "The Talks of Instructio," in M.O.C. Walshe, *Meister Eckhart. Sermons and Treatises*, vol. 3 (Longmead, Shaftesbury, Kent: 1990), 11–60. It is translated as "Counsels of Discernment" in *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatise and Defense*, ed. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn (New York: 1981), 247–85. Wolfgang Wackernagel has analyzed the piece in his "Eloge du Redemeister: Discours et discernement dans le *Discours de discernement*," in *Meister Eckhart: Lebensstationen, Redesituationen*, ed. Klaus Jacobi (Berlin: 1997). The German "Rede" means a kind of informal advice, the Latin term being "collatio."

In this early work Eckhart is already promoting "self-abandonment," the "empty spirit" that is "attached to nothing," the "nakedness" that is "free of things."<sup>62</sup> In 1302 he returned to Paris to the Dominican chair of theology, by which time his master's degree must have been conferred (the title "Meister" is thought to refer to his time as *magister*) as he had completed the necessary four years of post-bachelor lecturing. At Paris his duties as professor included exegetical commentary on biblical books, partaking in disputes (*disputationes*) on particular questions, and preaching. During this period, Eckhart composed the first two of his *Parisian Questions*. Eckhart was opposing the views of another Paris master, the Franciscan Gonsalvus of Spain (1255–1313) who was a promoter of the young Duns Scotus, who was lecturing on the *Sentences* in Paris from 1302. Eckhart had defended the thesis that the "the praise of God in heaven is better than the love of God on earth." Gonsalvus opposed this position.<sup>63</sup> There was an ongoing dispute between Dominicans and Franciscans concerning the primacy of intellect over will or vice versa. Henry of Ghent had proposed the identity of God with pure being.

After just one year in Paris, Eckhart was once again assigned administrative duties, this time in the newly created province of Saxonia. The plan of the *Opus tripartitum* was probably drafted at this time. This was to contain three parts: *opus propositionum*, *opus quaestionum*, and *opus sermonum*. He returned for a third time to Paris to the chair of theology at Saint-Jacques from 1311 to 1313. From 1313 until 1323 he is in Strasbourg as a vicar and as prior of the Dominican convent, dealing with issues connected with the Brethren of the Free Spirit. During this period he composed "Of the Nobleman" (DW V, 109–19). Recent scholarship has placed new emphasis on Eckhart's encounter with Beguine spirituality during his stay in Strasbourg.<sup>64</sup> The similarities between Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Eckhart have been discussed by many contemporary

<sup>62</sup> Colledge and McGinn (eds.), *Meister Eckhart. The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatise and Defense*, 248 and 254.

<sup>63</sup> See "La Question de Gonsalve d'Espagne contenant les raisons d'Eckhart," trans. A. de Libera in E. Zum Brunn, Z. Kaluza, A. de Libera, P. Vignaux, and E. Weber, *Maître Eckhart à Paris. Une critique médiévale de l'ontothéologie. Les Questions parisiennes n° 1 et n° 2 d'Eckhart, études, textes et traductions*, BEHE. Section des Sciences religieuses 86 (Paris: 1984), 200–23.

<sup>64</sup> See Wegener's chapter in this volume for a counterargument.

scholars.<sup>65</sup> Eckhart's debt to religious women, the Beguines in particular, has also been emphasized.<sup>66</sup>

Presumably Eckhart returned to Cologne around 1323 as regent master (*magister regens*) of the *studium generale* in which he had earlier studied.<sup>67</sup> Among his students at this time were Henry Suso and Johannes Tauler. Inquiries into his orthodoxy began in 1325 under Eckhart's Dominican superior Nicholas of Strasbourg and were made official in 1326 under the archbishop of Cologne, Henry of Virneberg.

Most of his German sermons belong to his later period. There are disputed issues around his authorship of certain works as well as the dating of certain works. For instance, Loris Sturlese has claimed that Eckhart's *Opus tripartitum* is to be located in Eckhart's time in Erfurt after his first Paris sojourn,<sup>68</sup> whereas Kurt Ruh has challenged the authenticity of the *Talks of Instruction*.

#### CHARACTERIZING ECKHART'S INTELLECTUAL OUTLOOK

Eckhart's complex relationship with Scholasticism and his association with different intellectual centers, including three periods at Paris, make it difficult to characterize with precision his intellectual position. As a Dominican theologian,<sup>69</sup> he clearly belongs to the tradition of Albertus Magnus<sup>70</sup> and Thomas Aquinas (Eckhart frequently quotes or alludes to both masters). He is also particularly connected with the so-called German

<sup>65</sup> Including Edmund Colledge, Oliver Davies, Herbert Grundmann, Romana Guarnieri, Bernard McGinn, Michael Sells, and Frank Tobin, among others. See Bernard McGinn (ed.), *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete* (New York: 1994).

<sup>66</sup> See Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart*, (Studies in Spirituality and Theology) 1 (Notre Dame: 1996).

<sup>67</sup> For a recent study see Loris Sturlese, "Die Kölner Eckhartisten. Das *Studium generale* der deutschen Dominikaner und die Verurteilung der Thesen Meister Eckharts," in *Homo divinus. Philosophische Projekte in Deutschland zwischen Meister Eckhart und Heinrich Seuse*, ed. L. Sturlese (Stuttgart: 2007), 119–35.

<sup>68</sup> See Loris Sturlese, "Meister Eckhart in der Bibliotheca Amploniana. Neues zur Datierung des 'Opus Tripartitum'," in *Die Bibliotheca Amploniana, Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 23 (Berlin: 1995), 434–46.

<sup>69</sup> For Eckhart's relationship with the Dominicans, see William A. Hinnebusch, *The History of the Dominican Order*, vol. 2 (New York: 1973), 304–10.

<sup>70</sup> See for instance the articles in Maarten J.F.M. Hoenen and Alain de Libera (eds.), *Albertus Magnus und der Albertismus. Deutsche philosophische Kultur des Mittelalters* (Leiden: 1995). See also Ruedi Imbach (ed.), *Albert der Grosse und die deutsche Dominikanerschule*, (Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie) 32, 1–2 (1985).

Dominican school in Cologne, which included Dietrich of Freiburg (1250–1310), and later Berthold von Moosburg, Johannes Tauler, and others.<sup>71</sup> In recent years, a group of German medieval scholars, the so-called "Bochum school" of scholars—Burkhard Mojsisch, Kurt Flasch, Loris Sturlese—have documented in detail Eckhart's links with his immediate German milieu. Mojsisch and Sturlese, in particular, have explored Eckhart's connection with Dietrich von Freiberg,<sup>72</sup> a Dominican theologian at Paris who also worked on the intellect and whom Eckhart knew personally, although he is never mentioned by Eckhart in his works.<sup>73</sup> Much more is now known of Eckhart's relationships with his teacher Albert the Great as well as with the broad school which included Ulrich of Strasbourg (ca. 1225–77), a movement known broadly as "Rheinish mysticism."<sup>74</sup> A lively debate rages as to whether these German Dominicans can truly be said to constitute a "school" in the sense of maintaining a unified philosophical position.<sup>75</sup> It is undoubtedly the case that the Dominicans exercised intellectual dominance in Germany from the late 13th until the mid-14th century. Broadly speaking, the main tenets of this Albertist Dominican school are the understanding of God as pure intellect, the claim that human nature too is essentially intellect (a view earlier promulgated by Johannes Scottus Eriugena), and the claim that human intellect can attain to the intellectual

<sup>71</sup> For the influence of Dietrich of Freiburg on Eckhart see especially N. Largier, *Zeit, Zeitlichkeit, Ewigkeit. Ein Aufriss des Zeitproblems bei Dietrich von Freiberg und Meister Eckhart*, (Deutsche Literatur von den Anfängen bis 1700) (Bern/Frankfurt: 1989), Kurt Flasch (ed.), *Von Meister Dietrich zu Meister Eckhart* (Hamburg: 1987), and also K.-H. Kandler, B. Mojsisch, and Fr.-B. Stammkötter (eds.), *Dietrich von Freiberg. Neue Perspektiven seiner Philosophie, Theologie und Naturwissenschaft*, (Bochumer Studien zur Philosophie) 28 (Amsterdam: 1999).

<sup>72</sup> On Dietrich see Loris Sturlese, *Dokumente und Forschungen zu Leben und Werk Dietrichs von Freiberg* (CPTMA) 3 (Hamburg: 1984). See also Dietrich von Freiberg, *Opera Omnia, Schriften zur Intellekttheorie*, ed. Burkhard Mojsisch, CPTMA 1 (Hamburg: 1977). Dietrich's *Tractatus de intellectu et intelligibili* has been translated by Markus Führer as *Treatise on the Intellect and the Intelligible* (Milwaukee: 1992).

<sup>73</sup> See the studies of Niklaus Largier, Wouter Goris, and Norbert Winkler, in Karl-Hermann Kandler, Burkhard Mojsisch, and Franz-Bernhard Stammkötter (eds.), *Dietrich von Freiberg: neue Perspektiven seiner Philosophie, Theologie, und Naturwissenschaft: Freiburger Symposium, 10–13 März 1997*, (Bochumer Studien zur Philosophie) 28 (Amsterdam: 1999).

<sup>74</sup> Alain de Libera, *Introduction à la mystique rhénane: d'Albert le Grand à maître Eckhart*, (Sagesse chrétienne) 3 (Paris: 1984) and earlier Jeanne Ancelet-Hustache, *Maître Eckhart et la mystique rhénane* (Paris: 1956).

<sup>75</sup> See Niklaus Largier, "Die 'deutsche Dominikanerschule': Zur Problematik eines historiographischen Konzepts," in *Geistesleben im 13. Jahrhundert*, ed. J.A. Aertsen and A. Speer, *Miscellanea Mediaevalia Sonderdruck* (Berlin: 2000), 200–13. See also Oliver Davies, *Meister Eckhart: Mystical Theologian*, 91–93.

vision that God Himself enjoys.<sup>76</sup> Albertus and his followers maintain an older Augustinian psychology that sees the soul as an entity independent of the body which, although not identical with intellect, contains the originally pure intellect directly illuminated by God.<sup>77</sup> Dietrich of Freiberg disagreed with Thomas on the relationship between being and essence; for him it is not a real distinction, as for Thomas, but rather essence and existence are two ways of signifying the same thing.

As the 19th-century commentators already recognized, Eckhart must also be situated in an older Christian Neoplatonic tradition of *Einheitsmetaphysik* which prioritizes thinking the divinity (*Gottheit*) as a transcendent, infinite, unnameable One (as Werner Beierwaltes,<sup>78</sup> Theo Kobusch, and others have done).<sup>79</sup> Eckhart is certainly familiar with the Neoplatonic negative theology, especially as found in the Christian followers of Proclus, mediated through Pseudo-Dionysius or the *Liber de causis*,<sup>80</sup> but also with the strong influence of Maimonides. In recent years, also, there has been a plethora of works devoted to apophatic theology and spiritu-

<sup>76</sup> See Kurt Flasch, "Procedere ut imago. Das Hervorgehen des Intellekts aus seinem göttlichen Grund bei Meister Dietrich, Meister Eckhart und Berthold von Moosburg," in *Abendländische Mystik im Mittelalter. Symposium Kloster Engelberg 1984*, ed. Kurt Ruh, Germanistische Symposien 8 (Stuttgart: 1986), 125–34 and Burkhard Mojsisch, "Dynamik der Vernunft bei Dietrich von Freiberg und Meister Eckhart," *ibid.*, 135–44.

<sup>77</sup> See Markus Führer, "The Agent Intellect in the Writings of Meister Dietrich of Freiburg and its Influence on the Cologne School," in *Dietrich von Freiberg: neue Perspektiven seiner Philosophie, Theologie, und Naturwissenschaft: Freiburger Symposium, 10–13 März 1997*, ed. Karl-Hermann Kandler, Burkhard Mojsisch, Franz-Bernhard Stammkötter (see note 73 above), 69–88.

<sup>78</sup> See W. Beierwaltes, "'Und daz Ein machet uns saelic.' Meister Eckharts Begriff der Einheit und der Einung," in Werner Beierwaltes, *Platonismus im Christentum*, (Philosophische Abhandlungen) 73 (Frankfurt am Main: 1998), 100–29. See also Wouter Goris, *Einheit als Prinzip und Ziel: Versuch über die Einheitsmetaphysik des Opus tripartitum Meister Eckharts* (Leiden: 1997).

<sup>79</sup> See, for instance, Wouter Goris, "Ontologie oder Henologie: Zur Einheitsmetaphysik Meister Eckharts," in *Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter*, ed. Jan Aertsen and Andreas Speer, *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 26 (Berlin: 1998), 694–703.

<sup>80</sup> See Werner Beierwaltes, "'Primum est dives per se.' Maître Eckhart et le *Liber de causis*," in *Voici Maître Eckhart. Textes et études réunis*, ed. E. Zum Brunn (Grenoble: 1994), 285–300, and Vladimir Lossky, *Théologie négative et connaissance de Dieu chez Maître Eckhart* (Paris: 1960).

ality by, among others, Jean-Luc Marion,<sup>81</sup> Michael Sells, Denys Turner,<sup>82</sup> Deirdre Carabine, and Thomas Carlson.<sup>83</sup>

God, for Eckhart, following the Christian Neoplatonic negative tradition, is such complete simplicity and unity as to be entirely ineffable. Thus Eckhart says in Sermon 26 *Nolite timere eos qui corpus occidunt*: "Everything that is in the Godhead is one, and of that there is nothing to be said."<sup>84</sup> In this context he elevates God above being and yet, in several of his works, notably his *Opus tripartitum*, retains Thomistic and Scholastic formulations that one and being are convertible, *ens et unum convertuntur*. Thus in the *Commentary on Exodus*, a particularly important biblical text since it contains the "I am who am" (Exodus 3:14) statement that motivated St Augustine and others to identify God with Being. For Eckhart, as for the Christian tradition, God is the "I am who am" of Exodus, as well as "that which is" "what it is." Eckhart identifies the one with being.<sup>85</sup> God is being, *esse*, that which is, the identity of essence and existence;<sup>86</sup> necessary being.<sup>87</sup> However, in his *Parisian Lectures*, Eckhart says God cannot be called *esse* and prefers to refer to Him as intellect which is prior to being. Thus Eckhart can write that God's act of understanding is His very existence, "God exists because He understands" (*quia intelligit, ideo est*).<sup>88</sup>

<sup>81</sup> See for example, Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: 1991). Marion argues that "God is love" places "love" before being. Whereas creatures are dependent on their being, the same is not true for God. For Marion, God does not fall within the dominion of Being but comes to humans as a gift. Marion therefore is rejecting ontotheological conceptions of the divine and embracing rather the tradition of Pseudo-Dionysius.

<sup>82</sup> See Denys Turner, "Meister Eckhart and The Cloud on Interiority, Detachment and Paradox," *Eckhart Review* (1992), 9–26; Turner, "Meister Eckhart: Dualist or Monist?," *Eckhart Review* (Spring, 1997), 40–50; and his "The Art of Unknowing: Negative Theology in Late Medieval Mysticism," *Modern Theology* 14, 4 (October, 1998), 473–88.

<sup>83</sup> See Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: 1994); Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: 1995); Thomas A. Carlson, *Indiscretion: Finitude and the Naming of God* (Chicago: 1999), and Oliver Davies and Denys Turner (eds.), *Silence and the Word: Negative Theology and Incarnation* (Cambridge: 2002).

<sup>84</sup> Translated in M.O'C. Walshe, *Meister Eckhart. Sermons and Treatises*, vol. 2 (Longmead, Shaftesbury, Dorset: 1987), 81.

<sup>85</sup> *Commentary on Exodus*, in *Meister Eckhart. Teacher and Preacher*, ed. B. McGinn (New York: 1986), 87. The Latin text is LW II, 1–227.

<sup>86</sup> *Commentary on Exodus*, in *Meister Eckhart. Teacher and Preacher*, ed. B. McGinn, LW II, 94.

<sup>87</sup> "Only God's existence is necessary existence," McGinn, *Meister Eckhart. Teacher and Preacher*, 95.

<sup>88</sup> Eckhart, *Paris Questions*, in A.A. Maurer, *Meister Eckhart. Parisian Questions and Prologues* (Toronto: 1974), Question I, 43–45; LW V, 40.

Eckhart maintains that being always presupposes the knowing of intellect. Absolute knowing, considered in itself, can be understood as without being or prior to being.

In his *Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, Eckhart claims that the divine assertion "I Am Who Am" involves a repetition that

indicates the purity of affirmation excluding all negation from God. It also indicates a reflexive turning (*reflexa conversio*) back of his existence into itself and upon itself and its dwelling and remaining fixed in itself. It further indicates a 'boiling' or giving birth to itself—glowing in itself, and melting and boiling in and into itself, light that totally forces its whole being in light and into light and that is everywhere totally turned back and reflected upon itself, according to that saying of the sage, 'The Monad gives birth to' (or gave birth to) 'the monad and reflected love or ardent desire back into itself.'<sup>89</sup>

Eckhart stresses both the transcendent Oneness of the divine and also that God is being or "is-ness" (*Istigkeit*). From Eriugena (following Dionysius), he also speaks of God as "nothingness." Johannes Scottus Eriugena understands God as "nothingness" (*nilum*, *Periphyseon* III.685a) and as the negation of essence (*negatio essentiae*, I.462b) and says that God is "not this nor that nor anything" (*nec hoc nec illud nec ullum ille est*, I.510c). The "nothingness" of creatures is a common theme—deriving from St Augustine and developed also by Eriugena and others. St Augustine claimed that the creature, considered apart from God, is a mere nothing. Eckhart constantly reinforces this message. For Eckhart, the transcendent nothingness of God and the dependent nothingness of creatures are mirrors of each other. His thought seeks to mediate the tension between these spheres of nothingness. It is precisely this emphasis on nothingness that attracted Heidegger.

In the remainder of this chapter, then, I shall focus on what I regard as the most powerful and influential philosophical interpretations of Eckhart by 20th-century European thinkers, particularly Martin Heidegger and his followers, notably his Marburg student Käte Oltmanns (who wrote a thesis on Eckhart) and Reiner Schürmann (1941–93), a highly regarded professor at the New School for Social Research in New York, and an influential

<sup>89</sup> See Meister Eckhart, *Commentary on Exodus*, ch. 1, 16, in *Meister Eckhart. Teacher and Preacher*, ed. B. McGinn, 46. The reflexive turning back is from the *Liber de causis*. The quotation of the Sage is from the *Book of the Twenty-Four Philosophers*. See also A.A. Maurer, *Meister Eckhart. Parisian Questions and Prologues* (Toronto: 1974), Appendix, 108.

commentator and interpreter of the work of Eckhart.<sup>90</sup> I shall also discuss the interpretation of Eckhart as a critic of ontotheology and indeed as a postmodern proponent of *différance*.

#### ECKHART AND HEIDEGGER: *GELASSENHEIT*

Perhaps the most important 20th-century philosopher to have taken up Eckhart is Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), so it is necessary here to examine his unorthodox approach in some depth. Heidegger was deeply influenced by Meister Eckhart both directly through his own texts and through citations of Eckhart to be found in the German poet Angelus Silesius (also known as Johannes Scheffler, 1624–77). In addition, several of Heidegger's circle, including his student Käte Oltmanns and his old friend from his native village of Messkirch, Fr Bernhard Welte (1906–83),<sup>91</sup> wrote on Eckhart. Furthermore, many philosophers, including Reiner Schürmann, Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann,<sup>92</sup> Jean Greisch,<sup>93</sup> and John D. Caputo,<sup>94</sup> have also contributed significantly to the discussion of the complex relation between Heidegger and Eckhart.<sup>95</sup> Recently, for instance, the

<sup>90</sup> See Reiner Schürmann, *Wandering Joy: Meister Eckhart's Mystical Philosophy*, translation and commentary by Reiner Schürmann, foreword by David Appelbaum (Great Barrington, Mass.: 2001). Schürmann was himself influenced by Bernhard Welte, who lectured on Eckhart at Freiburg, was close to Heidegger, and gave the graveside oration on his death; see B. Welte, *Meister Eckhart. Gedanken zu seinen Gedanken* (Freiburg: 1979).

<sup>91</sup> Bernhard Welte, *Meister Eckhart. Gedanken zu seinen Gedanken* (Freiburg: 1979; reprinted with a Foreword by Alois Haas, 1992). Heidegger's correspondence with Bernhard Welte has been published as Martin Heidegger–Bernhard Welte, *Briefe und Begegnungen* (Stuttgart: 2003).

<sup>92</sup> See Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, *Wege ins Ereignis: zu Heideggers "Beiträgen zur Philosophie"* (Frankfurt: 1994). Von Herrmann details the volumes of Eckhart that Heidegger possessed in his own library.

<sup>93</sup> See Jean Greisch, "La contrée de la sérénité et l'horizon de l'espérance," in *Heidegger et la question de Dieu*, ed. Richard Kearney (Paris: 1980), and Greisch, "Warum denn das Warum? Heidegger und Meister Eckhart: Von der Phänomenologie zum Ereignisdenken," in *Heidegger und die christliche Tradition. Annäherung an ein schwieriges Thema*, ed. N. Fischer and F.W. von Herrmann (Hamburg: 2007), 129–47.

<sup>94</sup> See John D. Caputo, "Meister Eckhart and the Later Heidegger, Part I," *The Journal of the History of Philosophy* 12 (1974), 479–94, and his "Meister Eckhart and the Later Heidegger, Part II," *The Journal of the History of Philosophy* 13 (1975), 61–80. See also his *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (New York: 1986; repr. 1990).

<sup>95</sup> For recent studies see Barbara Dalle Pezze, *Martin Heidegger and Meister Eckhart: A Path towards Gelassenheit* (Lewisburg, N.Y.: 2008) and Bret W. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will. On the Way to Gelassenheit* (Evanston: 2008). See also Barbara Mahoney, *Denken als Gelassenheit* (Freiburg: 1993); Hans-Joachim Simm (ed.), *Von der Gelassenheit: Texte zum Nachdenken* (Frankfurt: 1995); and Wolfgang Schirmacher, *Technik und Gelassenheit—Zeitkritik nach Heidegger* (Freiburg: 1983).

relationship between Heidegger's *Gelassenheit* and the concept of *wu-wei* in Taoism has been examined.<sup>96</sup> Heidegger focuses on Eckhart's central concept: *Gelassenheit*, often translated as "letting be," and on his concept of the abandonment of self-willing.

Already in his Habilitation thesis of 1915 on "Duns Scotus's Doctrine of the Categories and of Meaning" Heidegger promises a future study of Eckhart.<sup>97</sup> He also proposed a lecture course on Eckhart in Freiburg in 1919, which, however, was never given. His 1916 lecture "Die Zeitbegriff in der Geschichtswissenschaft" ("The Concept of Time in Historical Science") begins with a quotation from Eckhart concerning the simplicity of eternity in contrast to the changeability and multiplicity of time.<sup>98</sup> Heidegger was clearly reading Eckhart closely. In a letter of 22 January 1919 to his wife Elfriede, he says that he has been reading Eckhart in the edition of Ernst Diederichs<sup>99</sup> (he commends the edition but dismisses the editor's introduction as "worthless") and remarks that he learned that some of Eckhart's sermons had been published along with Tauler's in Adam Petri's Basel edition of 1521.<sup>100</sup> In one lecture from the 1930s Heidegger even claims that German philosophy begins with Eckhart, and he continues to invoke Eckhart especially in his lectures and talks during the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>101</sup> For instance, in his 1949 short piece, *Der Feldweg* ("The Country Path"), he refers to Eckhart as the "old master of reading and of life:"

In the unspoken of his speech, as the old Master of Reading and of Living Meister Eckhart said, is God first God. (*Im ungesprochenen ihrer Sprache ist, wie der alte Lese- und Lebe-meister Eckehardt sagt, Gott erst God*).<sup>102</sup>

<sup>96</sup> See Yen-Hui Lee, *Gelassenheit und Wu-Wei: Nähe und Ferne zwischen dem späten Heidegger und dem Taoismus* (Freiburg, doctoral dissertation: 2001).

<sup>97</sup> Heidegger's thesis is reprinted in M. Heidegger, *Die Kategorien- und Bedeutungslehre des Duns Scotus, Frühe Schriften* (Frankfurt: 1972), 133–350; see esp. 344. At this point Heidegger opposes the contrast between "Scholastic" and "mystic" and talks of the need for a phenomenological account of life. See Otto Pöggeler, "Mystical Elements in Heidegger's Thought and Paul Célan's Poetry," trans. Henry Pickford, in *Word Traces: Readings of Paul Celan*, ed. Aris Fioretos (Baltimore, Md.: 1994), 75–109.

<sup>98</sup> See Heidegger, *Frühe Schriften*, 357.

<sup>99</sup> Ernst Diederichs (ed.), *Meister Eckharts Reden der Unterscheidung*, (Kleine Texte für Vorlesungen und Übungen) 117 (Bonn: 1913).

<sup>100</sup> See Martin Heidegger, *Letters to his Wife 1915–1970*, ed. Gertrud Heidegger, trans. R.D.V. Glasgow (Cambridge: 2010), 61–62. Indeed, Petri's edition remained the only source of access to Eckhart's sermons until Pfeiffer's edition. Adam Petri was a member of the famous Basel family of printers.

<sup>101</sup> Reiner Schürmann in particular has attempted to document the places where Heidegger speaks of Eckhart.

<sup>102</sup> M. Heidegger, "Der Feldweg," in *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens 1910–1976*, (Gesamtausgabe [= "GA"]) 13 (Frankfurt: 1983), 89.

Crucially, Heidegger makes use of certain central Eckhartian notions, most notably "letting be" (*Gelassenheit*), "detachment" or "releasement" (*Abgeschiedenheit*; *MHG abgescheidenheit*), and the notion of the "without why" (*ohne Warum*).<sup>103</sup>

Undoubtedly Heidegger's most influential interpretation of Meister Eckhart is to be found in a slim volume entitled *Gelassenheit* (1959), which includes two texts: a 1955 talk entitled simply "*Gelassenheit*," and a "conversation" (*Gespräch*) entitled "Towards an Explication of *Gelassenheit*: From a Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking" ("*Zur Erörterung der Gelassenheit. Aus einem Feldweggespräch über das Denken*").<sup>104</sup> In fact, this latter text is a truncated excerpt from a much longer dialogue written by Heidegger a decade earlier, in 1944–45. The full version has now appeared in Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe* volume 77.<sup>105</sup> According to the editor Ingrid Schlüssler, the version originally published in 1959 represents only the last third of the version now available.<sup>106</sup>

In this text Heidegger's main focus is to elucidate the nature of "meditative thinking" (*Nachdenken, Besinnung*), its peculiar character of *letting be* or "releasement" (*Gelassenheit*) in relation to the overwhelming dominance of the framework of technological thinking, and the need for "rootedness" (*Bodenständigkeit*). For Heidegger, this "letting be" offers an opening in space and time that allows for a kind of counter-thinking or thinking "otherwise." The occasion for Heidegger's talk, delivered in his birthplace of Messkirch, was the relatively inauspicious 175th anniversary of the birth of a local composer Conradin Kreutzer (1780–1849). Heidegger is here practicing an Eckhartian-style sermon, given to local people not particularly tutored in philosophy or theology, warning of a current danger and suggesting a helpful practice to overcome the danger. This short

<sup>103</sup> For a study of these terms in Eckhart, see Erik Alexander Panzig, *Geläzenheit und Abegescheidenheit. Eine Einführung in das theologische Denken des Meister Eckhart* (Leipzig: 2005).

<sup>104</sup> Heidegger's talk was originally published as a pamphlet, entitled *Gelassenheit* (Pfullingen: 1959; reprinted Klett-Cotta, 13th edition 2004). The dialogue, "*Zur Erörterung der Gelassenheit Aus einem Feldweggespräch über das Denken*," was reprinted in *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens 1910–1976*, (GA) 13 (Frankfurt: 1983), 37–74, while the "*Gelassenheit*" talk has been reprinted in M. Heidegger, *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges 1910–1976*, ed. Hermann Heidegger, GA 16 (Frankfurt am Main: 2000), 517–33. An English translation of *Gelassenheit* is to be found as "Memorial Address" in M. Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: 1966), 43–57.

<sup>105</sup> See M. Heidegger, *Feldweg-Gespräche (1944/45)*, (GA) 77 (Frankfurt: 1995).

<sup>106</sup> See Ingrid Schlüssler, "Nachwort der Herausgeberin," in M. Heidegger, *Feldweg-Gespräche (1944/45)*, 246.



talk does not even mention Eckhart by name, but, in the talk, Heidegger does refer to an “old word,” which he calls “letting be” or “releasement toward things” (*die Gelassenheit zu den Dingen*).<sup>107</sup>

In this Messkirch address, Heidegger’s “first word” in his home village is the word “thanks.” He goes on to link the “thoughtlessness” and “thanklessness” (*Gedanken-losigkeit*) of much of our modern living which may be characterized as a “flight from thinking” (*Flucht vor dem Denken*). Thinking today has essentially been transmuted into “calculation” (*Rechnen*), investigating, and planning, which must be contrasted with meditative thinking (*Besinnung*)—a term much favored also by Heidegger’s mentor Edmund Husserl. Meditating, Heidegger insists, is not something high-flown and abstract; rather, it concerns what is closest to us. Moreover, meditative thinking requires grounding; it flowers in a homeland just as a work of art does. Thinking requires a certain kind of “groundedness” or “rootedness” (*Bodenständigkeit*).

According to Heidegger, scientific calculative thinking is everywhere and nowhere more evident than in the pursuit of nuclear power and the biotechnological control of the life process itself. The current age is the nuclear age and an age characterized by technological efficiency:

Nature becomes a gigantic gasoline station, an energy source for modern technology and industry. (*Die Natur wird zu einer einzigen riesenhaften Tankstelle, zur Energiequelle für die moderne Technik und Industrie*).<sup>108</sup>

But much more dangerous than the atom bomb is the capacity of scientists to technologically interfere with the life process itself. Heidegger in 1955 is fully aware of the dominance of technology and calculative thinking and its apparent inescapability. As a result of this technological upheaval, modern humans have lost their “rootedness” (*Bodenständigkeit*, GA 16, 526). No one has thought through precisely what this reliance and pursuit of technology is doing to us:

Yet it is not that the world is becoming entirely technical which is really uncanny (*das eigentlich Unheimliche*). Far more uncanny is our being unprepared for this transformation of world (*Weltveränderung*), our inability to confront meditatively what is really dawning in this age...<sup>109</sup>

<sup>107</sup> Heidegger, *Gelassenheit* (Stuttgart: 2004), 23; *Discourse on Thinking*, 54; GA 16, 527.

<sup>108</sup> Heidegger, *Gelassenheit*, 18; *Discourse on Thinking*, 50; GA 16, 523.

<sup>109</sup> Heidegger, *Gelassenheit*, 20; *Discourse on Thinking*, 52, trans. modified; GA 16, 525.

The intrinsic “sense” of the technological world is hidden from us (*Der Sinn der technischen Welt verbirgt sich*, GA 16, 527). The danger is that calculative thinking may be considered the only kind of thinking, in which case humans would have abandoned their nature as meditative beings. Heidegger then proceeds to offer an interpretation of what a detached attitude to technology should involve. Meditative thinking with its “rootedness” (*Bodenständigkeit*) must harbor the possibility for humans to say both “yes and no” to technology (GA 16; 527), both to employ technology and also to “let it be,” to let it in and also leave it out.<sup>110</sup>

Heidegger acknowledges that technology and the entire technical framing of the modern world cannot now be put to one side; rather, the challenge is not to allow ourselves to be dominated and enslaved by it. If we adopt the right attitude,

[O]ur relation to technology will become wonderfully simple and relaxed (*einfach und ruhig*). We let (*Wir lassen... in...*) technical devices enter our daily life, and at the same time leave them outside (*lassen... draussen...*), that is leave them alone, as things which are nothing absolute but depend on something higher. I would call this comportment towards technology which expresses “yes” and at the same time “no,” by an old word, releasement toward things.<sup>111</sup>

This appearing and hiding of the essence of technology is something we can be open to and we can adopt an attitude which Heidegger calls “openness to the mystery” (*die Offenheit für das Geheimnis*, GA 16, 528). This combination of *Gelassenheit* and “openness to the mystery” is precisely what is supposed to give us a new rootedness, a new “*Grund und Bode*.” However, Heidegger says this kind of meditative thinking (*Nachdenken*, *Besinnung*) does not happen by itself and is no accident but requires “courage” so it seems to require a self-conscious act of willing. Yet it is precisely this which he challenges in his second essay.

The second text published in the 1959 *Gelassenheit* volume, which was written somewhat earlier (1944–45), was cast in the form of a dialogue between three people: a scientist/researcher (*Forscher*), a scholar

<sup>110</sup> In the course of this essay, Heidegger plays on the multiple meanings of “letting” (*lassen*): including *verlassen* (forsaking, abandoning, leaving behind), *einlassen* (to let in, admit), *ablassen* (to let up, to stop), *fallenlassen* (to discard, leave to one side), *sich einlassen auf* (to engage in), and so on. Indeed, in the “Worldhood of the World” chapter of *Being and Time*, Heidegger speaks of “*sein lassen*,” about letting something be discovered in its readiness to hand. See Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 17th edition (Tübingen: 1993), 84–85; trans. John Macquarrie and E. Robinson, *Being and Time* (New York: 1962), 117.

<sup>111</sup> Heidegger, *Gelassenheit*, 23; *Discourse on Thinking*, 54; GA 16, 527.

(*Gelehrter*), and a teacher (*Lehrer*) and is translated as "Conversation on a Country Path About Thinking."<sup>112</sup> Here Heidegger develops the theme of *Gelassenheit* in a more systematic and technical manner and, this time, Meister Eckhart is explicitly mentioned as one of the old "masters of thought" (*bei älteren Meistern des Denkens*) "from whom much can be learned."<sup>113</sup>

Heidegger here develops a much deeper account of the nature of *Gelassenheit* or letting be. He is reflecting on the relation between thinking and willing (which Kant characterized as "spontaneity"). Heidegger here rejects the religious interpretation of *Gelassenheit* as a letting go or abandoning of the human will in order to let the divine will prevail. In this context, Heidegger thinks Eckhart himself errs on the religious side, replacing human will with divine will. He quotes Eckhart's *Talks of Instruction* (*Counsels of Discernment*): "Where I will nothing for myself, there instead wills God" (GA 77, 158). Rather, Heidegger seeks to articulate a new kind of non-willing, meditative response that is not fundamentally based on *questioning* but rather on a kind of "answering" (*Antworten*), which may also be understood as a kind of thanking. Questioning is a will to a response, for Heidegger, whereas what is needed is a kind of response that answers to the "claim" (*Anspruch*) of Being: "The word must first be listened to" (GA 77, 25).

According to Heidegger (and here the influence on Gadamer can clearly be seen), a genuine conversation does not attempt *to will* something (i.e. its outcome or result). Conversation has to involve a receptivity and openness to the matter at hand. Heidegger's *Gelassenheit* does not involve letting oneself go in order to invite God in. Rather, for Heidegger, *Gelassenheit* is entirely outside the domain of the will; it is neither passive nor active. Possibly influenced by Schopenhauer, Heidegger proposes *Gelassenheit* as a kind of "non-willing" (*Nicht-Wollen*) but is careful, especially in the longer unpublished version of the conversation, to distinguish this non-willing from any kind of "self-refusal" (*Sich-Weigern*) or "self-opposition" (*Sich-Widersetzen*) or "forbidding" (*Verbieten*). According to Heidegger, to explicitly renounce willing is still to will. In this lecture, especially, Heidegger understands representationalist thinking, thinking which sees to understand something in a particular manner, subject to a particular

framework or context, as a kind of willing. Technological thinking, then, is an extreme form of wilfulness.

In the *Gelassenheit* lecture, in order to characterize the new kind of opening within which genuine as opposed to representational thinking takes place, Heidegger introduces two new concepts, namely, the notions of "horizon" (*Horizont*), taken from Husserl, and "region" (and here Heidegger uses both "*die Gegend*" as well as an older dialect term "*die Gegnet*") which he understands as a certain kind of open space, but presumably not an imposed context. For Heidegger, a region is "an expanse and an abiding" (*die Weite und die Weile*).<sup>114</sup> It seems to have the character of both gathering and opening "so that its openness is gathered and held." The open expanse (*Weite*) is also a kind of "abiding" or "whiling" away. In other words, the concept of an opening here does not just have a spatial meaning—it also has a temporal connotation. A kind of temporal space is necessary for a genuine conversation.

For Heidegger, thinking is the activity of opening or regioning, where such opening is simply allowing the space of meaning to manifest itself as opposed to imposing a grid on it. Furthermore, "releasement" into the open is a matter of waiting (*Warten*). As Heidegger writes:

Releasement (*Gelassenheit*) is indeed the release of oneself from transcendental representation and so the relinquishing (*Absehen*) of a willing of the horizon. Such relinquishing no longer stems from a willing, except that the occasion for releasing oneself to belonging to the open-region would require a trace of willing (*Spur des Wollens*). This trace, however, vanishes while releasing oneself and is completely extinguished in releasement.<sup>115</sup>

Part of Heidegger's concern is to establish a kind of thinking about being which is haunted neither by metaphysics nor theology. It cannot be representational thinking. Furthermore, *Gelassenheit* should not be determined by the structure of Christian expectation, faith, and hope. The experience of *transcendence* of which he is talking here is still very much understood as phenomenology, as the experience of manifestation. Heidegger is exploring the manner in which truth is made manifest by humans, how humans stand in the truth. That-which-regions is itself truth, and the true human relation to such truth is *thinking* in the sense of allowing something to manifest itself.

<sup>112</sup> Heidegger, *Gelassenheit*, 27; *Discourse on Thinking*, 58–90.

<sup>113</sup> Heidegger, *Gelassenheit*, 34; *Discourse on Thinking*, 61.

<sup>114</sup> Heidegger, *Gelassenheit*, 40; *Discourse on Thinking*, 66.

<sup>115</sup> Heidegger, *Gelassenheit*, 57–58; *Discourse on Thinking*, 79–80.



The problem is whether, in these texts, *Gelassenheit*, for Heidegger, signals a kind of *quietism*, doing nothing, a retreat from action. Eckhart in his own *Talks of Instruction* directly addresses the issue of action and quietism. He argues there that persons who are too concerned about acting become attached to the action which is something temporary, whereas nothing is permanently in one's possession, so it is important to be detached from such doing.

Heidegger ends his meditation by invoking a single Greek word from Heraclitus, which he translates as "going near" (*Nahegehen*) or "moving-into-nearness" (*In-die-Nähe-gehen*).<sup>116</sup> This suggests a kind of activity, a kind of alertness which has at the same time to inhibit becoming representation.

Clearly, in these extremely dense texts, Heidegger is attempting not just to comment on Eckhart in the sense of offering an interpretation, but rather to free up the true sense of Eckhart's *Gelassenheit* so that it can be a form of remedial thinking in relation to the thinking of Being and living out the human activity of manifesting truth. Heidegger is not offering exegesis; he is rather wresting the concept of *Gelassenheit* from its Christian context in Eckhart and allowing it to have a deeper and more ontological significance. This represents a very profound and creative reading (even misreading) of Eckhart, which dislocates it from its historical and conceptual content. It can be argued, for instance, that Heidegger imposes on Eckhart's sense of *Gelassenheit* the Christian concept of *resignatio*, resignation to the will of God, rather than reading it as a more radical breaking free of all representations and images both of the divine and of worldly things.

#### ECKHART'S TREATISE "ON DETACHMENT" IN RELATION TO HEIDEGGER

In order to contextualize Heidegger's approach and understand its relation to Eckhart, we need to look more closely at Eckhart's treatise *On Detachment* (*Von Abgeschiedenheit*, Middle High German: *Von Abgescheidenheit*).<sup>117</sup>

<sup>116</sup> Heidegger, *Gelassenheit*, 70; *Discourse on Thinking*, 89.

<sup>117</sup> DW V, 400–35, translated as "On Detachment" in *Meister Eckhart. The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatise and Defense*, ed. Colledge and McGinn, 285–94, and in Walshe, vol. 3, 117–29. Its authenticity was challenged by Adolf Spamer in his careful critique of Pfeiffer's edition; see A. Spamer, *Zur Überlieferung der Pfeiffer'schen Eckhart-texte. Ein Versuch. Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 34 (1909), 307–420, but it was included by Quint in DW V.

This is a complex but unified tractate on the virtue of detachment.<sup>118</sup> Its date is uncertain.<sup>119</sup> The treatise begins with Eckhart attesting that he has read the pagan masters, the Old Testament prophets, the New Testament, and has sought himself to discover the highest virtue for human beings. According to Eckhart, detachment is the most elevated of the human virtues (surpassing even love, humility, and compassion) as, through it, humans lose their connection with creaturehood. Detachment attains to the unity and purity of God himself. Detachment affords humans perfect knowledge and will as the divine knowledge and will take effect in them. The object of this detachment is pure nothingness. Detachment places God above all good works; all the good works in the world have no effect on God's detachment.<sup>120</sup>

Elsewhere, in his Sermon 53 *Misit dominus manum suam*, Eckhart confirms that detachment was one of his central themes:

When I preach, I am accustomed to speak about detachment, and that a man should be free of himself and of all things; second, that a man should be formed again into that simple good which is God; third, that he should reflect on the great nobility with which God has endowed his soul, so that in this way he may come to wonder at God; fourth, about the purity of the divine nature, for the brightness of the divine nature is beyond words. (Sermon 53; *Misit dominus manum suam*).<sup>121</sup>

This list of themes has rightly been recognized by Reiner Schürmann and others as a summary of Eckhart's teaching.<sup>122</sup> The four themes are "detachment" (*Abgeschiedenheit*), "being transformed" (*Wiedereingebildet*) into God, the "nobility" (*Adel*) of the soul, and the "simplicity" (*Lauterkeit*) of God. Eckhart places detachment in first position. Indeed, Eckhart interprets Christ's injunction to Martha, "One thing is necessary" (*unum est necessarium*, Luke 10:42), as meaning "whoever wants to be free of care and to be pure must have one thing, and that is detachment."<sup>123</sup> Richard Woods also highlights Eckhart's other main teachings including the spark

<sup>118</sup> For a recent discussion of the structure of the treatise see Markus Enders, "Une interprétation du traité eckhartien du détachement," *Revue des sciences religieuses* 70, 1 (1996), 7–17.

<sup>119</sup> See Frank Tobin, *Meister Eckhart: Thought and Language* (Philadelphia: 1986), 20.

<sup>120</sup> "On detachment," in Colledge and McGinn, *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, 288.

<sup>121</sup> DW III, 437–48; Colledge and McGinn, *Meister Eckhart. The Essential Sermons*, 203.

<sup>122</sup> See for example Richard Woods, *Eckhart's Way* (London: 1987), 41.

<sup>123</sup> Eckhart, "On detachment," in Colledge and McGinn, *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, 285.

of the soul, the nothingness of God and of the creature, and the birth of the Word in the soul.<sup>124</sup>

Eckhart places a unique emphasis on the notion of "breakthrough" (*Durchbruch*), a concept also invoked by Heidegger, and indeed which is echoed in Husserl's claim about the role of the *Logical Investigations* in effecting a "breakthrough" in his thinking. In his Sermon 52, *Beati pauperes spiritu*, Eckhart says:

a great authority says that his breaking through (*durchbrechen*) is nobler than his flowing out (*üszvliezen*); and this is true.<sup>125</sup>

This breakthrough is a break-out from all that is temporal and conditioned. By abandoning the created and the temporal, we return to the eternal, but since the eternal is itself the changeless:

But in the breaking through, when I come to be free of will of myself and of God's will and of all his works and of God himself, then I am above all created things, and I am neither God nor creature, but I am what I was and what I shall remain, now and eternally.<sup>126</sup>

Heidegger's provocative reading of Eckhart absorbs him into Heidegger's own project of thinking of Being independently of beings. Heidegger's selective highlighting and interpretative rendering of Eckhartian themes has been hugely influential in lifting Eckhart out of purely medieval thought and presenting him as a still vital voice of our age.

#### ECKHART AS A CRITIC OF ONTOTHEOLOGY: THE POSTMODERN RECEPTION

Another important theme introduced by Heidegger which has had an enormous bearing on Eckhart studies is Heidegger's critique of *ontotheology*. Heidegger is largely responsible for identifying, naming, and criticizing the ontotheological tendency of modern philosophy and theology. This has been interpreted as a challenge to neo-Thomistic conceptions of being (found in Maritain, Gilson, and others).<sup>127</sup> In this context, Eckhart

<sup>124</sup> Richard Woods, *Eckhart's Way*, 42.

<sup>125</sup> DW II, 486–506. Colledge and McGinn, *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, 203.

<sup>126</sup> DW II, 486–506. Colledge and McGinn, *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, 203.

<sup>127</sup> See Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: 1952), and John F. X. Knasas, *Being and Some Twentieth-Century Thomists* (New York: 2003). The term "ontotheology" is to be found in Kant, but Heidegger applies it to the whole metaphysical tradition that treats of God as a being albeit an infinite being.

has been championed by post-Heideggerian critics of ontotheology, such as Alain de Libera, Emilie zum Brunn, John D. Caputo, among many others.<sup>128</sup> A number of studies produced by a group of CNRS researchers in Paris argued strongly for Eckhart's radical stance against the prevailing identification of God with being. Thus, in their Preface to the first French translation of Eckhart's *Parisian Questions*, *Maître Eckhart à Paris. Une critique médiévale de l'ontothéologie*, the authors claim boldly that, already in his first Paris sojourn of 1302/1303, and six centuries before Heidegger, Eckhart had established the basic principle of all his subsequent philosophy, namely, that God is not Being but intellect. This is presented as a critique of ontotheology.

The French deconstructionist Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), too, has discussed Meister Eckhart in several places and has cautioned against his own concept of *différance* being understood in terms of Eckhart's negative theology. Derrida discusses Eckhart's *Gelassenheit* (and Angelus Silesius) in his "Postscriptum: Aporias, Ways and Voices."<sup>129</sup> He refers to the manner in which Angelus Silesius takes up the themes of *Gelassenheit* and the "*ohne Warum*" (without the why). The essay is a meditation on the kind of assertion or non-assertion involved in the *apophysis* of negative theology and whether in fact it is an atheism. Derrida wants to stress the ambiguity involved in negative theology but his discussion is hardly either incisive or innovative. The American postmodern philosopher John D. Caputo (who has written extensively on Eckhart and who acknowledges the influence of Derrida) has commented illuminatingly on the relation between the strategies of Derrida and Eckhart.<sup>130</sup> Caputo claims that Eckhart employs certain deconstructive strategies aimed at loosening the grip of "ontotheology." For Caputo, interpreting Derrida, negative theologies are still caught up in asserting the ontotheological God which they claim to deny. In other words, negative theology still remains *theo-logy*, a speaking about God, even if that God is interpreted in a more transcendent manner.

<sup>128</sup> See especially E. Zum Brunn and A. de Libera, *Maître Eckhart. Métaphysique du Verbe et théologie négative* (Paris: 1984); and E. Zum Brunn, Z. Kaluza, A. de Libera, P. Vigna, and E. Wéber, *Maître Eckhart à Paris. Une critique médiévale de l'ontothéologie. Les Questions parisiennes n° 1 et n° 2 d'Eckhart, études, textes et traductions*, (BEHE. Section des Sciences religieuses) 86 (Paris: 1984).

<sup>129</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Postscriptum: Aporias, Ways and Voices," trans. John P. Leavey, in Harold Coward and Toby Foshay, *Derrida and Negative Theology* (Albany, N.Y.: 1992). A slightly different version appeared as "Sauf le nom (Postscriptum)" in Jacques Derrida, *On the name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: 1995).

<sup>130</sup> See John D. Caputo, "Mysticism and Transgression: Derrida and Meister Eckhart," in *Derrida and Deconstruction*, ed. Hugh Silverman, *Continental Philosophy* 2 (1989), 24–39.

In this respect, Eckhart, too, remains within a kind of ontotheology; he can write both that God is *esse* while creatures are nothing and also that God is a "nothingness," a "desert." Caputo defends Eckhart against Derrida's criticism of ontotheology by suggesting that this critique of ontotheology is already present in Eckhart. Eckhart, for Caputo, is supremely aware that language is caught up in a self-defeating enterprise. This failure of language for him has an ontological function to point to the inexpressible God beyond language. For Caputo, deconstruction is parasitic on hermeneutics and on an assertion which it then proceeds to qualify. To call God "Creator" is to mark him off from creatures, to call him "cause" is to mark him off from effects, and so on. Caputo believes that, to a certain extent, Eckhart is in the grip of a "Neoplatonic henological metaphysics;" nevertheless, he is also praying to God to rid him of God. Eckhart is not a proponent of the metaphysics of presence; rather, Caputo finds a certain "mystical dissemination," "grammatological exuberance," and "transgressive energy" in Eckhart's tracts and sermons. Eckhart's aim is to "prod the life of the spirit." Caputo claims that Eckhart's Neoplatonic henological negative theology actually masks a deconstructive challenging of assertion. Caputo concludes:

What Eckhart taught had little to do with a Neoplatonic One or a super-essential presence. Rather he taught with irrepressible exuberance the joyful wisdom of a life graced by God and in the process shattered with loving joy the most prized graven images of onto-theo-logic.<sup>131</sup>

In this tradition also one could situate the work of the Catholic postmodern thinker Jean-Luc Marion.

These bold, Heideggerian-inspired interpretations of Eckhart, as proponent of meditative thinking (capable of shedding light on our technological condition) and as a critic of ontotheology, dominated philosophical interpretations of Eckhart in the late 20th century. In a sense, Heidegger, in his typical style, pays little attention to the historical and intellectual context of Eckhart's work, but, undoubtedly his reading takes Eckhart seriously as a "master thinker" in the full richness of Heidegger's understanding of thinking (*Denken*). The 21st century will undoubtedly discover new "Eckharts" answering to the needs of the age and will undoubtedly refine further our understanding of the historical Eckhart.

<sup>131</sup> See John D. Caputo, "Mysticism and Transgression: Derrida and Meister Eckhart," in *Derrida and Deconstruction*, 39.

## EPILOGUE: MEISTER ECKHART—BETWEEN MYSTICISM AND PHILOSOPHY

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The principal theme of this Afterword to the three great themes of research into Eckhart that have been discussed above—the life and work of Meister Eckhart, Eckhart as "master of reading" (lector) and "master of life," and Eckhart and his influence—is closely connected to the history of Eckhart research. After the publication of the papal bull of John XXII in 1329, little was heard of Eckhart; it was only in the period of German romanticism that there occurred something like a rediscovery of the great medieval theologian and preacher. After Franz Pfeiffer published an edition of Eckhart's sermons in 1857, in addition to numerous other mystical texts from the Middle Ages, Germanists and theologians, above all those who belonged to the Protestant confession, began an intensive investigation of Eckhartian mysticism. This situation changed abruptly in 1886, when Heinrich Denifle published Latin sermons by Eckhart, since understandably, in view of their academic training, it was primarily Catholic theologians who regarded themselves as competent in this field. On the one hand, there was the mystic of the Germanists and the Protestant theologians—on the other, the philosopher of the Catholic theologians and the historians of philosophy. For many years, accordingly, there was an Eckhart divided into two: a German and a Latin Eckhart, with scarcely any link between them in the scholarly literature. Gradually, however, non-Catholic thinkers also began the task of interpreting the Eckhartian philosophy. Similarly, philosophers and historians of philosophy of the most varied provenance, including not a few Japanese scholars, studied the German sermons of the Eckhart who was understood as a mystic. In the great Stuttgart edition of the German and Latin works, which began in 1934, parallel passages in the edition of the texts in the other language are signaled again and again, with the result that the difference between the mystical and the philosophical Eckhart becomes ever less significant. This is our contemporary situation, in which I should like to comment on the problem of mysticism and philosophy in Meister Eckhart, looking both back—and ahead.