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Recommended Citation

Radler, Charlotte. "In Love I Am More God: The Centrality of Love in Meister Eckhart's Mysticism." *Journal of Religion* 90, 2 (2010): 171-198.

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"In love I am more God": The Centrality of Love in Meister Eckhart's Mysticism*

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In his German sermon 5a, Meister Eckhart (d. 1328), a Dominican teacher, preacher, and mystic, asks whether we can claim that the human being who loves God becomes God.[1] Though he concedes that such a statement may appear impious, he asserts that in love only one exists, not two, because "in love I am more God than I am in myself."[2] "It sounds wondrous," he admits, "that the human being is thus able to become God in love; however, it is true in the eternal truth."[3] Eckhart spools the metaphor of love into a supple descriptor that includes God, the human being, and the unifying force that transforms the relationship between human and divine. I contend that the multivalent signifier of love lies at the heart of Eckhart's mysticism and constitutes a central topos that discloses the substance of his mystical theology. Such a perspective, however, is not widely shared, for Eckhart is commonly characterized as a speculative thinker—that is, as one who privileges the terms of being and knowledge in mapping the mystical journey—and as the father of German speculation.[4] In this article, I want to

* I wish to thank Bernard McGinn, Douglas Burton-Christie, Jonathan Rothchild, and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions.

[1] Meister Eckhart, Predigt (Pr.) 5a, DW 1, 79. Throughout this article, I use the critical edition of Eckhart's work *Meister Eckhart: Die deutschen und lateinischen Werke*, 10 vols. (Stuttgart and Berlin: Kohlhammer, 1936–). I refer to the Latin Works as LW and the Middle High German works as DW. All translations are my own.

[2] Eckhart, Pr. 5a, DW 1, 80: "In der liebe bin ich me got, dann ich in mir selber bin."

[3] Ibid.: "Daz helt wunderlich, daz der mensch also mag got zu werden in der liebe; doch so ist es in der ewigen warheit war."

[4] For example, Josef Bach, *Meister Eckhart: Der Vater der deutschen Spekulation* (Vienna: Braumüller, 1864); Henri Delacroix, *Essai sur le mysticisme speculative en Allemagne au XIVe siècle* (Paris: Ancienne Librairie Germer Baillière, 1899), 1–18, 135–275; Friedrich-Wilhelm Wentzlaff-Eggebert, *Deutsche Mystik zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit: Einheit und Wandlung ihrere Erscheinungsformen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1947), 88–90, 97–101; Josef Quint, *Textbuch zur*

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0022-4189/2010/9002-0003$10.00

challenge this characterization by retrieving the category of love as a principal theme in Eckhart's mystical theology.

The tendency in contemporary scholarship to gloss over the role of love in Eckhart's mysticism places it on the fringes of his thought and constructs a sharp dichotomy between love and intellect/being. Such a methodological approach, indicative of a wider current within scholarship on mysticism, reads a facile divide into Eckhart's mystical theology that is absent from his own writings. This categorization of Eckhart's mysticism as one-sidedly speculative is often funded by reductive assumptions about the nature of the Neoplatonic mystical heritage, Dominican mysticism, "heretical" mystical theology, and the interrelationship between the metaphors of love, being, and knowledge. Eckhart's mysticism is frequently contrasted with—and seen as a reaction against—the supposedly excessive and anti-intellectual affectivity, eroticism, and emotionalism of women's mysticism.[5] However, the perceived dichotomy between speculation and affectivity is, I argue, grounded not in a dichotomy found in Eckhart's own thought but

Mystik des deutschen Mittelalters: Meister Eckhart, Johannes Tauler, Heinrich Seuse (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1957), viii, 1–2, and "Mystik und Sprache: Ihr Verhältnis zu einander, insbesondere in der spekulativen Mystik Meister Eckharts," in *Altdeutsche und Altniederländische Mystik: Wege der Forschung XXIII*, ed. Kurt Ruh (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964), 113–51; Ingeborg Degenhardt, *Studien zum Wandel des Eckhartbildes* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 19; Bernard Welte, "Der mystische Weg des Meisters Eckhart und sein spekulativer Hintergrund," in *Freiheit und Gelassenheit*, ed. Udo Kern (Munich: Kaiser, 1980), 97–102; Albert K. Wimmer, *Anthology of Medieval German Literature* (Bristol: Wyndham Hall, 1987), 431; Winfried Trusen, "Zum Prozeß gegen Meister Eckhart," in *Eckardus Theutonicus, Homo Doctus et Sanctus: Nachweise und Berichte zum Prozess gegen Meister Eckhart*, ed. Heinrich Stirnimann and Ruedi Imbach (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg, 1992), 10; Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 87, 109–24, 126, 129–31, 138, 148–49, 188, 191.

[5] See, e.g., Maria Bindschedler, *Der Lateinische Kommentar zum Granum Sinapis* (Basel: Schwabe, 1949; Hildesheim: Olms, 1985), 15–16 (citations are to the Olms edition); Wentzlaff-Eggebert, *Deutsche Mystik zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit*, 22–25, 60, 67, 88, 90, 97, 99; Ernest W. McDonnell, *The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture: With Special Emphasis on the Belgian Scene* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1954), 355–61; W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1960), 53–54; Trusen, "Zum Prozeß gegen Meister Eckhart," 9–10; Ulrike Stölting, *Christliche Frauenmystik im Mittelalter: Historisch-theologische Analyse* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald, 2005), 20, 528–35; Anne-Marie Priest, "'I Am You': Medieval Love Mysticism as a Post-modern Theology of Relation," *Magistra* 8 (2002): 85; Christine Büchner, *Gottes Kreatur—"ein reines Nichts?" Einheit Gottes als Ermöglichung von Geschöpflichkeit und Personalität im Werk Meister Eckharts* (Innsbruck: Verlagsanstalt Tyrolia, 2005), 262–63. Otto Langer contrasts the theologies of Eckhart and the nuns whom he counseled. Langer's sharp separation between Eckhart's mysticism and the nuns' spirituality—where the latter is characterized by emphasis on emotions, sensuality, subjectivity, (extraordinary) experiences, ecstasy, bridal topoi, and suffering, as well as by objectification of God and an inability to overcome duality—and his construal of Eckhart's theonomous mysticism as a direct reaction against *Frauenmystik* express a heuristically delimiting and overly generalized approach (Otto Langer, *Mystische Erfahrung und spirituelle Theologie: Zu Meister Eckharts Auseinandersetzung mit der Frauenfrömmigkeit seiner Zeit* [Munich: Artemis, 1987], 156–287).

rather in later binary constructions that are at least partly embedded in essentialist fallacies regarding what constitutes "male" and "female" categories, language, and capacities for mystical achievement.[6] These essentializations and generalizations that haunt theoretical reflection on mysticism simplify the great discursive and symbolic diversity of mystical representations in the history of Christian mysticism. The failure to nuance the reading of Eckhart's mysticism by addressing the function of love in his thought robs his mystical vision of its full conceptual scope and rich understanding of human spiritual potential. It also posits an artificial bifurcation between Eckhart's mysticism and women's mysticism and obfuscates their fruitful relationship. Amy Hollywood notes that Beguine influences on Eckhart break down stark contrasts between women's affective spirituality and men's speculative mysticism: "The putative division between men's and women's forms of spirituality arises already in the Middle Ages and is picked up in various ways by modern scholarship (most recently . . . by Bynum). The distinction does not bear up to careful scrutiny, yet it continues to wield tremendous power."[7] Building on Hollywood's critique, I maintain that re-

[6] Compare, e.g., Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone, 1992), 88, 157, 192; Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*, 110, 122. In *Christliche Frauenmystik im Mittelalter*, Stölting writes, "Vorweg lässt sich sagen, dass der neuplatonisch inspirierte—oder mehr 'theoretische,' 'spekulative' oder 'seinshafte'—Typ der Mystik stärker bei männlichen Mystikern—vgl. z.B. Hugo und Richard von St. Viktor, Meister Eckhart—verbreitet war, während die Frauenmystik vor allem der intersubjektiven Mystik zuzurechnen ist" (20). She continues, "Grundlegend gemeinsam aber ist bei ihnen [den Mystikerinnen des 13. Jahrhunderts]: *Ihre Mystik ist Liebesmystik*. . . . Von den beiden Alternativen, Denken und Erleben bzw. Emotion, realisierten die Mystikerinnen die Variante, die ihnen damals zugänglich war und die ihnen, als Frauen, nahelag" (531; see further 528–35).

[7] Amy Hollywood, "Feminist Studies," in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*, ed. Arthur Holder (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 377–78. See also Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (1995; repr., Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 5–7. Sara Poor also notes that "the opposition . . . between the *heilsam* (healing) effect of speculative mysticism and the *ekstatische Visionsmystik* or *Gefühlsmystik* (ecstatic visionary mysticism or emotional mysticism) has lasting consequences. Indeed, the legacy of this categorization has been the consistent distinction in histories and encyclopedias between the speculative or philosophical thought of male mysticism and the emotional experience of female mystics, a distinction that . . . reinforces the identification of the masculine with mediated and rational knowledge and the feminine with immediate and irrational experience" (Sara Poor, *Mechthild of Magdeburg and Her Book: Gender and the Making of Textual Authority* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004], 192). See further Bernard McGinn's critique of the labeling of Eckhart's mysticism as speculative in contrast to affective mysticism (esp. the *Minnemystik* of Bernard of Clairvaux and medieval women mystics) in *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart: The Man from Whom God Hid Nothing* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2003), 36–37. See also Bernard McGinn, "Love, Knowledge, and Mystical Union in Western Christianity: Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries," *Church History* 56, no. 1 (1987): 7–24, esp. 12, 16–18, 23–24, "Meister Eckhart and the Beguines in the Context of Vernacular Theology," in *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum,

thinking the dynamic openness between the attributes of love, being, and intellect can help us arrive at a more adequate understanding of Eckhart's thought specifically and Christian mysticism generally.

In Eckhart's writings, love contains an expansive range of meanings that includes God as love and the loving relationship between God and humanity. However, since Eckhart's fluid mysticism precludes stasis and stratification, love is intimately associated with the other signifiers, especially being and intellect. For Eckhart, the interplay between the terms cannot be broken apart in God and in detached human existence and experience. This interplay prompts Eckhart to move beyond Franciscan and Dominican positions on salvation (favoring love or knowledge, respectively, as the central mechanism) and state, "The perfection of blessedness lies in both: in understanding and in love."[8] Hence, Eckhart's mystical theology defies easy categorization.

In expressing the polyvalent dimensions of love, Eckhart employs a variety of terms, principally *amor*, *dilectio*, and *caritas* in his Latin writings and *minne* and *liebe* in his Middle High German texts. Importantly, Eckhart does not differentiate these terms by assigning specific meanings and degrees of love to them, but he uses them interchangeably to depict such a wide scope as God and creation.[9] His fluid taxonomy of

1994), 11–12, "Love, Knowledge and *Unio Mystica* in the Western Christian Tradition," in *Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: An Ecumenical Dialogue*, ed. Moshe Idel and Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum, 1996), 77–78, 84–85, and *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2005), 84. Moreover, see Louis Bouyer's preface in *Gertrude of Helfta: The Herald of Divine Love*, trans. and ed. Margaret Winkworth (New York: Paulist, 1993), 2.

[8] Eckhart, Pr. 70, DW 3, 188: "Volbringunge der sælicheit liget an beiden: an bekantnisse und an minne." See also, e.g., Eckhart, *In Ioh.*, LW 3, nn. 694–98, 610–13. Resituating John 20:4 in his discussion of knowledge and love, Eckhart asserts that among the twelve senses (reflective of the twelve apostles), only knowledge (*cognitio*), symbolized by Peter, and love (*amor*), symbolized by John, are capable of seeking Christ, who is buried and hidden in the tomb (n. 694, 611).

[9] In the history of Latin Christianity, most thinkers assign supple shades of meaning to *caritas, amor,* and *dilectio* (cf. Augustine, *De doctr. Christ.* 3.10.16, *Serm.* 336.2, and *De mor. eccl.* 26.48–51; Bernard of Clairvaux, *SC.* 7.2–3; 8.1; 20.6–9; 51.1, 3; 75.9; 83.3–5; Thomas Aquinas, *ST* Ia IIae, q. 65, a. 5; *In I Sent.* d. 17, q. 1, a. 5; *In III Sent.* d. 27, q. 1, a. 1; and *In III Sent.* d. 27, q. 2, a. 1). The distinctions do not appear to be precise or rigid, but the terms are often polysemous (e.g., Augustine, *De civ. Dei* 14.7; Bernard of Clairvaux, *SC.* 8.1; 9.2; 11.3; 19.7; 20.4, 9; 29.8; 45.1, 6; 50.4, 6, 8; 63.4; 74.1; 75.1, 9; 83.3, 5, 6; 84.6; Thomas Aquinas, *ST* Ia IIae, q. 26, a. 3). Similar to the medieval Latin discourse, the meanings of the Middle High German terms *minne* and *liebe* resist fixed distinctions. Their meanings are frequently fluid and polyvalent, especially because of the evolution of the terms (cf. Rüdiger Schnell, *Causa Amoris: Liebeskonzeption und Liebesdarstellung in der mittelalterlichen Literatur* [Bern and Munich: Francke, 1985], 19–20, 66; Horst Wenzel, "Stirbe ab ich, sô ist si tôt: Zur Semantik höfischer Liebe in Bild und Wort," in *Minne ist ein Swaerez Spil: Neue Untersuchungen zum Minnesang und zur Geschichte der Liebe im Mittelalter*, ed. Ulrich Müller [Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1986], 227–30). Thus, while Eckhart's intricate process of attribution (e.g., his flexible employment of the transcendental terms and his apophatic linguistic strategy) is, to a certain extent, unique in

love, therefore, does not clearly distinguish between God's love and love of God, neighbor, and self by ascribing particular concepts to particular forms of love. Since Eckhart's main concern is the inclusivity and unity of pure, detached love, he also shows little interest in exploring important medieval differentiations of love (e.g., affective, caritative, and intellective forms of love), as these designations signal discrete, fixed forms of love. Eckhart's linguistic flexibility is symptomatic of his constant use of reversible analogy, mobile perspectives, and apophasis, which emancipates his thought from ossified differentiations of love and distinctions between love, intellect, and being. By saying and unsaying, Eckhart liquefies his language further, yielding the terms convertible but not conflatable in the void of detachment.

The aim of this article is to redress the tendency to characterize Eckhart's mysticism as one-sidedly speculative and to argue for the centrality of love in Eckhart's thought. To illuminate the vital function of love in his mystical theology, I will proceed in four main steps. First, I analyze why love has been eclipsed in the study of Eckhart's mysticism and why I believe this characterization of Eckhart's thought to be deficient. Second, to contextualize the love metaphor within Eckhart's mysticism, I examine Eckhart's so-called metaphysics of flow and his notions of detachment and apophasis. Such contextualization can help reveal the extent to which Eckhart's fluid mysticism precludes the privileging of any one descriptor (whether that is intellect, being, or love) and refutes dualism. Third, I explicate significant passages from Eckhart's writings to demonstrate the profound importance of love in Eckhart's mysticism. Fourth, I consider the implications of this retrieval of love in Eckhart's mysticism not only for our understanding of Eckhart's thought but also for our understanding of the place of love in Christian mysticism considered more broadly.

LOVE LOST: THE MARGINALIZATION OF LOVE IN ECKHART'S MYSTICISM

The tendency of Eckhartian scholarship to neglect love stems, at least in part, from reading love as relationality or as a desirous action, motion, or force. Viewing love (and relationality) as uprooted and disconnected from being in turn renders love a superficial category characterized by its movement toward a particular object and by its pres-

its fundamental disinterest in ascribing exact meanings to the signifiers, it also, importantly, exploits a previous referential ambiguity with regard to the relationships among *caritas*, *amor*, and *dilectio* in the Latin Christian tradition and between *minne* and *liebe* in the Middle High German theological and literary discourse.

ervation of a static subject-object duality.[10] Love is hence seen as an act that is impotent to unite on an ontological (i.e., deeper) level but that functions by bringing together what is already like.[11] Though Eckhart certainly presents love in such a way in some of his texts, his use of love as a metaphor is complex. I believe that overstating this perspective yields an inadequately narrow reading of Eckhart. A fortiori, several of Eckhart's writings privilege love and disclose an intimate interconnection and interdependence between the signifiers of love and being (as well as intellect), for "God is, however, no less and otherwise love than he is his being."[12] Furthermore, while love, for Eckhart, is certainly a relational category, so is being; according to the Meister's writings, both love and being constitute movements toward another because of his so-called metaphysics of flow.[13] Thus, his relational no-

[10] See, e.g., Langer, *Mystische Erfahrung und spirituelle Theologie*, 259–60, 286; Udo Kern, *Die Anthropologie des Meister Eckharts* (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 1994), 107–8. Kern, e.g., cites sermo (S.) XL, LW 4, n. 389, 335: "Amor sive dilectio est motus in res." However, the narrative context, which deals with the just person's love for Justice ("Iustus autem, in quantum huiusmodi, se toto diligit iustitiam"), seems to intimate a capacious scope of love, which allows the one who loves to become one with the beloved.

[11] Kern writes, "Das Werk der Liebe besteht darin, daß es an einer res, an einem Werk 'einiget.' Dieses einigende Wirken der Liebe bezieht sich aber nicht . . . auf das Sein. Ontologisch einiget die Liebe nicht, vielmehr bringt und bindet sie zusammen, was schon geeint ist. Die Liebe handelt, verbindet. Ihre 'Dimension' ist funktional bestimmt, nicht essentiell-ontologisch. Das Tätigsein der Liebe ist entscheidend. Die Liebe ist ihre Wirksamkeit. Liebe ist Bewegung zum Ding, zum Gegenstand hin. . . . Die Liebe als Bewegung enthält schon ein aliquid der res, auf die sie hin unterwegs ist" (*Die Anthropologie des Meister Eckharts*, 107). To support his argument, Kern concentrates his analysis on German sermon 7, in which Eckhart claims that love, though it joins and attaches things, is unable to unite them in one being. See Eckhart, Pr. 7, DW 1, 122: "Minne eneiniget niht, enkeine wîs niht; daz geeiniget ist, daz heftet si zesamen und bindet ez zuo. . . . Minne einiget an einem werke, niht an einem wesene." Further, see S. VI, 3, LW 4, n. 63, 61: "Nota quod manere in deo sive in caritate est intromitti sive intrare, ubi sunt unum omnia"; and S. XL, LW 4, n. 389, 335: "Quia secundum philosophum 'nihil movetur ad aliquid, nisi habeat aliquid eius in se, ad quod movetur.' . . . Praemissis consonat quod similitudo causa est dilectionis, rursus etiam quod dilectio vult uniri sive unum fieri cum amato." Eckhart articulates a similar position in Pr. 21, DW 1, 360: "Minne eneiniget niht; si einiget wol an einem werke, niht an einem wesene."

[12] Eckhart, S. VI, 3, LW 4, n. 64, 61–62: "*Deus caritas est*. . . . Est autem deus non minus nec aliter caritas quam suum esse."

[13] As will be discussed below, within the parameters of Eckhart's so-called metaphysics of flow, creation *is* because God gives God's self fully and lovingly through the Trinity into the world (cf., e.g., Eckhart, *In Eccli.*, LW 2, n. 12, 241: "Oportet igitur necessario quod relatio sit, ratione cuius est fecunditas et diffusio in divinis"; see also n. 45, 274). God *is* in this movement toward alterity that comprises the gift of self (Eckhart, *In Ex.*, LW 2, n. 64, 68: "Id quod est ex altero et ad alterum est"), and creation—sustained by this "being towards"—is "substantiell relationales Sein" (Büchner, *Gottes Kreatur—"ein reines Nichts?"* 561). Eckhart's metaphysics of flow is thus in many ways a relational metaphysics; contrary to Kern's assertion, I would argue that movement and relationality weaken neither the category of being nor the category of love. Regarding Eckhart's relational ontology, Büchner writes, "Geschöpf und Gott stehen nicht eigentlich in einem Verhältnis zueinander, sondern sie *sind* dieses Verhältnis . . . Die Wirklichkeit für Eckhart ist in ihrer Tiefe absolute Beziehung. Diese Beziehung zeigt

tion of love neither attenuates it nor disengages it from being. A more comprehensive interpretation of Eckhart's writings will not merely focus on his referential understanding of love but will also take into account his construal of love as overcoming duality and producing the deepest indistinct union.

The scholarly tendency to overlook Eckhart's use of love in some sermons derives, to some extent, from the presupposition that Eckhart's thought is indeed speculative. The result is the elevation of some texts as "proof-texts" for the speculative nature of his mysticism. In these texts, love reifies and objectifies; it requires additions and attachments ("skin," "garment," "coat," etc.);[14] it cannot love freely, simply, and expansively and therefore cannot be applied to the divine. For example, in German sermon 9, Eckhart argues that love is only capable of loving (*minne*) God under a coat of goodness (*velle der güete*), that is, in an externalized form.[15] German sermon 23 also discusses love's disabling preoccupation with goodness. Love is so consumed by goodness, Eckhart claims, that if God were not good, love would not love God or recognize God as God; without goodness, love cannot love.[16] In German sermon 19, Eckhart places knowledge (*bekantnisse*) above love (*minne*).[17] He claims that since knowledge removes and abstracts, it pertains more to God than love does, yet, he adds, knowledge carries love within it.[18] The problem with love, Eckhart contends, is that it becomes infatuated with goodness and clings to it like a skin that covers up authentic existence. Beguiled by exteriority, love is incapable of becoming One with what is real. As a result, love remains in the doorway to God's house and can go no further without the assistance of intellect.[19] The intellect, by contrast, seizes God in God's naked and simple being (*wesen*). Love relies on the aid of the intellect and would wander blind without its assistance: "Therefore knowledge is better, because it leads love," Eckhart asserts. "Love, however, wants desire, longing. One single thought does not add anything to knowledge, but

sich in der Zeit als eine des totalen Gebens aus der Fülle und des totalen Empfangens in der Leere und birgt das feste Vertrauen darauf, daß, wenn alle zeitliche Perspektivität wegfällt, auch diese Unterscheidung nicht mehr als solches besteht, sondern ein nach allen Sein hin offenes, wechselseitiges Geben und Nehmen" (*Gottes Kreatur—"ein reines Nichts?"* 445–46). See further, Büchner, *Gottes Kreatur—"ein reines Nichts?"* 120–21 n. 313. Heribert Fischer makes a similar point in "Grundgedanken der deutschen Predigten," in *Meister Eckhart: Der Prediger*, ed. Udo M. Nix and Raphael Öchslin (Freiburg: Herder, 1960), 40.

[14] For example, Eckhart, Pr. 7, DW 1, 122–23; Pr. 9, DW 1, 152; Pr. 37, DW 2, 216–17; Pr. 40, DW 2, 274; Pr. 45, DW 2, 371; and Pr. 59, DW 2, 636.

[15] Eckhart, Pr. 9, DW 1, 152.

[16] Eckhart, Pr. 23, DW 1, 399. Compare Eckhart, Pr. 9, DW 1, 153.

[17] Eckhart, Pr. 19, DW 1, 314.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 314–15.

rather it detaches and separates itself and runs ahead and touches God, as God is naked, and grasps him only in his being."[20] Consequently, love is occupied by its yearning for experiences and objects, whereas knowledge grasps God in the nude. In German sermon 7, Eckhart portrays love as simply too anemic and distracted to effect any real movement and fusion.[21] Love (which Eckhart connects to the will) joins things, but it does not unite them in one being (*an einem wesene*);[22] love thus "takes God under a coat, under a garment."[23] Unlike love, intellect (*vernünfticheit*) has the ability to divest the coarse layers of somethingness and reach God in God's simple *wesene*, where God lacks all names and all distinctions.[24] However, as the following discussion will bear out, consistently isolating these sermons from the rest of Eckhart's corpus does not capture the full complexity of Eckhart's mysticism. In other writings, Eckhart presents a different and much more positive analysis of the power of love and actually privileges love, placing it at the center of his mystical theology and declaring that it transforms, sets ablaze, and brings about freedom and fusion of identities.

THE BOILING POINT: LOVE, LANGUAGE, AND DETACHMENT IN ECKHART'S MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

The significance of love within Eckhart's mysticism comes to light only if considered within the larger framework of his understanding of being, language, and detachment. Such an examination of love within the broader infrastructure of the Meister's mystical theology helps expose the untenability of marginalizing love in his thought. For Eckhart, the process of naming God, self, and the mystical experience is grounded in his metaphysics of flow.[25] The metaphysics of flow marks a circular structural metaphor for Eckhart's fluid architecture of reality. This fluid reality obviates dualism and manifests the close interre-

[20] Ibid., 315: "Dar umbe ist diu bekantnisse bezzer, wan si leitet die minne. Aber minne wil begerunge, meinunge. Einen einigen gedank enleget diu bekantnisse niht zuo, mêr: si lœset abe und scheidet sich abe und loufet vor und rüeret got blôz und begrîfet in eine in sînem wesene."

[21] Eckhart, Pr. 7, DW 1, 121.

[22] Ibid., 122. Compare Eckhart, Pr. 34, DW 2, 168: "Der brant der minne klebet in dem willen."

[23] Eckhart, Pr. 7, DW 1, 122–23: "Minne nimet got under einem velle, under einem kleide."

[24] Ibid., 122: "Bekantnise brichet durch wârheit und güete und vellet ûf lûter wesen und nimet got blôz, als er âne namen ist."

[25] Since this article is not the forum for a comprehensive exploration of Eckhart's metaphysical system, I will limit my discussion to elements that have direct bearing on the role of love in Eckhart's thought. For a fuller discussion of Eckhart's metaphysics of flow, see McGinn, *Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 71–113; Alain de Libera, *Albert le Grand et la philosophie* (Paris: Vrin, 1990), chap. 4.

lationship between being and love in his thought. The efflux, the flowing forth from the One through the Trinity into creation, and the reflux, the surge back of creation through the Trinity into the One, forms a continuous tide of being and love.[26] In German sermon 94, Eckhart describes how God's warm love boils over and constitutes the munificence of creation; God as love also pulls the soul upward through the power of love (*minnen kraft*) and heats it up, so that the liquefied soul dissolves and flows into union with God.[27]

Eckhart's metaphysics of flow maps a space in which humanity and divinity, time and eternity, flow continuously into and out of one another.[28] He conceptualizes humanity as having two intersecting realities, where temporal human autonomy is grounded in the divine cause.[29] Thus, since creation does not possess its own ontological foundation and is nothing in itself, it has being only through its relationship with ultimate reality, which is richness in itself.[30] Creation has being because of its relationship with God, since God is toward and in creation (as dialectically other and same). Eckhart's configuration of being has significant affective consequences, as his construction of love mirrors being's twofold constitution.

Eckhart's fluid construction of reality underlies a complex perfor-

[26] See, e.g., Eckhart, *In Gen.* I, LW 1, n. 7, 190–91; *In Ex.*, LW 2, n. 16, 21–22; *In Sap.*, LW 2, n. 283, 615–16; *In Ioh.*, LW 3, nn. 73–75, 61–63; Pr. 30, DW 2, 98; Pr. 80, DW 3, 383; and S. XXV, 1, LW 4, n. 259, 236.

[27] Eckhart, Pr. 97, DW 4, 224–25.

[28] See, e.g., Eckhart, Pr. 30, DW 2, 98; and Pr. 55, DW 2, 584.

[29] Eckhart, *In Gen.* II, LW 1, n. 35, 502; and *In sap.*, LW 2, nn. 21–22, 342–43. Compare also Frank Tobin, *Meister Eckhart: Thought and Language* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 59–61; Klaus Kremer, *Gott und Welt in der klassischen Metaphysik: Vom Sein der "Dinge" in Gott* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1969), 12–13, 17–21, 50–52, 55, 64, 67–69, and *Die Neuplatonische Seinsphilosophie und ihre Wirkung auf Thomas von Aquin* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 249–50.

[30] See, e.g., Eckhart, Pr. 4, DW 1, 69–70; Pr. 80, DW 3, 383–84; and Pr. 77, DW 3, 339: "Got aleine ist; wan alliu dinc sint in gote und von im, wan ûzwendic im und âne in enist niht in der wârheit: wan all crêatûren sint ein snœde dinc und ein blôz niht gegen gote." Further, see Eckhart, *In Gen.* II, LW 1, n. 25, 494–96; *In Sap.*, LW 2, n. 260, 592; and *In Ioh.*, LW 3, n. 52, 43. Regarding the *nihtes niht* of creation, see also Eckhart, Pr. 15, DW 1, 248; *In Eccli.*, LW 2, n. 61, 290; S. IV, 1, LW 4, n. 23, 24: "Esse autem a solo deo est, et ipse solus est esse: 'ego sum qui sum' et 'qui est, misit me'"; and *Prol. gen.*, LW 1, n. 13, 158: "Igitur si deus non est, nihil est." Compare further Büchner, *Gottes Kreatur—"ein reines Nichts?"* 61–62; Tobin, *Meister Eckhart*, 48, 64; Karl Albert, *Meister Eckharts These vom Sein: Untersuchungen zur Metaphysik des Opus Tripartitum* (Kastellaun: Aloys Henn, 1976); Reiner Schürmann, *Meister Eckhart: Mystic and Philosopher* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 66, 177, 179; Dietmar 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 (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg, 1979), 27–28; Alois M. Haas, *Sermo Mysticus: Studien Zu Theologie und Sprache der deutschen Mystik* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg, 1979), 228–29, and *Gottleiden—Gottlieben: Zur volkssprachlichen Mystik im Mittelalter* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1989), 53–54, 173–77.

mance of attribution that critiques particularizing referential language, overcomes the binary structures of analogy, and rejects the privileging of any particular signifier.[31] This fluidity inherently censures a dualism between love and being/understanding and underpins Eckhart's integrated conception of the mystical journey. Eckhart's usage of mobile perspectives, dialectics, paradox, and two-term predication reflects the reality that only God has unlimited possession of any positive predicate.[32] Depending on location (as detached or undetached), the human being is either the fullness of a descriptor or a constriction of reality through particularizing language and thought processes.

Another important consideration for the study of love in Eckhart's thought involves the apparent tension between Eckhart's vibrant play with language and metaphor and his seemingly unbending apophatic discourse. How can we reconcile Eckhart's careful crafting of the metaphor of love with his ostensibly uncompromising apophatic mysticism, which seems to subvert the very foundation of metaphor and language?[33] For Eckhart, the process of naming God (and self) requires apophasis and is organically linked to the apophatic praxis of detachment (*abegescheidenheit*) or, to borrow Denys Turner's phrasing, the "practice of apophatic anthropology."[34] Detachment and apophasis imply the removal, reduction, and cutting away of all that is extraneous and particular for the sake of the one thing alone that matters: what is truly real. The discursive praxis of detachment, that is, apophasis, has the paradoxical effect that it both purifies and transforms language and transgresses and transcends language.[35] It purifies and transforms language insofar as it provides a divine, comprehensive perspective and highlights the interconnection between the divine names. Detachment bridges the gap between Creator and creation, yielding the signifier

[31] Eckhart, Pr. 71, DW 3, 223, 225. Compare Hollywood, *Soul as Virgin Wife*, 158; see also 157, 164. See also Burkhard Hasebrink, *Formen inzitativer Rede bei Meister Eckhart: Untersuchungen zur literarischen Konzeption der deutschen Predigt* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1992), 103–4, and "Das Predigtverfahren Meister Eckharts: Beobachtungen zur thematischen und pragmatischen Kohärenz der Predigt Q 12," in *Die deutsche Predigt im Mittelalter*, ed. Volker Mertens and Hans-Jochen Schiewer (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1992), 150–68.

[32] See, e.g., Eckhart, *In Eccli.*, LW 2, nn. 52–53, 280–82.; McGinn, *Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 91–92. Compare also Bernard McGinn, "Meister Eckhart on God as Absolute Unity," in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, ed. Dominic J. O'Meara (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 131–32.

[33] See, e.g., Eckhart, Pr. 107, DW 4, 726–27. Compare also Eckhart, Pr. 63, DW 3, 79.

[34] Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 168. Compare Schürmann, *Meister Eckhart*, xiii–xiv, 47, 171.

[35] On the implications of detachment on language in Eckhart's thought, see, e.g., Bruce Milem's *The Unspoken Word: Negative Theology in Meister Eckhart's German Sermons* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2002).

more expansive so as to include both God and creation, or rather, more accurately for Eckhart, only God. By way of detachment, the human being can name God and self, for detachment unsettles attempts to reify and domesticate God and the human being. Through detachment, the human being truly is, loves, knows, and names God, neighbor, and self in an unmediated way devoid of particularity and dualism.[36] Detachment unveils divine transparency, which ensures a relational unity between the metaphors beyond conflation and evades metaphorical preference. Discursive detachment or apophasis, however, also transgresses and transcends language insofar as Eckhart recognizes that everything, even the Word, becomes silent in the stillness and nothingness of the One. His ontological dialectic becomes a discursive dialectic, which allows him to say, unsay, and be silent as each metaphor expands, contracts, and expires, tracking the circular metaphysics of flow from Oneness into multiplicity and back to Oneness. The Meister advises his audience to be silent (*swigen*) and not yap (*klafen*) about God, for if they do they are lying and sinning.[37]

This analysis of the fundamental interconnectedness of Eckhart's metaphysics of flow and his employment of language, apophasis, and detachment helps situate affectivity within his thought. The inherent fluidity of Eckhart's structures of reality places love, intellect, and being in a synergetic rather than mutually exclusive relationship. By bringing to light the collaborative relationship of these metaphors in Eckhart's mysticism, it will help us rethink Eckhart's mysticism in a more synthetic way. It will also aid us in developing resources for thinking about the mystical journey in a more inclusive manner.

TO BECOME BURNT, MELTED, AND WHOLLY LOVE: THE INTEGRATION OF LOVE AND BEING IN ECKHART'S MYSTICISM

Having established that Eckhart's mysticism proscribes dualism and stasis, I now turn to an analysis of specific texts that address the intricate relationship between love and being and demonstrate the centrality of love to Eckhart's mystical vision. In a number of his writings, Eckhart's discussion of the nature of love cannot be abstracted from the significant question of love's relationship to being. He portrays the relationship between love and being as reciprocally influential. This converging relationship is cogently illustrated in the Johannine *Deus caritas est*

[36] Eckhart, *In Ex.*, LW 2, n. 57, 63.
[37] Eckhart, Pr. 83, DW 3, 442.

(1 John 4:8, 16), a biblical idiom that rings true to Eckhart and becomes central to his understanding of mystical experience.[38]

Elaborating on an Augustinian theme, Eckhart holds that one becomes what one loves; pure love engenders pure being.[39] In German sermon 38, Eckhart claims that love, like intellect, generates likeness. Thus, if human beings love fragmented and earthly things, they become fragmented and earthly; however, if they love God, they become God.[40] For Eckhart, then, transformation and unification of love unlock and result in transformation and unification of being. At the end of German sermon 10, he modifies the Neoplatonic axiom "like knows like" to "like loves like."[41] He remarks, "Love always loves like; therefore God loves the just man like himself."[42] The transference of the axiom suggests parity and correspondence between love and knowledge.

German sermons 65 and 69 discuss the idea that love is constitutive of God's being and life. In sermon 65, Eckhart maintains that God loves the soul so much that its being and life depend on the necessity of God's love; all creatures are sustained in their being through the love that is God.[43] Furthermore, the Meister argues that God so loves the soul that God's life and being depend on it.[44] Whoever robs God of God's love for the soul also robs God of God's divinity.[45] Sermon 69 radicalizes the claims made in sermon 65: whoever attempts to divest God of God's love for the soul slays God.[46] Eckhart writes, "If one were to deprive God of this [God's love of the soul] so that he did not love

[38] For example, Eckhart, *In Ioh.*, LW 3, n. 731, 638–39. Eckhart begins Latin sermon VI, 1, by joining 1 John 4:16, *Deus caritas est*, with Exod. 3:14, *Ego sum qui sum*, thus highlighting the commensurate relationship between love and being and the absolute simplicity of God (S. VI, 1, LW 4, n. 52, 50).

[39] See, e.g., Eckhart's discussion of the just person's love of Justice. In Pr. 6, DW 1, 104, he writes, "Swer die gerehticheit minnet, der stât sô vaste dar ûf, swaz er minnet, daz ist sîn wesen." Compare Kurt Flasch, "Zu Predigt 6: Iusti vivent in aeternum," in *Lectura Eckhardi: Predigten Meister Eckharts von Fachgelehrten gelesen und gedeutet*, vol. 2, ed. Georg Steer and Loris Sturlese (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2003), 43–44.

[40] Eckhart, Pr. 38, DW 2, 238–39. See also Eckhart, Pr. 40, DW 2, 277–78. Compare Ps. 81: 6.

[41] Compare also, e.g., Eckhart, *BgT*, DW 5, 18.

[42] Eckhart, Pr. 10, DW 1, 174: "Glîch wird geminnet. Minne minnet alwege glîch; dar umbe sô minnet got den gerehten menschen im selber glîch."

[43] Eckhart, Pr. 65, DW 3, 95, 98. Eckhart construes divine love as that which absorbs and unites. Just as a porous wall soaks up the color, so God, who is Love, takes up and maintains the being of all creatures. Their being would evaporate without the support of Love.

[44] Ibid., 97: "Sô sere minnet got mîne sêle, daz sîn leben und sîn wesen dar ane liget, daz er mich minnen muoz."

[45] Ibid.: "Der gote daz benaeme, daz er mîne sêle niht enminnete, der benaeme im sîne gotheit, wan got ist als gewaerlîche diu minne, als er ist diu wârheit."

[46] Eckhart, Pr. 69, DW 3, 163–64.

[*enminnen*] the soul, one would deprive him of his life [*leben*] and being [*wesen*], or one would kill God if we may say such a thing; for that same love [minne] with which God loves, that is his life."[47] These sermons communicate the relational unity between being and love in God as well as the ontological and affective interdependence of Creator and creation. God's love or God as love is the life-causing and sustaining essence of all existents, including God, without whom nothing exists. According to the sermon's treatment of God as love, Eckhart's God does not reside in frozen self-sufficiency but exists and lives in and through a kenotic, relational movement. Love is hence essential to Eckhart's fluid mysticism and his understanding of God's boiling over into creation.

In German sermon 41, Eckhart explicitly poses the question "What is God's love?" He answers, God's nature (*natûre*) and being (*wesen*).[48] Thus, love, being, and nature are united in God as they are commensurate in their simplicity. The Meister, moreover, asserts that love makes the detached human being part of the loving relationship of the Trinity. He explains that God has and is one love; with this same love the Father loves the Son and the detached person, and the Holy Spirit proceeds with and in this same love.[49] Also, in German sermon 39, Eckhart employs his reconfigured version of Augustinian Trinitarian theology as a lens for exploring the interrelationship between love and being. He makes the traditional observation that the Father's being (*wesen*) consists of bearing the Son and that the Son's being consists of being born in the Father.[50] However, his analysis of the being of the Holy Spirit takes on theurgic overtones reminiscent of such Neoplatonic thinkers as Proclus: "The Holy Spirit's being is that I become burnt in him and become wholly melted in him and become wholly love."[51] The melted soul set ablaze by the love of the Holy Spirit (that is, the love that is the Holy Spirit) is liquefied and absorbed into love and becomes indistinct from it. Eckhart's integration of love into his robust ontology effectively subverts claims that love has no ontological consequence in his mysticism.

[47] Ibid.: "Der daz gote benæme, daz er die sêle niht enminnete, der benæme im sîn leben und sîn wesen, oder er tôte got, ob man daz sprechen sölte; wan diu selbe minne, dâ mite got die sêle minnet, daz ist sîn leben."

[48] Eckhart, Pr. 41, DW 2, 287.

[49] Ibid. Compare Eckhart, S. VI, 1, LW 4, n. 55, 53.

[50] Eckhart, Pr. 39, DW 2, 264.

[51] Ibid.: "Des heiligen geistes wesen ist, daz ich in im verbrant werde und in im zemâle versmolzen werde und zêmale minne werde." Compare also Eckhart, Pr. 20b, DW 1, 345; and *BgT*, DW 5, 30–31. In these writings, Eckhart discusses the Holy Spirit as fiery love (*hitzige minne*).

Eckhart's construal of pure, detached love as absolutely unified and inclusive negates differences of degree, order, and kind in this love. In his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Eckhart states that perfect love is not stratified by more (*plus*) or less (*minus*), degree (*gradus*) or order (*ordo*), since it is One.[52] Thus, a person who loves God more than a fellow human being acts in a good but not perfect way.[53] Perfect love, for Eckhart, is God, through whom we love.[54] In the transparency of this love, God loves only God's self since God is the pure, all-encompassing love that permeates and exists in all of creation.[55] God loves everything that is because it *is* (God).[56] Given that God loves only God's self in the transparency of pure love, God loves everything equally, one like the other and all like God's self: "For One is what God loves and [it is] in itself and in all things."[57] Correspondingly, the human being who loves perfectly ought to love equally and in the same way God in the neighbor and the self, and the neighbor and the self in God, because then she loves one and the same.[58] Pure love of God, self, and neighbor are, hence, equivalent in Eckhart's thought. As a practical upshot of his capacious account of love, Eckhart intensifies the ethical demand to love your neighbor by refusing to sublate it to the love of God.

In German sermon 12, Eckhart coalesces his teaching on the unity of love with his reconceived versions of the golden rule and Christology. "If you love yourself, you love all human beings as yourself," Eckhart contends. "As long as you love one single human being less than yourself, you never truly loved yourself, [that is,] unless you love all human beings as yourself, all human beings in one human being, and the human being is God and human being."[59] Since God loved hu-

[52] Eckhart, *In Ioh.*, LW 3, n. 728, 636.

[53] Ibid.

[54] See, e.g., also Eckhart, S. VI, 3, LW 4, n. 65, 63.

[55] See, e.g., also Eckhart, Pr. 73, DW 3, 268.

[56] See, e.g., Eckhart, *In Sap.*, LW 2, n. 256, 588: "Igitur deus est ipsum solum quod amat ipse." See, further, ibid., n. 257, 589: "Esse igitur uniuscuiusque ipsum est, in quo, per quod et propter quod deus videt, amat et operatur universaliter omne quod videt, amat et operatur." See also ibid., n. 220, 555, and nn. 255–56, 588.

[57] Ibid., n. 258, 590: "Quia unum est quod amat et in se et in omnibus."

[58] Eckhart, *In Ioh.*, LW 3, n. 728, 636. Compare also Eckhart, S. XL, 1, LW 4, n. 391, 336; and Pr. 30, DW 2, 105–6. In S. XL, 2, LW 4, n. 394, 339, Eckhart argues that the human being can only truly love self and neighbor in God because of God. In the same sermon, he also inveighs against a solipsistic existence and love and highlights the communal nature of love: "Item: *proximum sicut te ipsum*, quia nec te ipsum ut tu ipsum." See further Eckhart, S. VI, 1, LW 4, n. 53, 51: "*Deus caritas est*, primo, quia caritas communis est, nullum excludens." Compare also Eckhart, S. VI, 3, LW 4, n. 65, 63–64.

[59] Eckhart, Pr. 12, DW 1, 195: "Hâst dû dich selben liep, sô hâst dû alle menschen liep als dich selben. Die wîle dû einen einigen menschen minner liep hâst dan dich selben, dû

manity so much that God took on human nature in general in the incarnation, the human being is called to release the self and become that general communal human *being* and love humanity in the same indistinct and equal way, in one unified motion that transfigures and renews.[60] If a human being's love differentiates, it is broken and breaks apart the body of humanity. Eckhart's comprehensive teaching of love emphasizes the oneness, community, and solidarity of humanity and marks the eradication of separation and isolation. His central idea of oneness reaches its crescendo at the end of the sermon, where Eckhart's notion of the fusion of identities between God and the human being is inscribed in the metaphor of the eye. "The eye in which I see God is the same eye in which God sees me," Eckhart writes. "My eye and God's eye are one eye and one seeing, one knowing and one loving."[61] The metaphor of the eye conveys the disintegration of the God-creature, subject-object, and self-other distinctions. It also expresses a unity among the signifiers as well as the oneness and intactness of the action brought about by the merger: there is one vision, one love, and one understanding.[62] Eckhart's dialectical and fluid mysticism opens up his signifiers to one another. Without conflating the signifiers, it dismantles stable boundaries among them and casts them as dynamic concepts, stemming from the same ground. Eckhart's recourse to a relational understanding of being, knowing, and love to sketch his conception of an interconnected reality undercuts a divide between ontology, epistemology, and affectivity in his thought.

While love is constitutive of the divine overflow that is creation, it also comprises the journey back into a union that dissolves stagnant subject-object divisions. As noted above, in German sermon 5a Eckhart claims that the person who truly loves God becomes God, for this kind of love demands oneness.[63] Love always seeks to become One with the beloved.[64] Employing a hunting metaphor in German sermon 63, Eckhart maintains that God passionately chases (*iaget*) after all creatures with God's love (*mynne*), so that all creatures will reciprocally desire to

gewünne dich selben nie liep in der wârheit, dû enhabest denne alle menschen liep als dich selben, in einem menschen alle menschen, und der mensche ist got und mensche."

[60] See also Alois M. Haas, "Predigt 12: Qui audit me," in *Lectura Eckhardi: Predigten Meister Eckharts von Fachgelehrten gelesen und gedeutet*, vol. 1, ed. Georg Steer and Loris Sturlese (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1998), 38.

[61] Eckhart, Pr. 12, DW 1, 201: "Daz ouge, dâ inne ich got sihe, daz ist daz selbe ouge, dâ inne mich got sihet; mîn ouge und gotes ouge daz ist éin ouge und éin gesiht und éin bekennen und éin minnen."

[62] See also Hasebrink, *Formen inzitativer Rede bei Meister Eckhart*, 88–90.

[63] Eckhart, Pr. 5a, DW 1, 79.

[64] Eckhart, S. XL, 1, LW 4, n. 389, 336.

love and chase after God since that is *lüsticlich* for God.[65] All things and acts are compelled by the desire to love with the love that is God and are only satiated by this love.[66] This yearning compels the detached soul to become One with the love that is God in an indistinct union.[67] In perfect unity, the soul even shares in the ubiquity and purity of God's love: "God is everywhere in the soul, and it is everywhere in him; hence, God is an all without all [things], and it [the soul that is in love] is with him an all without all [things]."[68]

Other Eckhart sermons also address the profound unifying and permeating effects of love. In German sermon 27, Eckhart holds that through true love, likeness and equality arise between two parties who may have been unlike before but who become like through love.[69] Nevertheless, it is evident that love does not merely bridge the gap of unlikeness by effectuating likeness but that it probes deeper: love also unites as the lover is transformed into the beloved. In order for two to become One, one of the lovers must wholly lose its being (*wesen*) and sink itself into the being of its lover.[70] Eckhart here transcribes the scriptural exhortation to love one another (John 13:34 and 15:12, 17; 1 John 3:11, 23) to mean to love *in* another.[71] This characteristically Eckhartian transposition of meaning gives the admonition a distinctly perichoretic reading: if the soul loves God perfectly, it is in God and equal to God.[72] In German sermon 32, Eckhart also sketches the mutual perichoresis and union brought about by love. He contends that in divine love, "God is pulled through the soul and the soul is pulled through God."[73] Displaying the cohesive nature of intellect and love in

[65] Eckhart, Pr. 63, DW 3, 75. See also Eckhart, Pr. 65, DW 3, 95.

[66] Eckhart, Pr. 63, DW 3, 75–76, 81. Compare Eckhart, Pr. 65, DW 3, 95–96, in which Eckhart writes, "Sô ist got diu minne und sô minniclich ist er, daz allez, daz minnen mac, daz muoz in minnen, ez sî in liep oder leit."

[67] Eckhart, Pr. 63, DW 3, 75. Walter Haug notes, "Gott als Liebe im Sinne des Einzig-Einen impliziert also eine Gotteserfahrung, die in der für Eckhart charakteristischen Weise die Identität in der *unio* aufs äußerste forciert. . . . Wenn man hier das Einzig-Eine der Gottheit mithören darf, ja soll . . . , dann wird die Liebe mit dem göttlichen Grund in eins gesetzt" ("Predigt 63: 'Got ist mynne,'" in Steer and Sturlese, *Lectura Eckhardi*, 1:213–14). Fleshing out the diverse meanings of 1 John 4:16, *Deus caritas est* and *Got ist diu minne*, Eckhart asserts in sermon 65 that God as Love chases everything that is capable of loving (*allez daz, daz minnen mac*) out of multiplicity (*manicvalticheit*) into God's own unity (*einicheit*; Pr. 65, DW 3, 95).

[68] Eckhart, Pr. 63, DW 3, 82: "Got ist über al in der sele, und sy ist in ime über al; also ist got ain al on al und sy mit im ain al on al."

[69] Eckhart, Pr. 27, DW 2, 47–48. On love's demand for *glîchnisse*, see, e.g., Eckhart, Pr. 82, DW 3, 426.

[70] Eckhart, Pr. 27, DW 2, 48–49.

[71] Ibid., 49–50.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Eckhart, Pr. 32, DW 2, 145: "Dâ wirt got gezogen durch die sêle und die sêle wirt gezogen durch got."

his mysticism, Eckhart argues that the soul attains perfection by grasping God in perfect understanding and uniting with God in perfect love.[74] As exemplified in these sermons, love has extensive ontological impact; love both brings together and unites on a deeper substantial level; it both presupposes two and transcends duality; it is both the motion that strives, longs, and searches and the stillness of rest, embrace, and submersion.

Sermon 83 illustrates Eckhart's flexibility regarding transcendental terms and the sophisticated performance of attribution at the core of his hermeneutics. In the homily, he creatively employs the concepts of love and understanding and subjects them to the process of apophasis. He cultivates a linguistic and methodological ambiguity that manifests the dialectical, circular process of saying and unsaying and his efforts to transform and transcend language. The text lucidly depicts the relationship of correlation between the signifiers and their situatedness in the oneness of ultimate reality. Eckhart grounds his discussion of the interplay of the terms in his apophatic method by asserting that God is nameless since God is beyond understanding and predication.[75] Following the *Book of Causes* proposition 5 (6), he maintains that human conception and attribution imposed on the void that is God disclose more about the human subject than about an incomprehensible and ineffable First Cause.[76] Consequently, since even ascribing goodness, wisdom, and being to God constitutes a blasphemous lie, Eckhart counsels his audience to be silent and to "sink out of your yourness and dissolve into his hisness, and your 'yours' and his 'his' should become one 'mine' so wholly that you with him understand eternally his unbecome 'isness' and unnameable nothingness."[77]

Nonetheless, Eckhart immediately complicates his apophatic discourse by analyzing the six powers of the soul and linking the three superior powers (memory, intellect, and will or love) to the persons of the Trinity.[78] While Eckhart compares memory to the Father, he likens the power of intellect to the Son.[79] He defines the latter power as a knowing (or, perhaps rather, unknowing) without images, without a medium, and without likeness, which can be achieved solely through

[74] Ibid., 145–46.
[75] Eckhart, Pr. 83, DW 3, 441.
[76] Ibid., 441–43.
[77] Ibid., 443: "Dv solt alzemal entzinken diner dinisheit vnd solt zer fliesen in sine sinesheit vnd sol din din und sin sin éin min werden als genzlich, das dv mit ime verstandest ewiklich sin vngewordene istikeit vnd sin vngenanten nitheit."
[78] Ibid., 446–48.
[79] Ibid., 446–47.

indistinct union.[80] In his discussion of will and love, the Meister connects the powers to the Holy Spirit.[81] He reads love—as in his analysis of intellect—from the perspective of detachment, whylessness, and identity; he strips the term bare of additions and projections and moves beyond all referential content, reaching the startling conclusion that God is beyond *minne* and *minneklicheit*. "You should love God apart from his loveableness," he urges, "that is: not because he is loveable for God is unloveable; he is above all love and loveableness. . . . You should love him as he is One not-god, One not-spirit, One not-person, One not-image, further: as he is a simple, pure, clear One, separated from all duality, and in the One we should eternally sink down out of something into nothing."[82] Eckhart thus deconstructs a dualistic paradigm in favor of a correlative and integrative usage of the transcendental terms by rooting them in the dynamic unity and nothingness of the divine ground.

AN EXPECTANT LOVE WITHOUT A WHY: ECKHART'S AFFECTIVE READING OF BIRTHING AND LIVING WITHOUT A WHY

Love becomes a vibrant site in several of Eckhart's sermons for elucidating two of his most important notions: birthing, which marks a fusion of identities between human and divine, and living without a why, which indicates a free, purposeless way of life. In German sermon 28, Eckhart states that love has no why (*diu minne enhât kein warumbe*), for pure love always rests in the goodness of someone's nature and does not seek a goal and reason beyond that.[83] Eckhart insists elsewhere that if God is loved because of something else that is not God (*sie minnent got umbe iht anders, daz got niht enist*), then God was never truly loved, but the human being operates in the same ambit as Judas, selling God

[80] Ibid., 447.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid., 447–48: "Du solt got minnen svnder minneklicheit, dc ist: nvt Dar vmbe, dc er minneklich si, wand got ist vnminneklich; Er ist vber alle minne vnd minneklicheit. . . . Dv solt in minnen, als er ist Ein nit-got, Ein nit-geist, Ein nit-persone, Ein nut-bilde, Mer: als er ein luter pur clar Ein ist, gesvndert von aller zweiheite, vnd in dem einen svlen wir ewiklich versinken von [n]ite zv nvte."

[83] Eckhart, Pr. 28, DW 2, 59. See also Eckhart, Pr. 27, DW 2, 59. Eckhart's notion of loving "without a why" in many ways disrupts the *ordo caritatis* as outlined by, for example, Augustine. For Augustine, ordered love is guided by a *propter Deum* (*De doctr. Christ.* 3.10.16, and *Serm.* 336.2). See further Thomas Aquinas's notion—similar to Augustine's position—that *caritas* always has a *propter Deum* (*ST* IIa IIae, q. 23, a. 5; and *Quaest. Disp. de car.* a. 5). For Eckhart, even this noble "why" constitutes a teleological construction that needs to be vitiated in detachment.

cheaply just as Judas sold God.[84] *The Book of "Benedictus": The Book of Divine Consolation* joins the notions of loving without a why and birthing. In the text, Eckhart posits that God, who is pure Love, loves because of loving and works because of working (*er minnet durch minne, und er würket durch würken*).[85] The coincidence of identities that occurs through birthing engenders a circularity: the perfectly detached person who is born as the Son of God loves God because of the love of God (*durch minnen-got*).[86] Birthing and detachment thus leave only one whyless, transparent love that is God and that overflows out of the ground.

Latin sermon XL, 2, presents ecstatic love as an authentic love that lacks a why. The sermon is significant because it runs counter to assumptions that Eckhart eschews ecstasy as an expression of mystical experience (presumably since an ecstatic spirituality characterized the kind of women's mysticism that he attempted to critique in his own thought).[87] To be sure, the use of ecstasy as a central category is relatively rare in Eckhart's writings since he feared that rapture (like the pleasant feelings of sweetness, delight, and consolation) would become an attachment and not brim with *minnewerk*.[88] However, its inclusion demonstrates the openness of Eckhart's mysticism and his refusal to hegemonize certain categories and experiences in the mystical journey.

Following his usual hermeneutical methodology, Eckhart disconnects, rearranges, and reconnects the words in the command to love your neighbor as yourself (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 19:19 and 22:39) in order to uncover the polyvalent meanings of the biblical pericope. Eckhart takes as the starting point for his analysis Dionysius the Areopagite's contention that love effectuates ecstasy as it draws the lover out of itself

[84] Eckhart, Pr. 41, DW 2, 291–92. Compare Eckhart, Pr. 82, DW 3, 430–31; and S. XLVI, LW 4, n. 471, 389.

[85] Eckhart, *BgT* 2, DW 5, 43.

[86] Ibid., 44.

[87] For example, Langer, *Mystische Erfahrung und spirituelle Theologie*, 231. Compare Pr. 86, DW 3, 486, where Eckhart depicts the oneness of Christ and Martha (whom he privileges over Mary as a mystical role model for an integrated mysticism in this sermon) in ecstatic language as he describes them standing as one fiery spirit (*ein brinnender geist*) on the rim of eternity. See also Eckhart's construction of Paul (2 Cor. 12:2–4) as an ecstatic who is *gezücket/enzücket/raptum* and whose raptures result in mystical union and/or a pure spiritual understanding. See, e.g., Eckhart, Pr. 23, DW 1, 403–7; Pr. 61, DW 3, 36–40; Pr. 80, DW 3, 381; Pr. 86, DW 3, 487; and S. XXII, LW 4, n. 213, 197–99, n. 216, 202–3. Compare further Dietmar Mieth's discussion of Peter's ecstatic transportation on the pathless path (*wec âne wec*) and Mary Magdalene's ecstatic desert experience in sermon 86 in Mieth, "Zu Predigt 86: Intravit Iesus in quoddam castellum," in Steer and Sturlese, *Lectura Eckhardi*, 2:170–71.

[88] Compare, e.g., Eckhart, *RdU* 10, DW 5, 219–24, esp. 221.

and into the beloved.[89] The true lover renounces self-love, loves nothing but the beloved, and is wholly absorbed into the beloved.[90] The less the lover searches for the self in the beloved, the more truly and perfectly the lover loves the beloved, for the lover has no why beyond the beloved.[91] Anything but a whyless love hinders ecstasy, that is, the movement of going beyond the solipsistic self and leaping into the beloved.[92] A pure and perfect love releases the human being beyond the self into the divine ground, which is also the ground of the soul; here, the soul loves God in God's self as well as God in all things out of its own ground. Eckhart's configuration of love in the sermon suggests that the vitality of whyless, ecstatic love prompts a fusion of identities between Creator and creature. This text, therefore, disabuses interpretations of Eckhart that construe love as powerless to unsettle fixed subject-object distinctions.

Eckhart's reappraisal of John 13:34–35 in German sermon 75 presents an original reading of the pericope that reconceptualizes Jesus's commandment to the disciples to love one another as he had loved them. Eckhart radicalizes the mandate as he translates it into a directive to love extensively in and through the divine love that encompasses God's flow out into creation and back into union. This vast love is, the reader learns, a perpetually expectant love that rests on Eckhart's construal of God as eternally pregnant: a pregnant God births the world as God spills over into creation, and births the soul as the Son as the soul swirls in perfect co-identity in the inner-Trinitarian self-love and self-knowledge.

In the homily, Eckhart expands the notion of love in the biblical text by transcribing it as three ascending forms of love: a good form of natural love, a better form of love given by grace, and a perfect form of divine love.[93] Through God's first love, human beings learn about the natural goodness that renders God pregnant (*swanger*) from all eternity in the Image, *bilde* (which Eckhart often links to Christ and the uncreated spark in the soul),[94] and that propels God to billow, boil,

[89] Eckhart, S. XL, 2, LW 4, n. 398, 340; Dionysius the Areopagite, *De div. nom.*, 4, 712A.

[90] Eckhart, S. XL, 2, LW 4, n. 398, 341.

[91] Ibid., n. 399, 341.

[92] Ibid., n. 400, 341–42: "Patet consequenter quod omnis quaerens delectationem ex aliquo vel in aliquo non amat illud, sed se ipsum amat, nec amor ille facit exstasim, unde nec amor est."

[93] Eckhart, Pr. 75, DW 3, 292–93. Eckhart maintains that these three forms of love are one in the perfect simplicity of the divine.

[94] For example, Eckhart, *In Sap.*, LW 2, n. 283, 615–16; S. XLIX, 1, LW 4, n. 505, 421; and S. XLIX, 3, LW 4, n. 512, 427.

and overflow into creation.[95] Since God loves equally and—like the center of the circle—is equally close to all things, God also pours God's self equally into all of creation.[96] In light of this affective and ontological reality, Eckhart translates the admonition to imitate Christ to an exhortation that humans should love all of creation equally through divine love.[97] Through God's second love conferred by grace, the human being is pulled out of itself (*ûz ir selber gerucket*) above into God as human desire is transformed from myopic, distinct self-desire (*eigenen lust*) to a more capacious desire for God.[98] Eckhart signals the transformation by paraphrasing the words of the "Book of Love" (*mine buoche*): "Draw me after you in your pleasant taste" (Sg. 1:3).[99] The text also addresses the union of the signifiers love (*minne*) and intellect (*vernunft*): the intellect that climbs into the divine light is illumined and united with grace-filled love; thus, knowing and loving God as God is in God's self.[100] God's third love is divine and gestures further at the dynamic unity between the descriptors. Through this love, the soul understands that God eternally lies in childbed like a pregnant woman and births the Son.[101] This birth constitutes God's (self-) knowledge, which eternally springs forth from the Father's heart and consumes everything in its purity, and God loves nothing but the Son and all that is in him.[102] Here, the soul is absorbed into the love of the Trinity: the Father loves the soul in the Son with the love that is the Holy Spirit.[103] Moreover, the perfectly united soul becomes part of not only the inner-Trinitarian self-love but also the inner-Trinitarian self-knowledge as it stands in God and God in the soul.[104] The soul that has perfected these three loves, Eckhart concludes, possesses four things in a cohesive spir-

[95] Eckhart, Pr. 75, DW 3, 293–94.

[96] Ibid., 294–95.

[97] Ibid., 295–96. Eckhart has a broad and inclusive notion of "neighbor" that goes beyond humanity and comprises all of creation, which has significant implications for his understanding of (and call to) love and justice. See, e.g., Eckhart, S. XL, 1, LW 4, n. 391, 336–37: "Item *simile*, quia omnis vere amans deum necessario amat proximum sicut et quantum se ipsum, et non solum omnem proximum, scilicet hominem, sed omne proximum, omne citra deum diligit sicut se ipsum. Est ergo *simile*, quia illo habito habetur istud et est in illo."

[98] Eckhart, Pr. 75, DW 3, 297. Compare Pr. 18, DW 1, 303–4. In this sermon, Eckhart analyzes the soul's journey upward and inward and observes that "the soul must ascend with hot desire" ("Diu sêle muoz mit heizer begerunge ûfgân"); only then can the soul enter through the divine doorway into love and unity.

[99] Eckhart, Pr. 75, DW 3, 297.

[100] Ibid., 298.

[101] Ibid., 299.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid., 300.

[104] Ibid., 301.

ituality: detachment, the active life of Leah, the contemplative life of Rachel, and a soul that ascends to indistinct union, where it receives all that God may offer.[105] Eckhart's affective readings of living without a why and of birthing—two of his most essential concepts that have been viewed as providing compelling evidence of the radically speculative character of his mysticism—spurn any divorce between love, being, and intellect in his writings. The Meister's employment of nuptial love to unpack his notions of apophasis and indistinct union further indicates the truly synthetic nature of his mystical theology.

A SECRET TREASURE CHAMBER: NUPTIAL LOVE IN ECKHART'S MYSTICISM

An important image employed by Eckhart—as well as by Bernard of Clairvaux and some medieval women mystics—to communicate fundamental tenets of his mysticism is the bridal love between the Bridegroom (Christ) and the bride (the soul) depicted in the Song of Songs.[106] German sermon 71 adopts nuptial love to unlock two significant elements of his thought: apophasis and indistinct union.

In the sermon, Eckhart scrutinizes God's namelessness through an affective and nuptial prism, claiming that God is without name because the bride does not seek to circumscribe or objectify her lover by naming him.[107] He finds material in the Song of Songs (Sg. 3:2–4) and filters God's ineffability through the feverish, consuming love of the bride who searches for her lover. Eckhart provides four reasons why the soul cannot name him whom it loves.[108] First, God is nameless because God is above all names.[109] Second, when the soul passes over

[105] Ibid., 301–3.

[106] Representative and variant examples of nuptial mysticism include Bernard of Clairvaux, *Dil*, 3.7–10; 4.12–13; 11.31–33; and *SC*, e.g., 1.3–4, 6; 2.1–3; 3.1–3; 7.1–3, 6; 8.1–7; 9.8–9; 23.3–16; 32.2–4; 41.5–6; 45.8; 47.4; 51.2, 8–10; 52.2, 6; 58.1; 62.3; 73.10; 74.1–3; 79.1; 83.1–6, 12; 85.13; Clare of Assisi, 1EC1 6–11; 2EC1 1–7, 18–20; 3EC1 5–28; and 4EC1 7–27, 28–32; Hadewijch, *V* 10.74–82, 12.187–192, 12.206–210; Mechthild of Magdeburg, *FL* 1.22, 1.44, 2.2, 2.9–10, 2.25, 3.9, 4.12, 6.1, 7.30, 7.37; Mechthild of Hackeborn, *Liber* 1.19, 1.23, 1.27, 1.37, 2.4, 3.1, 6.3, 6.7; Gertrude of Helfta, *Legatus* 2.23.5, and *Exercitia* 3.92–120, 5.6–9. I will not discuss here the complex relationship between bridal and courtly modes of mysticism; I will simply note that some thinkers (e.g., Hadewijch and Mechthild of Magdeburg) integrate both modes of mysticism in their theology in intricate ways. On the relationship between bridal and courtly modes of mysticism, see, e.g., Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 137–67, esp. 143–53; Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 168–70, 235–36.

[107] Eckhart, Pr. 71, DW 3, 221.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid., 221–22.

into God through love and fades away in a fusion of identities, it knows nothing but love (since only like can know and love like), and no space exists between the lovers to create the duality necessary to name something, for a sign or a signifier demands distinction.[110] Pure love and true lovers thus disallow duality. The third reason builds on the second: there is not enough time to name God, for the perfectly detached person cannot turn away from her lover long enough; as she can only love, know, and be Love in the transparency of lovers, she cannot utter anything but Love.[111] Finally, the soul that hovers in the love of lovers does not believe that God has any other name but love, since love contains all other names (*si nennet alle namen in der minne*).[112] Eckhart, hence, does not consider a referential use of the love metaphor here, since it would preserve and guard duality. The significance of his reflections on bridal love and namelessness in sermon 71 is that they provide him with resources to criticize and deconstruct the objectification and particularization inherent in referential language about God and the self. The detached usage of language transcends particularity and releases its wider discursive potentiality. Paradoxically, it is Eckhart's commitment to apophatic theology that sustains and expands his use of metaphor, imagery, and language.

Preached at a convent of Cistercian nuns in Cologne, where the Bernardine mystical heritage was a vibrant part of the spirituality, Sermon 22 presents a forceful example of Eckhart's appropriation of a nuptial mysticism that resonates with Bernard of Clairvaux.[113] In a beautiful passage, Eckhart describes how God created the soul according to the highest perfection to be the beloved bride (*brût*) of the Son.[114] Aware of this, the Son as king (*künic*) steps out of the secret treasure chamber of the eternal Fatherhood (*ûzer sîner heimlîcher triskamer der êwigen veterlicheit*) in order to exalt his female friend (*vriundinne*) to whom he is eternally wedded, so that she may return with him "into the exaltation from which she came," that is, the hidden divinity.[115] The king, suffering torments of love (*leit sîne pîne von minne*), leaps out like a young roebuck after his bride, even as he wishes to go back into his bridal chamber to unite with her.[116] Eckhart's description of the king's bound-

[110] Ibid., 222.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.
[113] For a more extensive analysis of Pr. 22, see Fischer, "Grundgedanken der deutschen Predigten," 45–55. On the influences of Bernard of Clairvaux's mystical theology on Eckhart, see Bernard McGinn, "St. Bernard and Meister Eckhart," *Citeaux* 31 (1980): 373–86, esp. 385.
[114] Eckhart, Pr. 22, DW 1, 387–88.
[115] Ibid., 388.
[116] Ibid.

ing and soaring while remaining perfectly grounded within approaches an ecstatic depiction. In the sermon, Eckhart maps a movement of return into union in the hidden divinity—the *in principio*, which is the pure beginning and the end of all being[117]—that embraces all of creation: "When he went out from the highest [place] of all, he wanted to go in again with his bride to the purest [place] of all and wanted to reveal to her the hidden secret of his hidden divinity, where he rests with himself [and] with all creatures."[118] The bridal chamber therefore connotes the placeless place and timeless time before God became God and creation became creation.

The varieties of nuptial imagery in Eckhart's writings should be viewed not as anomalies but rather as witnesses to the inclusiveness of his mysticism. While they ultimately must be discarded in the face of the divine transparent nothingness, these different images communicate the pathless path to and union with God. Eckhart's conceptual flexibility is also evident in his discussion of the Dionysian celestial hierarchies as gateways into God; in some of his sermons, he not only construes love as the most powerful spiritual faculty but also disposes of the intellect at a lower stage in the mystical journey.

WITH THE WINGS OF SERAPHIM: LOVE'S JOURNEY INTO GOD

A number of Eckhart's sermons frame the vital role of love by way of Dionysius the Areopagite's celestial hierarchies. In German sermon 90 A/B, Eckhart wrestles with the question of how the soul transcends all things natural and unites with a supernatural God.[119] This brief passage proves to be significant in terms of unlocking the relationship between love and knowledge in Eckhart's mystical theology. Sermon 90 A/B can be found in the "Paradisus anime intelligentis" collection, which generally privileges the intellect topos as an apposite descriptor for God and the experience of God.[120] However, in this text Eckhart argues that the soul attains union with the divine through love alone. In a direct address to the itinerant noble soul, the Meister urges it to put on its walking shoes, which are metaphors for *verstantnisse* and *minne*.[121]

[117] Ibid., 388–89.

[118] Ibid., 388: "Dâ er ûzgienc von dem allerhœhsten, dâ wolte er wider îngân mit sîner brût in dem allerlûtersten und wolte ir offenbâren die verborgene heimlicheit sîner verborgenen gotheit, dâ er ruowet mit im selber mit allen crêatûren."

[119] Eckhart, Pr. 90 A/B, DW 4, 67–68.

[120] See, e.g., Kurt Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik*, vol. 3, *Die Mystik des deutschen Predigerordens und ihre Grundlegung durch die Hochscholastik* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1996), 273–79, esp. 276.

[121] Eckhart, Pr. 90 A/B, DW 4, 68.

Then, Eckhart explains, the soul steps over its own understanding and continues its travels "one-shoed" over the three hierarchies (which most likely refer to the three highest Dionysian celestial hierarchies, the Thrones, the Cherubim, and the Seraphim).[122] Wearing only the walking shoe of love, the soul leaps into the heart of God, which is also God's hiddenness.[123] Though located within a sermon collection that is generally seen as giving preference to speculation, this sermon is significant for our analysis of the function of love in Eckhart's mysticism since it proposes a mystical model in which intellect is thrust aside and *minne* transports the soul into God. While this sermon privileges the role of love at the final juncture of the mystical crossing, it most importantly attests to the expansive nature of Eckhart's broader mystical vision.

A comparison of German sermons 37 and 60 and Latin sermon VI, 1—where each interprets love through the lens of Dionysius's celestial hierarchies—further illuminates Eckhart's flexibility regarding transcendental terms. His refusal to ultimately favor any particular signifier shows the fluidity of his mysticism, which repudiates a dualism between the divine attributes. In German sermon 37, Eckhart connects the highest echelon of the Dionysian celestial hierarchies with understanding. According to the Meister, these angelic choirs are like the intellect (*vernünfticheit*) and keep God in themselves.[124] Ascension of these celestial hierarchies leads to an unmediated comprehension of the divine for the naked intellect. "With these angels," Eckhart writes, "the intellect grasps God in his dressing-room, naked, as he is One without distinction."[125] It is significant to note that Eckhart here links this uppermost level of the celestial hierarchies solely with the faculty of the intellect; only the intellect can ascend and comprehend indistinctly. However, if we turn to two of Eckhart's other sermons that also center on the celestial hierarchies, we see that he here privileges love as a

[122] Ibid. See also Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, 6, 200D–205B; 7, 205B–D.

[123] Eckhart, Pr. 90 A/B, DW 4, 68. In the Latin Commentary on the vernacular poem the *Granum Sinapis* (an attempt, in my judgment, to render Eckhart's mysticism more "palatable" once it came under suspicion), the anonymous author revisits the theme of the feet of love and knowledge twice (Bindschedler, *Der Lateinische Kommentar zum Granum Sinapis*, 38.1–2, 88; 43.12, 96–98). The latter reference is evocative of Eckhart's discussion of "mystical footwear" in sermon 90 A/B, as the commentary holds that the foot symbolizing intellect rests at the level of the Cherubim unable to soar higher, and only the foot symbolizing affectivity rises to the level of the Seraphim and above to the sighs for God and the superintellectual glowing and sparkling brightness; solely *affectio*, breathed on "by the flaming fervor of the super-unknown light," can leap out and up beyond itself to unite with God.

[124] Eckhart, Pr. 37, DW 2, 216–17.

[125] Ibid., 217: "Mit disen engeln nimet vernünfticheit got in sînem kleithûse, blôz, als er ist ein âne underscheit." See also Eckhart, Pr. 59, DW 2, 636; Pr. 40, DW 2, 274; Pr. 9, DW 1, 152; and Pr. 7, DW 1, 122.

vehicle for ascension and mystical union; he connects the highest stage of the celestial hierarchies exclusively with the faculty of love, which includes God and the power that ruptures and reforms the self. In his German sermon 60, echoing Thomas Gallus (the last major Victorine mystical thinker), Eckhart circumscribes the capacity of the intellect in the mystical ascent.[126] Similar to Dionysius the Areopagite, he identifies the Cherubim with knowledge (or wisdom) and the Seraphim with love.[127] Quoting Ps. 79:2, "God sits above the Cherubim," Eckhart concludes that knowledge (*bekantnisse*) is defined by measure (*mâze*) in the soul, which is characteristic of a limited human modus operandi.[128] Hence, knowledge carries the soul to God but is unable to bring the soul into God.[129] Only love (*minne*), the highest power (*diu oberste kraft*) linked to the ardor of the highest level of the Seraphim, is capable of breaking through into God and uniting the soul with God; here, the soul is fully submerged in God and is baptized in the divine nature and receives a divine life.[130]

In Latin sermon VI, 1, *Deus caritas est*—which, like sermon 60, wrestles with Ps. 79:2 as its homiletic topic—Eckhart also advocates for love's superior unifying faculties in ways similar to those in sermon 60. Love, Eckhart explains to his audience, "begins where the intellect ceases."[131] His reading of the celestial hierarchies in this sermon suggests that the intellect brings the soul only to the threshold of the divine yet is unable to produce union and oneness. Thus, if we correlate German sermon 60 with Latin sermon VI, 1, a picture emerges of love as the most vigorous and ardent energy that pulls the human being out of the self into the indistinct vastness of God. Eckhart's predilection for love and diagnosis of intellect as impotent to unite indistinctively with God displaces an exclusive privileging of speculative categories. This displacement provides additional testimony to the organic character of Eckhart's mysticism.

[126] Thomas Gallus forms an important link between the Victorine and Franciscan traditions. McGinn, *Flowering of Mysticism*, 78; Walther Völker, *Kontemplation und Ekstase bei Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1958), 223. For a more extensive discussion of the function of the Seraphim in Eckhart's sermon 60, see Charlotte Radler, "The Anatomy of a Mustard Seed: Reassessing the Roots and Reception of Meister Eckhart's Mysticism" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2004), 460–62.

[127] Eckhart, Pr. 60, DW 3, 22.

[128] Ibid., 21–22.

[129] Ibid., 22.

[130] Ibid., 22–24.

[131] Eckhart, S. VI, 1, LW 4, n. 52, 51: "Incipit ubi intellectus cessat."

MINNEN KRAFT: CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

A careful analysis of Meister Eckhart's opus supports the claim that love is fully integrated into the texture of his mysticism. Taken in its entirety, Eckhart's work provides a poignant witness to the enduring power of love in the mystical experience. The powerful love topos aptly suits Eckhart's need for a signifier that is so supple in scope that it includes Creator and creation, everything and nothing. In much of the past scholarship on Eckhart (and other mystics), the categories of love, being, and intellect have been conceived of as too static, the boundaries between them too rigid. However, a more comprehensive reading of Eckhart makes it clear that we need to rethink what kind of mystic Eckhart was, especially given how fluidly he conceives of the relationship between transcendental terms. Eckhart's apophatic, nonreferential discourse not only unsettles a putatively dichotomous relationship between affectivity and speculation but renders such distinctions moot. In the dialectics of saying and unsaying, Eckhart's mysticism dynamically opens up the signifiers to one another to create a luminous vision of what it means to exist in the unitive space where humanity and divinity coinhere.

The recognition of the central locus of love in Eckhart's thought has implications not only for our understanding of Eckhart's work but for our understanding of Christian mysticism as a whole. First, it invites us to revisit the relationship between love, intellect, and being in a number of Christian mystics (particularly in the mystics influenced by Eckhart) and to engage in a richer reading of them that moves beyond such heuristic tools as "speculative" and "affective," which contract the field of meaning and make it difficult to appreciate the full complexity of the mystical text. Second, it cautions against essentialist readings, especially as linked to the categories "speculative" and "affective." In Eckhart's case, the assumption that his mysticism is one-sidedly speculative has pitted it against the purportedly one-sidedly affective spirituality of certain women mystics from the late medieval world. Such a reading has not only created a problematic division between love and intellect/being but has also resulted in a distorted understanding of Eckhart's relationship with women mystics as well as a static and oppositional sense of male and female forms of mysticism (as if these were monolithic reifications). While scholars are increasingly and forcefully rejecting a blanket categorization of women's mysticism as affective, anti-intellectual, and emotional, a comparable rejection of the similarly reductive and essentialist classification of Eckhart has been slow to come. It may be because we have a truncated understand-

ing of essentialism as affecting only women and thus fail to see that essentialism—in the negative sense—is always inclusive. Thus, it is time that we gave love its due as an integral part of Eckhart's notion of mystical union with God. For Eckhart, the centrality of love in the mystic's quest for God was clear, and he returned to it again and again, reminding readers often to ponder the haunting truth: "In love I am more God."