

Article

# “Love One Another” According to Meister Eckhart

Silvia Bara Bancel <sup>1,\*</sup>  and Markus Enders <sup>2,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Theology, Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 28015 Madrid, Spain

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Theology, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, 79098 Freiburg, Germany

\* Correspondence: sbara@comillas.edu (S.B.B.); markus.enders@theol.uni-freiburg.de (M.E.)

## Abstract

Although Meister Eckhart is frequently regarded as a speculative mystic, his practical teachings, particularly concerning love, are often overlooked. This study explores the practical consequences of his statements on neighborly love in order to demonstrate his concrete contributions to ethics. Our research reveals that Eckhart views true love as a Trinitarian act of grace where humans participate in God’s love. Through pure, selfless love, human beings become inhabited by the Holy Spirit, loving their neighbors universally and equally as themselves. These findings are drawn from a textual analysis of Eckhart’s Latin commentaries on the Gospel of John and his German sermons, focusing on his Trinitarian theology and doctrine of virtues. Ultimately, love is identified as the central divine virtue that unifies the soul with God. When individuals love without seeking their own interest, their actions are simultaneously human and divine works. Thus, Eckhart’s profound theology offers a highly practical framework where perfect love radically transforms ethical action.

**Keywords:** love; Meister Eckhart; charity (*caritas*); mysticism; neighborly love; virtues; Trinitarian theology; detachment; Holy Spirit

## 1. Introduction

Meister Eckhart (1260–1328) has been regarded as a great philosopher of Christianity (Flasch 2010) and also as a “speculative mystic” (Ruh 1996, p. 17; Vannier 2018, p. 63), who engages in “fundamental mysticism” (*Fundamentalmystik*) (Haas 2015, p. 322); a “philosophical mysticism” (Albert 2015, p. 708); or a mysticism understood as “metaphysics of interiority” (Kobusch 2011). Perhaps for this reason, the more practical aspects of Eckhart’s words have been overlooked, with a few exceptions, such as the study on the unity between active and contemplative life in Eckhart (Mieth [1969] 2018), his “art of detachment” (Vinzent 2011) and his understanding of virtues (Milne 2016; Beier and Roesner 2023; Milne 2024). Thus, Eckhart bases them on his metaphysics (Beccarisi 2012), and presents a “radically theocentric understanding” of all virtues (Enders 2023, p. 293). He “considers all virtues in their vertical dimension, i.e., with regard to their spiritual unity in God and with regard to their significance for the deification of human beings” (Beier and Roesner 2023, p. 406).

As a Dominican, and following the approach of Thomas Aquinas (S. Th. II q. 40 a. 1 ad 2), Eckhart believes that “the active live is better than the contemplative live, because by acting one pours out of love, what one has taken in contemplation.” Contemplation and action must go hand in hand, for “there is nothing but one,” as he explains in German sermon 104: “In fact, God intends in the unity of contemplation the fruitfulness of action.



Academic Editor:

Cristóbal Serrán-Pagán y Fuentes

Received: 12 March 2026

Revised: 27 April 2026

Accepted: 28 April 2026

Published: 30 April 2026

**Copyright:** © 2026 by the authors.

Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland.

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons Attribution \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license.

Because in contemplation you only serve yourself, but in virtuous action, there you serve the multitude. To this Christ exhorts us by His entire life"<sup>1</sup> (Eckhart 2019, pp. 284–85).

Furthermore, he maintains that "if a man were in an ecstasy as St. Paul was, and if he knew of a sick person who needed a bowl of soup from him, [he] would consider it far better [...] to leave that rapture out of love and help the needy person out of greater love"<sup>2</sup> (Eckhart 2009, p. 496). For greater love, one must serve those in need, Eckhart points out.

Consequently, despite the paucity of practical illustrations offered by Eckhart on matters of action and conduct, practical implications can be drawn from his words on love and charity. For it might appear that Eckhart remains on a theoretical level and makes no contribution to ethics. However, this is not the case. On the contrary, his radically theocentric understanding of human love gives rise to an ethic of love not only for human love of God, but also for human charity or interpersonal love. An ethic which, at the same time, leads to union with God; a mystical ethic. We would like to examine this in more detail in the following lines.

Although some authors have mentioned the importance of love in Eckhart (e.g., Mieth 2014; Flasch 2010, p. 243), there are hardly any studies that have addressed the issue in depth, with the exception of Georg Steer (2011) and Markus Enders (2008), who have focused solely on Eckhart's German works. We will therefore examine both the German and the Latin works, in particular his *Exposition of the Gospel of John*. The latter may be somewhat dry, but it is through them that Eckhart's philosophical foundations and his sources become apparent. However, we do not intend to undertake a comparative study of his sources here, as this would go beyond the scope of an article; instead, we shall focus on Eckhart's thought.

As we shall see, his ethics could be classified as a virtue ethics, within the Aristotelian and Thomist tradition, albeit with its own distinctive features. For Thomas Aquinas's ethics of virtue is primarily philosophical—specifically with regard to the natural virtues, that is, the moral and intellectual virtues—and only secondarily grounded in theology, particularly with regard to the so-called theological virtues such as faith, hope and love. In contrast, Meister Eckhart's virtue ethics are not only primarily, but strictly speaking exclusively, theocentric in nature, as we shall see.

## 2. Love According to Meister Eckhart's Latin Works

### 2.1. "Ordo Amoris" *Sermo Die b. Augustini*

In the Latin sermon Eckhart delivered in Paris to celebrate St. Augustine's Day, Eckhart considers theology to be part of practical knowledge and almost identifies ethics and theology, as Andreas Speer (2011, pp. 7–9) points out. He states:

For the masters divide for us the knowledge of philosophy into theoretical, logical, and ethical or practical. And this according to the three things that in turn keep human beings occupied in such a way that they never at any time seem to be idle with respect to any of these three; and these are thinking, speaking, and acting. The theoretical or speculative (science) they further divide into mathematics, physics, and ethics or theology. [...] The ethicist or theologian contemplates more subtly the ideas of things—which, before they came forth into bodies, existed eternally in the divine mind—and how they existed there intelligibly.<sup>3</sup>

This direct link between theology and ethics may come as a surprise, but the sermon clarifies it, pointing out that the knowledge of God acquired by the theologian ("through a mirror and in an enigma", *per speculum et in aenigmate*, and, on occasions, also "in divine light", *in lumine*) is oriented towards three things: revealing what awaits us, anticipating divine sweetness, and making us act correctly.<sup>4</sup>

Such knowledge or wisdom leads to “the manifestation of virtue in action” (*exhibitio virtutis in operatione*),<sup>5</sup> which means living according to “the order of love” (*ordo amoris*).<sup>6</sup> Hence, Meister Eckhart concludes his sermon on Saint Augustine by quoting his words: “One thing I know: that I will not rest until I become entirely love. May God, who lives, deign to grant this to us.”<sup>7</sup>

What, then, does it mean to live according to “the order of love” and to become “love,” according to Eckhart? He does not offer a method or specific instructions on what to do, but rather invites us to be, to acquire a just, good, and loving being:

People ought never to think too much about what they could do, but they ought to think about what they could be. If people and their way of life were only good, what they did might be a shining example. If you are just, then your works too are just. We ought not to think of building holiness upon action; we ought to build it upon a way of being, for it is not what we do that makes us holy, but we ought to make holy what we do. *Counsels on Discernment* 4. (Eckhart 1981, p. 250)

So, to delve deeper into love, into what it means to “become entirely love”, the words of Eckhart in his *Exposition of the Gospel of John* are significant, particularly when he expounds on Jesus’ invitation to mutual love in Jn 13:34 and Jn 15:12.

## 2.2. Love One Another

### 2.2.1. John 13:34

Firstly, we must analyse what Eckhart explains about John 13:34: “I give you a new commandment: Love one another, as I have loved you.”<sup>8</sup> In keeping with medieval tradition, Eckhart explains Scripture phrase by phrase and often begins by highlighting the most relevant interpretations of other authors, the Church Fathers or great masters, before offering his own interpretation. He frequently draws on collections of texts, such as the interlinear gloss of the Bible and Thomas’s *Catena aurea*, which Eckhart refers to as the “Gloss of Thomas”, compilations, arranged by verse, of relevant quotations from the Church Fathers. At the same time, in his argumentation Eckhart draws on the works of great philosophers, particularly Aristotle, but also Plato and Plotinus, Avicenna, Maimonides, etc. (Sturlese 2008, 2012).

Here, Eckhart begins by asking what this newness consists of, and what the new commandment that Jesus offers is. Eckhart points out what Saint Augustine says in Thomas’s *Catena aurea*.<sup>9</sup> According to Augustine, it is a new commandment (*novum*), not because it did not exist in the old Law, for there was indeed the commandment to love one’s neighbour as oneself (Lev. 19:18), but because love always makes the old man a new man. But this is not love in the sense of natural affinity, such as that between spouses or parents and children, for Jesus specifies: “as I have loved you” (*sicut dilexi vos*). And by loving one another with such love, we become children of God, brothers and sisters of the only Son of God.

Eckhart expands on Augustine’s reflection in three points. 1° Augustine’s words show that the precept of love (*caritatis praeceptum*) is new because it makes the old man a new man. But we can also say that in the old law, love was not an imperative, but only a piece of advice, a recommendation. Thus, love belongs to the new law, while fear belongs to the old.<sup>10</sup> 2° The old law dealt with temporal matters and promised temporal things. Eckhart suggests here that it is a new law because it deals with what is beyond time. 3° Eckhart points out that some interpret Augustine’s words on natural love by saying that those who love naturally do not love God more than themselves. This is what Saint Thomas argues in his *Summa Theologica* (I q. 60 a. 5 o. 5). Others, as Albertus Magnus, interpret the opposite, but with erroneous arguments, according to Eckhart: they argue that creatures naturally love God more than themselves because their being depends on Him as their origin and

their end. But then, by loving God more than oneself because one's being depends on God, in reality the creature loves God in its own interest: "she loves God for His own sake, not God for the sake of God" (*diligit deum propter se ipsam, non deum propter deum*).

For his part, distancing himself from Thomas and Albertus Magnus, Eckhart explains that every creature naturally loves God more than themselves, because if they love themselves or anything else, they love it because of God (*propter Deum*). The reason for this is that "it is being, and only being, that everyone desires", as the Muslim philosopher Avicenna argues in his *Metaphysics* (VIII c. 6) and, with him, Meister Eckhart. But "the being is God and is from him alone" (*Esse autem deus est et ab ipso solo est*), Eckhart reminds us. On the other hand, non-being is what we hate when we hate. So when a creature loves itself, in reality they love God and hate themselves, because their being comes from God and, by themselves, they are non-being, they are nothing. Eckhart concludes that "the nature of every creature is not to love themselves, but to hate themselves in themselves; yet to love God within themselves, and to love themselves in God; and thus, in both cases, the beloved is one and there is [only] one love."<sup>11</sup> It is therefore true that grace does not change nature, but perfects it, Eckhart concludes.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, Eckhart can bring together statements that appear contradictory. Augustine's statement that "the root of all evil is self-love, and the root of all good is the love of God" (*De civitate dei* XIV c. 28), with the epistle to the Ephesians 5:29, which points out that "no one ever hated their own flesh; on the contrary, we nourish and cherish it". And Aristotle's assertion in his *Nicomachean Ethics* IX c.4 that what we find pleasing in others arises from what we like about ourselves; and again in the Book of Ecclesiasticus (13:19): "Every living creature loves its own kind." For if they love their fellow human being, they love themselves first and foremost. And what they love, in loving themselves, is their being. That is why, ultimately, they love God in themselves, as Eckhart had explained before.

In the previous argument we can appreciate Eckhart's positive view of human nature and his natural love, and also see how he draws here on both the Old and New Testaments and on the authority of a Church Father, Saint Augustine, as well as Aristotle, "the philosopher," and Avicenna, for to him there is only one source of truth: "especially since everything that is true, whether in being or in knowing, proceeds from one source and one root of truth, both in Scripture and in nature."<sup>13</sup> We have also seen how freely Eckhart interpreted the teachings of Saint Augustine (see also Weigand and Schiewer 2011; Vannier 2020, pp. 29–158) and Saint Thomas (see Sturlese 2012, pp. 201–18) or distanced himself from them in order to put forward his own point of view. It has also become clear how Eckhart considers various perspectives (creatures can love themselves "in themselves" or "in God"), and taking these different perspectives into account makes it possible to overcome apparent contradictions: when we truly love, what we love is being; what we love is God; self-love in God is love of God and thus "there is only one love".

### 2.2.2. John 15:12

Meister Eckhart's commentary on John 15:12 ("This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you") also begins by showing what the Church Fathers said on this subject, as collected by Thomas Aquinas's Gloss (*Catena aurea*). Eckhart focuses especially on Saint Gregory and above all on Saint Augustine.

First, the question arises as to why Christ considers the precept of love to be "his" commandment. Are faith, hope, and morality not also precepts of Christ? This is what Saint Gregory contemplates, and he responds that all the commandments are included in that of love. Eckhart accepts this explanation and adds two biblical quotations to prove it: Matthew 22:40 ("On these two commandments [love of God and neighbour] hang all the Law and the Prophets") and Romans 13:10 ("the fulfilment of the law is love"). Eckhart

also mentions and agrees with Saint Augustine's response on this subject, as transmitted by the Gloss: "Where there is love (*caritas*), nothing can be lacking; and where there is no love, nothing can be of any benefit."<sup>14</sup>

Eckhart points out that this is not just any kind of love, for Christ adds to his commandment "as I have loved you." Eckhart begins by summarising two arguments from Augustine found in the *Catena aurea*. First, as 1 Jn 3:16 says, Christ gave his life for us and we too must give our lives for our brothers and sisters.<sup>15</sup> Second, "Christ loves us so that we may have God [in us] with Christ."<sup>16</sup> Those who love one another in order to have God within them (*propter habendum deum*) truly love one another. But according to Saint Augustine there are few who love one another in this way, so that God may be one and "all in all".

Eckhart expands on these reflections and, in turn, sets out nine characteristics of God's love for us, thereby indirectly pointing out what our love should be like:

(1.) God loves us "without a passion that affects or alters him" (*sine passione afficiente sive immutante*) (In Ioh. n. 626, LW III, p. 544). Here Eckhart does not develop this point. But previously, in his *Exposition of John* n. 570, he explains that "those things which arise from passion are not divine" because "God performs all things without passion." And he draws on the authority of Saint Augustine, who in his *Confessions* I, 4, 4 says in a prayer: "You love and are not disturbed, you repent and do not suffer, you are angry and you remain calm."<sup>17</sup> Likewise, in his *Exposition of the Book of Genesis* n. 220, he returns to the same text by Augustine and specifies that "passion or alteration does not pertain to reason or to the intellect", as Aristotle stated in his Book VII of the *Physics*. "However, in us, where the sensitive part is joined in one soul and in one being with the rational part, the passion produces alteration in us."<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, Eckhart encourages us to love in the purest and equanimous way possible.

Furthermore (2.) God loves us for our own benefit (*propter nostram utilitatem*), not for His own. Consequently, this means that we too must love selflessly, without seeking our own interests. This Eckhartian statement reappears expressed in the invitation to act "without why" (*âne warumbe*), to be a man "who has detached himself from himself and all things, not seeking anything of himself in anything and does all his actions without a why and out of love" (Pr. 29, Eckhart 2019, pp. 636–37).

(3.) God loves us only in goodness and for goodness' sake. (In Ioh. n. 627). This can be related to German sermon 27, in which Eckhart, following Thomas Aquinas (S. Th. II q. 23 a. 2), explains "that the goal of love, for which love acts all its action, is goodness, and this goodness is God". And further on: "if your love is so pure", "you do not intend anything else nor love anything but goodness and God."<sup>19</sup> (Eckhart 2020, pp. 435, 437).

(4.) Eckhart explains the fourth characteristic of God's love:

Because He loves us as Himself, with the same love with which He loves Himself and in Himself, therefore, let us also love our neighbour in God and God in our neighbour. For where one is because of the other, in both there is one, and two [become] one, no longer two, but one. Thus we no longer love our neighbour merely "as" (*sicut*) ourselves, as Matthew and Luke have it, but "as if" (*tamquam*) he were ourselves, as Mark has it, and Augustine frequently uses that wording. "As if" is said as if one were to say: "as much as" (*tantum quantum*).<sup>20</sup>

It is indeed unity with God that Meister Eckhart seeks, and so if we love our neighbour because of God, we also love God, just as if we love ourselves in God, we love God in ourselves, as was said earlier when commenting on Jn 13:34.

(5.) "We may love one another for God's own sake (*propter Deum*), says Eckhart; for thus God loves and accomplishes all things for his own sake," as Scripture points out in Proverbs 16:4: "The Lord has made all things for his own sake."<sup>21</sup> In Sermon 27, he

expresses it as follows: “As little as my eye can talk and my tongue recognise colour, so little can love tend towards anything other than goodness and God.” Therefore, “the love with which we love must be so pure, so naked (*bloz*), so detached that it should not be directed either towards me or towards a friend of mine or towards anything other than itself” (Eckhart 2020, pp. 435–37). Thus, we have to love one another for God’s sake and in God.

(6.) In addition, “God loves all persons and all things with an equal affection, but with an unequal effect” (*deus dilligit omnes et omnia pari affectu, dispari effectu*); he treats a sick child differently to a healthy child, an infant differently to an adult (In Ioh. n. 628, LW III p. 546). It is an invitation to love attentively to the needs of others.

(7.) “God loves us with the love that is the Holy Spirit” (*deus nos diligit amore qui est spiritus sanctus*), so that we may love one another with a spiritual love, a holy love, not an earthly love (In Ioh. n. 629). Here Meister Eckhart does not go any further, but he returns to the subject when he comments on John 15:13. He affirms that “the love or affection (*amor sive dilectio*) with which we love one another is the Holy Spirit himself; the love by which we lay down our life for our friends is the very same—not another—by which we lay down our life even for our enemies”; and also, “the slightest love and grace” “is an instrument of the Holy Spirit” (In Ioh. n. 633, LW III, pp. 550–51). He had also supported it earlier: “the Holy Spirit is the same love by which the Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father, and by which God loves us and we love God.”<sup>22</sup>

Eckhart takes up Peter Lombard’s assertion, which deepens Saint Augustine’s Trinitarian reflection (*De Trinitate* XV c. 17 n. 30): “the Holy Spirit is not only the love of the Father and the Son by which they love one another and love us, but it is also the love by which we love God.” (Sent. I d. 10 c. 2) (Lombard 2012, p. 231). Furthermore, in Distinction XVII, Peter Lombard maintains that “the Holy Spirit is the love or charity by which we love God and our neighbour” (Sent. I d. 17 c. 1 and c. 6).<sup>23</sup>

By the 13th century, this claim had been refuted by the great theologians (Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas), and in Eckhart’s time it was not widely accepted. For example, Thomas (S. Th. II II q. 23 a. 2) considers that instead of being the Holy Spirit himself, charity is a created habitual form in the soul (Zuijdewegt 2012). This is an example of how Eckhart, who always speaks of Thomas with respect and admiration as they were both Dominican friars, nevertheless distances himself from him in certain respects. The extent of this distancing is a matter of debate amongst critics (Flasch 2010; Sturlese 2012, pp. 201–54; Bara Bancel 2022a).

Latin Sermon VI,3 allows us to clarify how Eckhart understands this question: “By loving He [God] makes us love. He Himself causes in us and gives us the love with which we love. [. . .] He is the very love by which we love. [. . .] Note that: according to the whole of what we are, we do not love God, but only according to what we have received; for example, insofar as we are good or just”<sup>24</sup> (Sermon VI,3 n. 65, LW IV, pp. 9–11, 63).

Eckhart emphasises that love, which is the Holy Spirit, that love through which we love God and our neighbour, is not something we generate ourselves, the fruit of our own abilities, but rather the love we have received and, insofar as we are good or just and participate in Goodness and Justice, which is ultimately God.

As we will see, Eckhart also reiterates this clearly in his German sermon 27: “Love is so pure, so naked (*bloz*), so detached in itself, that the best masters [Lombard] say that the love with which we love is the Holy Spirit. There were some who wanted to contradict this. This is always true: in all the movements in which we are moved to love, there is nothing that moves us but the Holy Spirit.<sup>25</sup> Love in the purest, in the most detached, in itself is nothing but God”<sup>26</sup> (Eckhart 2020, p. 437). This is not about love or will as faculties of the human soul, but rather that absolutely pure and detached love to which we are called in

order to follow the commandment to love as God has loved us (and therefore with all the characteristics mentioned above and below). This is nothing other than the highest level of love, the purest and most detached; it is God himself, that is, the Holy Spirit, who is the love of the Father and the Son, the intra-trinitarian life, which bursts forth in the human being completely detached and one with God.

(8.) Eckhart continues his commentary on verse 12 by pointing out that “God loved us first” (1 John 4:19), he loved us “when we were still enemies” (Romans 5:10). Significantly, he points out, the Lord says “love one another” (*invicem*), that is, let each one love the other as if he were himself and himself as if he were the other. For only in this way can one truly love, and love oneself and one’s neighbour. For “then one loves oneself in God and loves one’s neighbour in God and loves God in oneself and in one’s neighbour, one single in both and in everything. But he who does not love in this way does not truly love himself, nor does he love his neighbour or God.”<sup>27</sup> Here we find the same idea as in the fourth point.

In Sermon 27, Eckhart takes a very radical stance on this subject:

Therefore He says: ‘Love one another’, that is, in one another. The Scriptures speak very well of this. St. John says: ‘God is love, and he who is in love is in God, and God is in him’. Yes, he speaks very well: if God were in me and I were not in God, or if I were in God and God were not in me, everything would be split. But since God is in me and I am in God, I am no longer worthless nor is God above (me). (Eckhart 2020, p. 439)

(9.) In the ninth point, which explores love for one another in greater depth, Eckhart again quotes Saint Augustine, but this time he does not use Saint Thomas’s Gloss, instead mentioning two works by Augustine. In *De disciplina christiana*, Augustine says that “we call father and son, son-in-law and father-in-law close, but nothing is closer than man to man.”<sup>28</sup> And in *De vera religione*, he teaches that we must love our mother, father, brother or sister as ourselves, that is, as human beings, according to their image of God, and thus, he who loves his neighbour as (*tanquam*) himself does not envy him, he shares with him what he can and does not need him, as he does not need himself, but only God; and by adhering to Him he is happy, Augustine concludes.

Eckhart goes further than Augustine, arguing that the person who loves with such love no longer even needs God, just as they do not need themselves, because “one does not need what one has within oneself.” That is why the one who loves everything as himself is the richest, for he possesses everything, because “by loving he possesses the good as good, and through love he has nothing but the good.”<sup>29</sup> But “good as good is God,” he explains in his *Commentary on Wisdom* (In Sap n. 98).<sup>30</sup>

The Dominican continues his reasoning, which implicitly supports the idea that whoever loves is begotten as a son of God. Christ says that “his” commandment is “to love one another”. And as Eckhart explained earlier in John 13:34, this is a “new” commandment, which does not come from the old law of fear, but from the new law of love. And in John 15:15, he explains that between servant and master there is fear, but between father and son there is love: “The Father loves the Son” (John 3:35 and 5:20); that is why, according to Eckhart, the word son (*filius*) comes from *philos* (friend), which means the same thing as love.<sup>31</sup> He who loves and “does everything out of love for the good alone, inasmuch as it is good” is a son of God—Eckhart maintains in In Ioh. n. 115.<sup>32</sup> But in being born as a son of God, as in every birth, even in nature, there is first pain, “murmurings and passive rebellions,” just as in the acquisition of virtue, which we learn with labour and suffering until the moment when the form of virtue is engendered in us, and virtue is born and acquired, then there is the joy of goodness, which is connected to love. Eckhart often uses the example of fire burning wood, which crackles at first and offers resistance, until the form of fire is acquired in the wood, then there is only peace and gentleness. It

should be noted that John of Damascus used the same example of red-hot iron to explain the hypostatic union in Christ in *De fide orthodoxa* (III 15 and 26), a work that Eckhart knew well and quoted frequently.

Elsewhere in his *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, Eckhart himself links becoming children of God with love for one's neighbour and becoming one with God and in Him, and this helps us to conclude this section:

whoever wishes to become a son of God must love his neighbor as himself, so that the Word made flesh may dwell within him; that is, he must love his neighbor just as much as himself, renouncing the personal self, renouncing what is his own. For one who possesses charity loves his neighbor in no way less than himself; indeed, he loves the one God in all things and all things in Him. But in the One there is no distinction, neither Jew nor Greek [Rom 10:12]; in the One there is neither more nor less.<sup>33</sup>

### 2.2.3. John 15:13

Eckhart's approach to this verse seeks to show that giving one's life "for one's friends" or "for one's enemies" is the same thing, because the love with which we love is the same Holy Spirit, and therefore "the love with which we give our lives for our friends is the same as that with which we give our lives for our enemies".<sup>34</sup> "Indeed charity does not even recognise such a thing as enemies."<sup>35</sup> Moreover, "in those who love and have charity and the Holy Spirit within them, enmity, bitterness and sadness are transformed into gentleness and joy,<sup>36</sup> and therefore, "the love (*caritas*) that has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5) considers it equal and indistinct and the same thing to give one's life for enemies or for friends, "for every friend and every enemy has become one, through one, in one, for one, and one thing."<sup>37</sup>

This journey through Eckhart's Latin texts shows how the author understands love of neighbour and even love of oneself as a pure love which, at its core, implies love of God, but also a love that comes from God and is the presence of God himself in us. Thus, by loving, we become children in the Son, inhabited by the Holy Spirit, we are one with Him and in Him. It is worth asking about the concrete consequences of these words which, as Eckhart himself acknowledges in sermon 27, may seem difficult. "But nobody should be in despair because of it," replies Eckhart. "The more you give yourself to God, the more God gives Himself back to you: the more you renounce what is yours, the more eternal bliss is yours" (Eckhart 2020, p. 443).

Detachment, surrender to God and the purification of our love imply a progressive presence of God within us, in the depths of our soul. And so, all our actions, which come from within, are "delightful and gentle."<sup>38</sup> Moreover, these actions are "ours and divine" at the same time, Eckhart maintains:

For nothing except God Himself enters into our essence. And therefore, it is said in a significant manner in Isaiah 26: "all our works you have done in us," [Is 26:12]; and in John 14: "the Father, who remains in me, does the works." "In me", he says, which the prophet expresses as "in us". And therefore, according to another reading, he says significantly: "all our works you have done for us" [Is 26:12]. Indeed, only those works profit us—and are both ours and divine—which proceed from within, and in which God, the innermost, moves, and nothing from outside or external intervenes.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, human actions can become at the same time a work of God, when they are done out of pure and selfless love. These "good and divine actions" "are done in a fiery love for God and one's fellows" (Eckhart 2020, p. 495), which does not imply a loss of freedom, but rather the fullness of it (Bara Bancel 2022b, p. 126).

### 3. The Nature of Love According to Meister Eckhart's German Works

Meister Eckhart's understanding of the nature of love—both man's love for God and love between human beings—is deeply rooted in his theology of the Trinity and his doctrine of virtue. For him, true love is never just a human emotion or a purely ethical attitude, but an act of being and, at the same time, a gift of grace for human beings, in which human beings are taken up by the Trinitarian God himself into his intra-Trinitarian love for himself.

#### 3.1. *The Trinitarian Nature of Love: The Perfect Equality of the Son of God with God the Father as the Basis for the "Birth" of the Holy Spirit as the Divine Essence of Love*

For Eckhart, true, perfect love of God on the part of human beings is not a natural capacity of the spiritual soul of human beings created by God, but an act of divine grace through which human beings receive a share in the love with which God loves himself. In his 1318 *Book of Divine Consolation*, written for Queen Agnes (1281–1364), the wife of King Andrew III of Hungary, who died in 1301, Meister Eckhart also explains the divine essence of love, whose nature he determines in a reflection on Trinitarian theology: Within the Trinitarian God, the Son of God possesses perfect equality with the divine Father, i.e., the divine Son is perfect equality with God the Father himself,<sup>40</sup> which means not tautological identity or sameness, but sameness of essence with relational-personal differences between Father and Son. For, as Eckhart explains in German sermon 44, unity presupposes equality;<sup>41</sup> consequently, for the perfect relational-personal unity between Father and Son in the Godhead, the equality of the Son with the Father, his identity of essence with the Father, is a necessary and, in this case, also a sufficient condition. Therefore, the Son of God, in his essential unity with God the Father, is equality itself.<sup>42</sup> However, as Eckhart explains in this sermon, referring to a principle of natural philosophy from Aristotle, all equality aims at birth.<sup>43</sup> For with the equality of two persons, their love for one another also grows as they strive for union with the other who has become equal. Perfect equality, such as that of the Son within the Trinity to the divine Father, therefore leads to the perfect union of both divine persons and thus to the birth of a third inner-divine person, the Holy Spirit, who—as the perfect union of Father and Son—is hence the personal unity of the perfect mutual self-giving of the two divine persons of Father and Son to each other and thus perfect love itself. If, therefore, the Son proceeds from the Father as his perfect equality, i.e., undifferentiated in essence but relationally or personally distinct, then the union or personal-relational unity of both divine persons devoted to each other is the divine Spirit. The divine essence of love is therefore the union of relational differences, but identical in essence, and thus, as this personal unity of relationship, the birth, i.e., the essence-identical emergence, of a third inner-divine person.<sup>44</sup> Hence, Meister Eckhart says: "Love has this nature, that it flows and springs from two. One as one does not produce love. Two as two also do not produce love; two as one produces natural, urgent, fiery love" (BdgT, DW V, pp. 15–18, 30).

#### 3.2. *The Natural Striving of the Human Soul for the Birth of a Son*

According to Eckhart, the hidden power of nature strives for perfect equality in all natural processes and therefore for the (divine) One, which it seeks and loves for its own sake.<sup>45</sup> This applies without exception and thus also and above all to the rational, natural, creaturely soul of human beings. According to Eckhart, however, the divine Son himself and with him the kingdom of God, i.e., the totality of divine creative ideas of all that is created, are truly present in the innermost part of the human soul, i.e., in its (essential) foundation (see, for example, the German sermons 5b, 22, 53 and 101). But as we have seen, the Son is equality "from the One, and in the One, and with the One" (BdgT, DW V, 30,12) and, as this equality, at the same time "the beginning and origin of blossoming,

fiery love" (30,13), i.e., of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, every soul carries something divine within itself and consequently also naturally strives for God or the divine Son to be born in it.<sup>46</sup> For according to the principle explained above, every equality aims at a birth, so that "in equality, God gives birth."<sup>47</sup> However, according to Eckhart, after the birth of the Son within it, the human soul naturally strives to be preserved in God, since only the being of God has permanence in itself.<sup>48</sup> However, while the spiritually gifted soul naturally desires only this birth of the divine Son as the intra-Trinitarian self-reflection of God within it and thus its preservation in God, it is solely the work of God to graciously grant the devoted soul the immediate experience of the birth of the Son, which basically always takes place in every rational soul.<sup>49</sup>

### 3.3. *The Union of the Human Soul with God in the True Love of God in Human Being*

God can only make the human soul equal to himself and give birth to it within himself, i.e., allow it to become one with his Trinitarian self-reflection, when the soul has brought the activity or self-efficacy of its natural creaturely powers, which are essentially unequal to God, to complete rest, and when, moreover, through God's unifying power, the soul also loses its natural-creaturely being, by being made one with God, through God's own love for himself, so that the soul, made equal to God by God, loves God for his own sake.<sup>50</sup> For according to ancient teaching, love, whose essence is the Spirit of God itself, transforms the lover into the being of the beloved.<sup>51</sup> According to Eckhart, the utmost, perfect love of man for God is therefore nothing other than God's self-love, with which God has made human love for him equal or one through grace.

Since the perfect equality of the Son arises, as it were, from the simplicity of the divine essence and at the same time returns to it in a process of inner divine self-reflection that is free of space and time, it and the divine love that proceeds from it, with the unifying power of divine unity at work within it, not only draws and entices the soul to itself, i.e., to the immediate experience of its (own) birth as the Son; but this equality leads the soul in this immediate experience of God beyond that to the completely blissful union with the first Trinitarian person, that of the Father, in whom the divine equality, i.e., the totality of divine ideas, emerging in the Son, comes to silence and thus every movement, including that of the divine Spirit, comes to rest.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, the soul united with the intra-Trinitarian Christ through her and in her birth as the Son loves equality or the Son not for its own sake or his own sake, "but she loves it (sc. the equality) for the sake of the One who is hidden in her and is the true 'Father', a beginning without any beginning, 'of all in heaven and on earth'" (BdgT, DW V, p. 35,12ff.).

Eckhart compares this extreme, intra-Trinitarian union of both the divine Son and the divine Father with the human soul to wood being consumed by fire. For just as fire, when it consumes wood, gives its own being, its own nature to the wood and takes away its own nature,<sup>53</sup> so the divine Spirit transforms the human spirit-soul by uniting himself with it not only experientially, but also by making the human soul one with its own divine being through grace. In this union, the human soul loses its own natural, creaturely effectiveness—like wood in fire—and, by God's grace, takes on His own nature. The soul's perfect love for God thus leads not only to its self-renunciation in its activity, but also to the soul becoming one with the One.

### 3.4. *The Divine Nature of Love—Summary*

Let us summarise: from the perfect equality of the eternal Son with his Father emerges the divine essence of pure love, i.e., the Holy Spirit, to whom the human soul, naturally striving for the divine One, is drawn and is led by God himself into the experience of its eternal birth as the Son, i.e., as a creative idea of God and, in this, into the experience of the

divine Father. And in and by this action the human soul is also, through the expropriation of its creaturely nature by God, made equal or one with God's own divine being. Therefore, as Eckhart succinctly puts it, love can only exist where there is equality and unity.<sup>54</sup> In other words, according to Meister Eckhart, (perfect) love abolishes all inequality between lovers. According to Eckhart, genuine love between people can therefore only exist where there is fundamental equality between both sides, i.e., not in the relationship between a master and a servant,<sup>55</sup> but rather in the relationship between a man and a woman, as these are not unequal opposites, but fundamentally complementary differences that can become equal or one in love.<sup>56</sup> Just as love in its pure form in God is a relationship of perfect equality between father and son, so too should the love between human beings be a mutual intertwining: this is why Meister Eckhart says: "Our Lord says: Love one another (*einander*)! That is to say, love in one another (*ineinander*)!" (Pr. 27, DW II, pp. 3, 49).

### 3.5. "Groundlessness" and Selflessness as Criteria of Authenticity of the True Love of God and the Neighbour in Human Beings

Meister Eckhart attaches great importance to the fact that only the Son of God has pure love for God: "For undoubtedly no one who is not the Son of God loves God sufficiently and purely. For love, the Holy Spirit, springs from and flows from the Son, and the Son loves the Father for his own sake, the Father in himself and himself in the Father" (BdGT, DW V, p. 42,14ff.).

Because the love of God is nothing other than the love of the Son for the Father, in which God loves everything, including creatures, that he loves, Eckhart can say that God loves and acts for his own sake, that in his love he "looks not for any reason outside himself, but only for his own sake."<sup>57</sup> Human beings can therefore only enter into this love of God for himself, which is the essence of pure, perfect love, if they have become sons of God through the grace of God. The decisive criterion for whether someone has actually received this sonship must therefore be their equality with the love of the Son for the Father: "Therefore, if a person loves him (sc. God) himself and all things, and does all his works not for reward, honour or pleasure, but only for God's sake and God's honour, this is a sign (sc. that) he is God's son" (BdGT, DW V, p. 43,22ff.).

God's perfect love, which is Himself in the Holy Spirit, is directed towards Himself and thus towards no purpose outside of Himself, and in this sense, as Eckhart says in a phrase that has become famous in the history of ideas, it has "no why" (Eckhart 1993, p. 1017)—this formula goes back to Beatrijs of Nazareth and is also attested in the writings of the famous Beguine Marguerite Porete (McGinn 2010, p. 463)—; it is therefore without reason or intention, directed only towards its own likeness, towards God's own perfect goodness,<sup>58</sup> to which it belongs in essence to communicate itself. But if God loves and acts in all things for his own sake, it is consistent to say of God, with Eckhart, that he loves for the sake of love, which he himself is, and that he acts for the sake of acting.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, whoever is born of God as his son, i.e., graciously imbued by God himself with genuinely divine qualities, loves God for his own sake, just as the divine Son loves the divine Father. He therefore loves God for the sake of love (which is God himself) and works his works for the sake of working,<sup>60</sup> but that means: His love for God has no purpose outside of itself, it is "without reason"<sup>61</sup>; therefore, all his actions are not determined by any intention, however hidden, for his own benefit. Rather, he is self-forgetful, like a child at play, absorbed in his love for God. The good man who has become the Son of God therefore loves God for God's sake and himself and his neighbour only for God's sake, because God is in himself the first thing to be loved and, as such—since the first thing is the cause of what follows it—at the same time the measure of everything that is lovable and beloved.<sup>62</sup> In other words, the right, filial love of man for God is completely unintentional and selfless or, to use Eckhart's words, 'pure' and 'detached';<sup>63</sup> it does not seek God's gifts and thus its own advantage and

benefit, but only God himself, him alone and nothing else.<sup>64</sup> But when man, with this pure, detached love, which is the Holy Spirit himself,<sup>65</sup> loves nothing but God or His goodness, he possesses the essence of all the virtues ever wrought by men,<sup>66</sup> because he loves with God's own love, namely that of the Son for the Father, i.e., because the Holy Spirit of God is the power in and with which he loves. However, the emergence of the Holy Spirit in human beings "presupposes the birth of God in human beings, from which the Holy Spirit flows as the love in which the Father and Son love one another, since they recognise each other as equal" (Eckhart 1993, p. 669).

In his radical conception of true love of God in human beings, Eckhart goes even further: the good person not only loves and does everything he loves and does for God's sake alone, but also loves and acts for his own sake.<sup>67</sup> This statement only appears to contradict the pure will of God and thus the characteristic of complete selflessness of true love of God in man. For man has, as it were, entered into or, more correctly, been taken up by God into the love of the divine Son for the Father, in that he experiences the birth of the Son directly in the depths of his soul. What he loves in this divine self-love is the unborn Father;<sup>68</sup> and he loves him not with his natural, creaturely soul power, but with the absolute, perfect love of the only begotten Son, who is therefore the (logical) subject, the principle of movement, the "who" of this love for the Father, as Eckhart unambiguously states.<sup>69</sup> However, due to their essential identity, the divine persons are in each other, as stated in the traditional doctrine of their perichoresis or *circumincessio*. Therefore, "the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father. Father and Son are one" (DW V, p. 44,26f.). Thus, the Son, who became man, also loves and acts for himself and acts for his own sake, for he is in the Father, is one with him. The humans as adoptive sons are in the Father, even if—unlike the divine Son—not by nature, but through grace.

Selflessness as a criterion of authenticity in man's love of God must prove itself above all in the experience of suffering, as Eckhart shows in his *Book of Divine Consolation*. But the following rule applies here: "Insofar as man finds himself suffering and without consolation, insofar did his work not happen for God's sake alone. Behold, and to that extent he does not stand firm in divine love" (DW V, p. 53,11ff.). Suffering only arises for man when something runs counter to his will, when something happens against his will. Man's subjective experience of suffering is therefore an indicator of whether and to what extent his own will corresponds to the will of God. For the will of God for the individual is revealed, as Eckhart also clearly emphasises elsewhere,<sup>70</sup> precisely in what befalls him, what is given to him (in advance) and is beyond his control. Therefore, whose will does not correspond to the will of God given to him, his love of God is not yet selfless and thus not yet pure. To illustrate this, Eckhart tells the following story:

A sick person was once asked why he did not ask God to make him well. The person replied that he was reluctant to do so for three reasons. The first (reason) was that he believed with certainty that the loving God would never allow him to be sick unless it was for his own good. Another reason would be that if a person is good, he wants everything that God wants, and not that God should want what the person wants, for that would be very wrong. And therefore: if he (sc. God) wants me to be ill—for if he did not want it, I would not be ill—then I should not wish to be healthy either. For without doubt, if God made me healthy without his will, it would be worthless and indifferent to me that he made me healthy. (BdgT, DW V, pp. 8–17, 57)

In other words, everything that God wants for each individual, i.e., loves, is necessarily good for him, even if he or her does not initially understand or recognise this in the case of illness or other misfortune.<sup>71</sup> In summary, the story told by Eckhart illustrates in a very real way that only those who want God's will to be done for them as for everyone else<sup>72</sup>

and not their own, creaturely will, truly love God; but this ultimately means, as achieved by very few but tirelessly invoked by Eckhart, that one's will has become one with the will of God, in that, as the son of the divine Father, one stands completely in God's own love and thus in God's will.

### 3.6. *Selflessness, Equality and Universality as Criteria for the Authenticity of True Friendship and Love for One's Neighbour*

The characteristic of selflessness is not only characteristic of love for God, but also of true love for one's neighbour. Here, too, Eckhart gives a memorable, albeit negative, example that highlights the difference between this and true love for one's neighbour:

If I had a friend and loved him because he did me good and fulfilled my every wish, I would not be loving my friend, but myself. I should love my friend for his own goodness and for his own virtues and for everything that he is in himself.<sup>73</sup>

True love for one's neighbour, however, includes not only selflessness but also equality and universality, and thus, by implication, love for one's enemies.<sup>74</sup> For, as we have seen, God's perfect love loves itself in everything and therefore loves one and the same thing, both in itself and in things, and loves everyone and everything in exactly the same way; its love is qualitatively indiscriminate and universal. The person who is formed according to God's Son, that is, endowed with the qualities of the divine Son, the divinely loving person, therefore loves both himself and his fellow human beings, and in principle all human beings, in a perfectly equal and undivided way; his love is, like that of the divine Spirit, universal and qualitatively uniform.

### 3.7. *On the Four Degrees of Virtue, the Divine Virtues and Love as the Mother and Adornment of Virtues*

Fundamentally, Meister Eckhart understands the moral virtues of human beings as "spiritual perfections" (*perfectiones spirituales*) and these in turn as essential attributes of God (Enders 2023, pp. 283–301).

#### 3.7.1. *Eckhart's Teaching on the Four Degrees of Virtue According to His German Sermon 74 (Dilectus deo et hominibus, cuius memoria in benedictione est)*

According to Meister Eckhart's German sermon 74, (moral) virtue has four degrees: The first degree of virtue consists in the liberation of human beings from the influence and dependence of all transitory entities. The second degree of virtue, even if it may sound paradoxical, takes away virtue from man, namely as a destiny or characteristic of the human soul. At this stage, the virtuous man is deprived of his virtue as a habitus and thus as an acquired attitude or characteristic of his soul by God; he is dispossessed of his virtue. The third degree of virtue also takes away from man the memory of his former possession of virtue as a characteristic of his soul; it makes him forget it completely, as if he had never possessed virtue as a characteristic acquired by his soul. The fourth and highest degree of virtue is entirely in God and God himself, i.e., the perfection of man through virtue ends with God's transformation of man into his own image, with his deification.<sup>75</sup> God thus robs man of his virtue as a quality acquired and possessed by him in his soul, in order to unite man with himself through this expropriation of his nature, to deify man.

Eckhart expresses this same idea in his Latin work, in the *Commentary on Wisdom*. He shares the Neoplatonic perspective and maintains that even if virtues in their imperfection are numerous and divided, they are one in their highest state and accomplishment. He also explicitly refers to Plotinus' four degrees of virtue.<sup>76</sup>

### 3.7.2. Eckhart's Teaching on the Three Divine Virtues According to His German Sermon 33

In this sermon, Eckhart explains, among other things, that divine grace, which flows from the divine fountain, which is a parable of God and which makes the human soul equal to God, throws itself, as he expresses it very vividly, into the three highest human soul powers. When divine grace throws itself into the human will, this is love in man. In other words, the human will perfected by God is divine love in human beings. When divine grace pours itself into the power of human understanding, this is called the light of faith in human beings. And when divine grace throws itself into the aspiring power of the human soul, this is called hope in human beings. That is why these three, namely faith, hope and love, are called "divine virtues" because they work divine works in the soul of man, just as one can recognise from the power of the sun that it makes all things on earth alive and sustains them in their being.<sup>77</sup>

According to this, faith, hope and love are, for Eckhart, the manifestations or modes of action of divine grace in the three highest powers of the human soul. Thus, the divine virtue of faith is nothing other than the human mind filled with the grace of God. Furthermore, for Eckhart, the divine virtue of hope is nothing other than the human striving for the higher and divine, filled with the grace of God; and finally, for him, the divine virtue of love in humans is nothing other than the human will filled with divine grace. These three virtues are called "divine" because they produce genuinely divine effects in the human soul, for the power at work in them is divine.

### 3.7.3. Eckhart's Teaching on Love as the Mother and Adornment of Virtues, i.e., on Love as the *forma virtutum*, and His Teaching on the (sc. Human) Deifying Character of Virtues in His German Sermon 28 (*Ego elevi vos de mundo*)

In this sermon, Eckhart explains that love for the virtues is a flower, an adornment and a mother of all virtues and all perfection and all bliss for us humans, because it is God (himself), since God is the "fruit of the virtues"; God fertilises all virtues and is a fruit of virtues, and this fruit remains with man.<sup>78</sup> Accordingly, in this sermon Eckhart identifies love as the source and adornment of virtues with God himself, i.e., with the perfect essence of love, which is God himself. If God is referred to here as the "fruit of virtues," it is because, in Meister Eckhart's understanding, virtues lead man to God or to union with God. Among them, however, love is the central divine virtue, which is the determining (final) cause of all other virtues, in that it directs man towards his highest and ultimate goal, i.e., communion and, according to Eckhart, even unity with God.

## 4. Conclusions

This overview of his Latin and German works, using the theme of love as an example, demonstrates that Eckhart's thinking in both groups of works is characterised by thematic coherence and consistency: his sermons reflect—as might be expected—the same philosophical and theological considerations that he also explores in his scholarly writings.

We have seen that Eckhart attaches enormous importance to love, although he dwells little on what one must do in concrete terms, since he considers that if we are righteous, our works are righteous. It is not what we do that sanctifies us or makes us good, but what we are, our way of being (*Counsels on Discernment* 4). Thus, the just person, insofar as they are just (or the one who loves, insofar as they love), is found in justice itself (or in love); they are a child of justice, born out of justice (In Ioh. n. 14, LW III, p. 13,1 ff.). According to Eckhart, not only the transcendentals, being, unity, truth and goodness, but also spiritual perfections such as love, honesty or justice, in their essence, belong to the realm of the divine (*Prologus generalis* n. 4, LW I, p. 23,6). Hence he invites us to "become love entirely" (*Sermo die B. Augustini* n. 7, LW V, p. 99). Thus, love (*caritas*) is a gift from

God and, therefore, we love God “according to what we have received”, “to the extent that we are good or just” (Sermo VI,3 n. 65, LW IV, p. 63) and whoever loves is begotten as a child of God. Moreover, Eckhart maintains, in agreement with Peter Lombard, that the love with which we love one another is the Holy Spirit himself (In Ioh. n. 629; Pr. 27). For this reason, love is the central theological virtue, the “mother of all virtues”, for it leads to communion and unity with God (Pr. 28).

Meister Eckhart derives the unity and equality of true and perfect, inner-divine love from the perfect equality of the divine Son with his Father from which arises the divine essence of pure love, that is, the Holy Spirit. Therefore, as Eckhart puts it succinctly, love wishes to be only where there is equality and unity (Pr. 27, DW II, p. 47,6 ff). Consequently, according to Eckhart, genuine love in interpersonal relationships can only exist where there is a fundamental equality of value or dignity between both parties, such as in the partnership between a man and a woman, who represent fundamentally complementary differences that can become one in love (Pr. 27, DW II, p. 48,1 ff.).

Meister Eckhart’s understanding of the divine nature of love implies that true human love for God, for one’s neighbours and for oneself must be completely selfless, purposeless and “without why” (*âne warumbe*). In their love for God, human beings should not seek any advantage, reward or benefit for themselves, but should love God purely for His own sake. This radical inner attitude also inextricably determines charity: those who love in this divine unity treat all fellow human beings—whether friend or foe—with the same universal, indiscriminate love and selflessness with which God loves Himself, i.e., the Holy Spirit. For it is love—which is God Himself—that constitutes the very essence of a person’s true love for their neighbour and for themselves. For Eckhart, ethical action is therefore not merely the fulfilment of a duty, but springs from an inner, pure and divine being. In practice, this means that active charity is even preferred to pure contemplation; one should abandon even the highest spiritual ecstasy in order to help a person in need.

Meister Eckhart’s mystical ethics constitute a unique form of virtue ethics that differs fundamentally from the Aristotelian–Thomistic model of virtue ethics. What are these differences? For Thomas Aquinas (and indeed, Aristotle) and Meister Eckhart differ fundamentally from one another in their definition of the nature of the virtues. For, according to Eckhart, human virtues—both intellectual virtues (such as wisdom) and moral virtues (such as justice)—are not, as they are for Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, good dispositions (*habitus*) of acting and behaving of the rational faculties of the human soul which perfect the human will. In contrast, Eckhart regards the virtues as spiritual perfections (*perfectiones spirituales*) which, in the true and primary sense—that is, in terms of their essence and being—belong solely to God himself, and not to the human soul. Consequently, Eckhart regards human virtues as attributes of God that are perfect in their very nature, rather than as dispositions for good action on the part of human beings, as in the case of Thomas Aquinas (and Aristotle). Meister Eckhart thus regards the virtues as spiritual (ontological) perfections and therefore as essential attributes of God, who, according to Eckhart, is not only the ontological origin (as is partly the case with Thomas) but also the very essence of the virtues themselves. This fundamental difference in Thomas’s and Eckhart’s understanding of the virtues does not stem primarily from their engagement with different sources—Aristotle in the case of Thomas, and (particularly Christian) Platonism to a greater extent in the case of Eckhart—although this also plays a role for both; rather, it stems primarily from their differing understandings of reality or being, which is analogical in Thomas and univocal in Eckhart (Enders 2023, pp. 299–301).

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, S.B.B. and M.E.; writing of the Introduction and Conclusions, S.B.B. and M.E.; writing of Section 2: “Love According to Meister Eckhart’s Latin Works”, S.B.B.; writing of Section 3: “The Nature of Love According to Meister Eckhart’s German Works”, M.E. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

## Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

BdgT	<i>Das Buch der göttlichen Tröstung</i> (The Book of Divine Consolation). In DW V.
DW	Meister Eckhart. Die deutschen und lateinischen Werke. Die deutschen Werke (Eckhart 1936–2003)
f., ff.	following (lines)
In Ioh.	Expositio sancti Evangelii secundum Iohannem. In LW III.
In Gen.	Expositio libri Genesis. In LW I.
In Sap.	Expositio libri Sapientiae. In LW II, pp. 301–34.
LW	Meister Eckhart. Die deutschen und lateinischen Werke. Die lateinischen Werke (Eckhart 1956–2015)
n.	<i>numerus</i> (number)
Pr.	Predigt (German sermon). We follow the numbering of the critical edition (DW).
S. Th.	Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologiae</i> .

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Pr. 104, DW (=Deutsche Werke, cited with reference to the volume in Roman numerals and the page and line numbers in Arabic numerals) IV, pp. 579, 155–581, 179: “*da si daz wüirkende leben bezzer dan daz schouwende leben, da man in der wüirklichkeit uzgiuzet30 von minne, daz man ingenomen hat in der schouwunge. [ . . . ] Wan got meinet in der einicheit der schouwunge die vruchtbarkeit der wirkunge. Wan in der schouwunge dienst du aleine dir selber, aber in der tugentlichen wirkunge da dienst du der menige. Hie zuo manet uns Kristus mit allem sinem lebene.*”
- <sup>2</sup> Rede der Unterscheidung n. 10, DW V, p. 221,4–8: “*Als ich mêr gesprochen hân: wære der mensche alsô in einem inzucke, als sant Paulus was, und weste einen siechen menschen, der eines suppelîns von im bedörfte, ich ahtete verre bezzer, daz dû liezest von minne von dem dientest dem dürftigen in mêrer minne.*”
- <sup>3</sup> Sermo die b. Augustini n. 2, LW (=Lateinische Werke, cited with reference to the volume in Roman numerals and the page and line numbers in Arabic numerals) V, pp. 89,9–90,1 and 8–9: “*Sic enim dividunt nobis magistri scientiam philosophiae, scilicet in theoreticam, logicam et ethicam sive practicam. Et hoc secundum illa tria, quae ita vicissim occupant homines, ut nunquam aliquo tempore ab aliquo istorum trium feriari videantur; et ea sunt cogitatio, locutio et operatio. Theoreticam sive speculativam ulterius partiuntur in mathematicam, physicam et ethicam sive theologiam. [ . . . ] Ethicus sive theologus ideas rerum, quae in mente divina, antequam prodirent in corpora, ab aeterno quo modo ibi intelligibiliter exstiterunt, subtilius intuetur.*”
- <sup>4</sup> Sermo die b. Augustini n. 6, LW V, pp. 94,9–95,1: “*Et haec cognitio operatur ad tria: primo ad occulta vel futura pronuntiandum, secundo ad meritorie operandum, tertio ad divinam dulcedinem praegustandum. Primus modus est prophetalis; secundus in habitibus gratuitis usque ad fructus; tertius in exstasi mentis, et haec in fructibus. Secundus et tertius perfecte erant in eo, quia de tertio dicitur secundum quod est in intellectu practico.*”
- <sup>5</sup> Sermo die b. Augustini n. 7, LW V, p. 95,14: “*exhibitio virtutis in operatione.*”
- <sup>6</sup> Sermo die b. Augustini n. 7, LW V, p. 96,3–4: “*Et virtus est ordo, secundum Augustinum, ordo inquam amoris, quia qui virtutem habet, ordinem tenet servatque naturam.*” (“And virtue is order, according to Augustine; that is, the order of love, for whoever has virtue maintains order and preserves nature.”)
- <sup>7</sup> Sermo die b. Augustini n. 12, LW V, p. 99, 3–4: “*Unum scio, quia non quiescam, donec totus amor fiam. «Quod nobis praestare dignetur, qui vivit deus. Amen.*”

- 8 In Ioh. n. 541–44, LW III, pp. 472–75.
- 9 Thomas Aquinas, *Catena aurea in Ioannem* cap. 13 lectio 6.
- 10 See also In Ioh. n. 184, LW III, pp. 153–54.
- 11 In Ioh. n. 544, LW III pp. 474,11–475,1: “*natura omnis creaturae est non se amare, sed odisse se ipsam in se ipsa, amare autem in se ipsa deum et se ipsam in deo et sic est utrobique amatum unum et amor unus.*”
- 12 In Ioh. n. 544, LW II, p. 474,10: “*gratia naturam non mutat, sed perficit eo quod, sicut dictum est, natura omnis creaturae est.*” Eckhart often repeats this statement: In Ioh. n. 528, LW III, p. 459,13; RdU, DW V, p. 288,10; p. 289,5.
- 13 In Ioh. n. 185, LW III, pp. 154,16–155,2: “*. . . praesertim cum ex uno fonte et una radice procedat veritatis omne quod verum est, sive essendo sive cognoscendo, in scriptura et in natura.*”
- 14 In Ioh. n. 624, LW III, p. 544,1–3: “*ubi caritas est, nihil est quod deesse possit, et ubi caritas non est, nihil est quod prodesse possit.*”
- 15 Thomas Aquinas, *Catena aurea in Ioannem* cap. 15 lectio 4: “*Augustine in John. Quia ergo superius dixerat: hoc est praeceptum meum ut diligatis invicem sicut dilexi vos, fit ex hoc consequens quod idem Ioannes dicit, ut quemadmodum Christus pro nobis animam suam posuit, sic et nos debemus animas pro fratribus ponere.*”
- 16 In Ioh. n. 623, LW III, p. 544,8: “*dilexit nos Christus, ut deum habere possimus cum Christo.*” Eckhart summarises Augustine’s statement in *Catena in Ioannem* cap. 15 lectio 4: “*Ad hoc ergo et nos invicem diligamus, ut dilectionem nostram discernamus a ceteris, qui non ad hoc se invicem diligunt ut Deus diligatur, quia nec vere diligunt. Qui autem se propter habendum Deum diligunt, ipsi se diligunt.*”
- 17 In Ioh. n. 570, LW III, p. 498,8–11: “*Iuxta quod notandum quod ea quae ex passione sunt, divina non sunt; deus enim agit omnia sine passione. Augustinus circa principium Confessionum libri deo loquens ait: ‘amans non aestuas, paenitet te, et non doles, irasceris, et tranquillus es.’*”
- 18 In Gen. n. 220, LW I, pp. 363,9–364,4: “*Quarto notandum quod passio sive alteratio non cadit circa rationem vel intellectum, ut dictum est supra et habetur VII Physicorum. Unde in nobis, ubi sensitivum coniunctum est in una anima et in uno et unum esse cum rationali, passio consequens formale passionis alterationem in nobis inducit. Secus igitur est in deo et in omnibus separatis a sensitivo. Et hoc est quod Augustinus optime ait: ‘amas nec aestuas’ etc.*”
- 19 Pr. 27, DW II, pp. 43,6–44,1 and 46,6–6: “*diu minne, mit der wir minnen, diu sol sin also luter, also bloz, also abegescheiden, daz si niht ensol geneiget sin weder uf mich noch uf minen vriunt noch neben sich.*” And: “*. . . daz dîn minne alsô lûter, alsô blôz in ir selber ist, daz dû niht anders enmeinst noch enminnest dan gûete und got.*”
- 20 In Ioh. n. 627, LW III, pp. 545,7–546,2: “*Sic ergo et nos diligamus proximum in deum et deum in proximum. Nam ubi unum propter alterum, utrobique unum et duo in uno, iam non duo, sed unum.*” “*Quarto, quia nos diligit sicut se ipsum, eodem amore quo se ipsum et in se ipso. Sic ergo et nos diligamus proximum in deum et deum in proximum. Nam ubi unum propter alterum, utrobique unum et duo in uno, iam non duo, sed unum; et sic iam non solum proximum diligimus ‘sicut’ nos ipsos, sicut habent Matthaheus et Lucas, sed ‘tamquam’ nos ipsos, ut habet Marcus, et illa littera Augustinus frequenter utitur; est autem ‘tamquam’ dictum quasi ‘tantum quantum’.*”
- 21 In Ioh. n. 628, LW III, p. 546,3–6: “*Quinto, ut diligamus invicem propter deum; sic enim deus diligit et operatur omnia propter semet ipsum, [. . .] Prov. 16: ‘universa propter semet ipsum operatus est deus.’*”
- 22 In Ioh. n. 506, LW III, 438,1–2: “*Sic enim et idem amor est spiritus sanctus quo pater filium diligit et filius patrem, quo deus nos diligit et nos deum.*”
- 23 Peter Lombard (Sent I d. 17 c. 6) concludes his exposition by saying: “*Charity is called a movement of the soul, not because it is itself a movement, or an affection, or a virtue of the soul, but because through it, as if it were a virtue, the mind (mens) is affected and moved. [. . .] Charity, that is, the Holy Spirit, works other acts and movements of the virtues through the corresponding virtues: for example, it works the act of faith, that is, believing, through faith; and the act of hope, that is, hoping, through hope. [. . .] But the act of loving, that is, love (diligere), it produces by itself, without the mediation of any virtue. [. . .] Therefore, charity is truly the Holy Spirit” (Lombard 2012, p. 288).*
- 24 Sermo VI,3 n. 65, LW IV, pp. 63,9–64,3: “*. . . diligendo facit nos diligere. Ipse causat in nobis et dat dilectionem qua diligimus. [. . .] ipse est dilectio qua diligimus. [. . .] nota quod secundum totum id quod sumus deum non diligimus, sed tantum secundum id quod accepimus, puta in quantum boni sive iusti sumus.*”
- 25 The German sermon 65 (DW III, 97,10–98,1) seems to contradict to what is said above, as it states: “*There were certain masters who said that the love that is in us would be the Holy Spirit, but this is not true.*” However, Eckhart is clarifying how to understand Peter Lombard’s statement: it does not mean that divine love is “*contained by us*” or within us, but rather “*the love of God contains us and we are one in it*” (Eckhart 2019, pp. 707–9).
- 26 Pr. 27, DW II, pp. 41,4–43,1.
- 27 In Ioh. n. 629, LW III, p. 547,1–6: “*Octavo: ‘deus prius dilexit nos’, Ioh. 4: ‘dilexit’, ‘cum adhuc inimici essemus’, Rom. 5. Signanter ait ‘invicem’, ut scilicet [quilibet] quemlibet diligit, ac si ille esset ipse et ipse esset ille. Et notandum quod qui sic diligit alium quemlibet, solus vere et se diligit et illum et nemo alius; amat enim se in deo et illum in deo et deum in se et in illo, unum in utroque et in omnibus. Qui secus, nec deum vere diligit nec se vere nec aliquem vere diligit.*”
- 28 In Ioh. n. 630, LW III, p. 547,7–8. Augustine of Hippo, *De disciplina christiana* c.3 n.3.
- 29 In Ioh. n. 631, LW III, p. 548,6–8.

- 30 In Sap n. 98, LW II, p. 432,4–6: “*Et hoc est quod quidam theologorum dicunt virtutes coneccti in caritate. Caritas enim est amor boni, inquantum bonum, et hoc deus est, ‘bonum bonum’, ‘omnis boni bonum’, ut supra Augustinus dicit.*” (“And this is what certain theologians mean when they say that the virtues are connected in charity. For charity is the love of the good insofar as it is good, and this is God: ‘the Good of all good’, ‘the good of every good’, as Augustine says above.”)
- 31 In Ioh. n. 632, LW III, pp. 548,14–549,1. Also n. 115, p. 100, 14; n. 475, p. 408,8; n. 479, p. 411,11; n. 602, p. 525,1. This fanciful etymology is taken from Papias Vocabulista.
- 32 In Ioh. n. 115, p. 100,13–15: “*Filii autem sumus, si amore boni solius, ut bonum est, operemur singula. Filius enim a philos, graece, quod est amor, dicitur.*”
- 33 In Ioh. n. 290, LW III, p. 242,4–9: “. . . *quod volens filius dei fieri, verbum caro factum in se habitare debet diligere proximum tamquam se ipsum, hoc est tantum quantum se ipsum, abnegare personale, abnegare proprium. Diligit enim habens caritatem in nullo minus proximum quam se ipsum, diligit siquidem unum deum in omnibus et omnia in ipso. In uno autem nulla est distinctio nec Iudaei etiam nec Graeci, in uno neque magis neque minus.*”
- 34 In Ioh. n. 633, LW III, pp. 550,12–551,1: “*Posset tamen ex supra dictis in illo ‘diligatis inuicem’ plane responderi quod cum amor sive dilectio, qua inuicem diligimus, sit ipse spiritus sanctus, amor quo pro amicis animam ponimus ipse est, non alius, quo pro et inimicis animam ponimus. Adhuc autem minimus amor et gratia, utpote instrumentum spiritus sancti.*”
- 35 In Ioh. n. 633, LW III, p. 551,4: “. . . *quin immo caritas nescit inimicos.*”
- 36 In Ioh. n. 634, LW III, p. 551,7–8: “*Praeterea inimica, amara, tristitia in amante habente caritatem et spiritum sanctum convertuntur in dulcedinem et gaudium.*”
- 37 In Ioh. n. 634, LW III, p. 552,4–5: “*Amicus enim omnis et inimicus illic ex uno, per unum, in uno, ad unum et unum sunt.*”
- 38 In Sap n. 184, LW II, p. 519 “*omnis actio ab intra procedens delectabilis est et suavis [. . .], suavis quidem propter convenientiam actus et habitus, iuxta nomen suum intus entis.*”
- 39 In Sap n. 184, LW II, 520–1: “*Nihil enim citra ipsum deum essentiae nostrae illabatur. Propter quod signanter dicitur Is. 26: ‘omnia opera nostra operatus es in nobis’, secundum unam litteram, et Ioh. 14: ‘pater in me manens ipse facit opera’. ‘In me’ ait, quod propheta dicit ‘in nobis’. Propter quod signanter ait secundum aliam litteram: ‘omnia opera nostra operatus es nobis’. Illa siquidem opera sola nobis proficiunt, nostra sunt et divina, quae ab intus sunt et in quibus deus intimus movet et nihil foris aut extra.*” Eckhart makes similar assertions in In Ioh. 647.
- 40 BdgT, DW V, p. 30,9f.: “*Glīchnisse gibet man dem sune in der gotheit*” (“Equality is attributed to God the Son”); see also *ibid.*, note 101. (All the translations from Middle High German are by the author).
- 41 Pr. 44, DW II, p. 338,2–5: “Our masters say this: unity requires equality. Unity cannot exist unless there is equality. That which is bound together and enclosed creates unity. That which is (only) close to me, as when I sit with him or am in the same place, does not create equality.” On the relationship between equality and unity, see also Pr. 6, DW I, p. 107,3ff. and Pr. 13, DW I, p. 216,3ff.
- 42 Pr. 44, DW II, pp. 339,4–340,4: “Where there is enclosure and complete binding together, there must necessarily be equality. [. . .] Where there is no inequality, there must necessarily be unity; it is not only united in an enclosure, but rather becomes one; not only equality, but rather sameness. That is why we say that the Son is not equal to the Father, but rather he is equality (sc. itself); he is one with the Father.” Equality is therefore also the necessary condition for the gracious, mystical union of the (human) soul with God, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 339,5–340,1: “Where God and the soul are to be united, this must be done through equality.” Concretely, this union takes place when the soul directly experiences the divine image in its essence, in which it is equal to God in being, i.e., the Son of God; for in this image it is itself divine and therefore not united with God, but essentially one with him, cf. *ibid.*, 340,5–341,9.
- 43 Pr. 44, DW II, p. 341,10f.: “A master says: All equality aims at birth. He further says: Nature never finds equals without giving birth.” Cf. *ibid.*, 341, note 2, as the reference point for Eckhart’s quotation from Aristotle, *De anima* 415a, 26–29 (in the Latin translation known to Eckhart): “*Naturalissimum enim operum viventibus est, quaecumque perfecta et non orbata, aut generationem spontaneam habeant, facere alterum quale ipsum.*”
- 44 BdgT, DW V, p. 30,10–15: “Equality in all things, but especially and first of all in divine nature, is the birth of the One and equality of the One, in the One and with the One, is the beginning and origin of blossoming, fiery love. The One is the beginning without any beginning. Equality is the beginning of the One alone and receives this, that it is and that it is the beginning, from and in the One.” On the Trinitarian form of being of divine love, see LW III, n. 733, p. 640,4–7: “*Posset etiam dici quod trina repetitio dilectionis indicat quod in ipsa necessario tria concurrunt: diligens, dilectum et ipsa dilectio. Adhuc autem dicamus quod ternarius hic indicat patrem qui ‘diligat filium’, supra tertio et quinto, et filium dilectum, Matth. 3, spiritum sanctum qui amor est consubstantialis, quo se amant pater et filius.*” (“It could also be said that the threefold repetition of “love” indicates that three things must necessarily concur in it: the one who loves, the beloved, and the love itself. Furthermore, let us say that this threefold pattern here signifies the Father, who “loves the Son” [as stated above in chapters three and five], the beloved Son (Matthew 3), and the Holy Spirit, who is the consubstantial Love by which the Father and the Son love one another.”).

- <sup>45</sup> BdgT, DW V, p. 34,6f.: “And I further say truthfully that the hidden power of nature secretly hates equality insofar as it carries difference and division within itself, and seeks in it the One, which it loves in itself and alone for its own sake, just as the mouth seeks and loves the taste or sweetness in and on wine.”
- <sup>46</sup> Pr. 44, DW II, p. 342,4–7: “The nature of the soul would never bear the same (sc. God-like) within itself if it were not for the fact that it longed for God to be born in it; it (sc. the soul) would never come into its nature, it would never long to come into it, except because it awaits birth.”
- <sup>47</sup> Pr. 44, DW II, p. 343,7f.
- <sup>48</sup> Pr. 44, DW II, p. 343,8–10: “If the soul were not aware of this, it would never desire to enter into it (sc. into the divine nature). It wants to be preserved in him; its life depends on him. God has a foothold, a permanence in his being.”; cf. also DW II,342,10–343,3: “It must necessarily be that it (sc. the soul) expects that God will be born in it and that it will be preserved in God, and that it desires union (sc. with God) so that it may be preserved in God. Divine nature pours itself into the light of the soul, and it is preserved in it. By this God aims to be born in her and united with her and preserved in her. How can this be? Do we not say that God is the sustainer of himself? When he draws the soul into it (sc. into his divine nature), she finds that God is the sustainer of himself, and there she remains, otherwise she would never remain.”
- <sup>49</sup> Pr. 44, DW II, p. 342,7–10: “and this (sc. the birth of the Son in the soul) is brought about by God; and God would never bring this about unless he wanted the soul to be born in him. God is (sc. in this) the actor, and the soul is the one who desires (sc. after becoming a son of God). God belongs to the work, and the soul belongs to the desire and the ability for God to be born in her and for her to be born in God. God causes the soul to become like him.” For Meister Eckhart’s account of the birth of the divine Son in every rational soul, see Sermon 101, DW IV,1, pp. 343 ff.; Sermon 5b, DW I, pp. 89–90; Sermon 24, DW I, p. 417; Sermon 6, DW I, p. 104; Sermon 38, DW II, p. 235.
- <sup>50</sup> Pr. 44, DW II, pp. 343,10–344,3: “and therefore there is no other way than to peel away and separate everything that belongs to the soul: its life, its powers and (its) nature, all of that must be removed, and it must stand in the pure light, where it is one with God: there it finds God. This is God’s peculiarity, that nothing foreign falls into him, nothing imposed, nothing added. Therefore, the soul should receive no foreign impressions, nothing imposed, nothing added.” This quotation clearly shows that Meister Eckhart teaches, with regard to the utmost, perfect love of God in man, a union of the soul with God in being, when he says that everything belonging to the soul, and not only its life, i.e., its self-movement, its powers, i.e., its natural faculties, but also its nature must be stripped away and separated or removed so that this union can take place. The phrase “and she (sc. the soul) stands in the pure light, where she is one with God” means that in this ultimate union with God, the soul is made one with God through the soul’s own divine creative idea, i.e., with its own divine form or exemplar cause.
- <sup>51</sup> Pr. 44, DW II, p. 343,3–7: “Augustine says: ‘Just as you love, so you are: if you love the earth, you become earthly; if you love God, you become divine. If I love God, do I then become God? I do not say this, I refer you (sc. rather) to Holy Scripture. God spoke through the prophet: ‘You are gods and are children of the Most High.’” The passage quoted is Ps 81:6; for the Augustine quotation, cf. DW II,343, note 2; This reference to authority, which states that love transforms the lover into the beloved, also proves that, according to Meister Eckhart, the perfect love of man for God unites man with God not only in experience but also in being, at least in the depths of the human soul, although this happens to man through the grace of God, whereas God is divine by nature and not by the grace of another being. According to Eckhart, human beings thus become, through the grace of God, what God is by nature.
- <sup>52</sup> BdgT, DW V, p. 33,1–9: “And since equality flows from the One and draws and entices through the power and in the power of the One, therefore neither that which draws nor that which is drawn finds rest and satisfaction until they are united in One. Therefore, our Lord said in the prophet Isaiah that no high equality and no peace of love is sufficient for me until I myself am revealed in my Son and I myself am inflamed and enkindled in the love of the Holy Spirit (cf. Isa 62:1). And our Lord asked his Father that we might become one with him and in him, not merely united.” DW V, p. 35,4ff.: “Therefore God also tells us and exhorts us in the Gospel that we should ask the heavenly Father that our joy may be complete, and Saint Philip said, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us’ (John 14:8); for ‘Father’ signifies birth and not equality, and signifies the One in whom equality is silenced and everything that has a desire to be becomes still.” By nature, all creatures strive for the One itself, cf. DW V, p. 46,16–19: “God entices and draws all creatures to the One. All creatures seek the One, even the lowest creatures seek the One, and the highest perceive this One; drawn beyond their nature and superimposed, they seek the One in the One, the One in itself.” This quotation also proves that the highest creatures are “drawn beyond their nature” and “transformed” by the divine nature, i.e., shaped by God with his own being; on Eckhart’s understanding of divine unity and the blissful effect of man’s union with it, see also (Beierwaltes 2014).
- <sup>53</sup> See BdgT, DW V, p. 33–34.
- <sup>54</sup> See Pr. 27, DW II, p. 47,6f.: “Such should be your love, for love wants to be nowhere else but where there is equality and unity.” On the equalising, unifying effect of love, see also, following Meister Eckhart, Heinrich Seuse, Großes Briefbuch, IV. Brief (Seuse 1907, p. 420,19): “*liebi glichet ungleichú ding*” (“Love makes unequal things equal to each other”).

- 55 Pr. 27, DW II, pp. 47,7–48,1: “There is no peace between a master and a servant he has, because there is no equality.” Further references to the master-servant relationship according to Eckhart, *ibid.*, p. 48, note 1.
- 56 Pr. 27, DW II, p. 48,1f.: “A woman and a man are unequal to each other. But in love they are quite equal.” See also *ibid.*, pp. 48,2–49,2.
- 57 BdgT, DW V, p. 43,21ff.; *ibid.*: “He (sc. God) loves and works all things for his own sake.”
- 58 See Pr. 27, DW II, p. 43,1–4: “The masters say: The goal of love, towards which love works all its deeds, is goodness, and goodness is God. Just as little as my eye can speak and my tongue can recognise colour, so little can love incline itself towards anything other than goodness and God.” The reference to “the masters” probably refers primarily to Thomas Aquinas, cf. S. Th. I-II q. 27 a. 1: “*Oportet igitur ut illud sit proprie causa amoris quod est amoris obiectum. Amoris autem proprium obiectum est bonum.*”
- 59 See BdgT, DW V, p. 43,27.
- 60 See BdgT, DW V, p. 44,7f.; see also *ibid.*: “That is why and in that he is the Son of God, formed according to God and in God, who loves for his own sake, that is, he loves for the sake of love, he acts for the sake of acting.”
- 61 See Pr. 28, DW II, p. 59,7: “. . . but love has no why.”
- 62 See *Sermo XXX n. 306*, LW IV, pp. 271,6–272,2.
- 63 See Pr. 27, DW II, pp. 42,3–43,1: “Love in its purest form, in its most detached form, in itself, is nothing other than God.” On the pure love of human beings, see also (Kern 1992, pp. 744–47).
- 64 See Pr. 27, DW II, pp. 43,6–44,4: “The love with which we love should be so pure (*lûter*), so exposed (*blôz*), so detached (*abegescheiden*) that it is directed neither towards me nor towards my friend nor (sc. towards anything) beside itself. The masters say that no good work can be called a good work and no virtue a virtue unless it is done in love. This virtue is so noble, so detached, so pure, so stripped down to itself that it recognises nothing better than itself and God.” Here Eckhart adopts Thomas Aquinas’ view of *caritas* as *mater*, *radix* and *forma virtutum* (S. Th. I-II q. 62 a. 4), see e.g., *Sermo V,3*, LW IV, p. 63,6ff.
- 65 See Pr. 27, DW II, pp. 41,4–42,2: “True love is so pure, so exposed, so detached within itself that the best masters say that the love with which we love is the Holy Spirit. There were some who wanted to contradict this. But this is always true: all movement by which we are moved to love is moved in us by nothing other than the Holy Spirit.” Regarding Eckhart’s reference to “the best masters,” the editor Joseph Quint, p. 41, note 4, points above all to Peter Lombard, *Sent. I d. 17 c. 1 n. 143*, who bases himself on Rom 5:5 and on Augustine, *De Trinitate XV*. Eckhart is indebted to this view of the Lombard, see *Sermo VI,1 n. 55*, LW IV, p. 53,7f.; *Sermo VI,3 n. 65*, p. 63,9–11; *Sermo XI,1 n. 113*, p. 106,6ff.; *Sermo XL,2 n. 392*, p. 338,2f. Wéber (1986, pp. 196–200) identified William of St. Thierry as the primary source for Eckhart’s understanding of the Holy Spirit, who takes up older motifs from Plotinus, Proclus, Dionysius, Maximus Confessor and Eriugena. Eckhart probably had in mind Thomas Aquinas, S. Th. II-II q. 23 a. 2, but also Bonaventura, *In I Sent. d. 17 q. 1*, among the theologians who contradicted this view. The *Traktat von der Minne (Treatise on Love)*, which was written by someone close to Meister Eckhart and most likely between 1323 and 1326 during Eckhart’s lifetime, also takes this position (Ruh 1987, pp. 222–25); “with the mitigating remark that the Holy Spirit is the moving cause of our love” (Quint, DW II, p. 41, note 4), Eckhart seems to be moving somewhat closer to Thomas’s view again.
- 66 See Pr. 27, DW II, pp. 45,10–46,6: “And if it is so that your love is so pure, so detached, so pure in itself that you love nothing but goodness and God, then it is a certain truth that all the virtues that all men have ever practised belong to you as perfectly as if you had practised them yourself, and indeed (sc. even) more purely and better (you possess them as those); for the fact that the Pope is Pope often causes him great hardship; but you possess his virtue in a purer and more detached manner and with tranquillity, and it belongs more to you than to him, insofar as your love is so pure, so pure in itself, that you have nothing else in mind and love nothing else but goodness and God.”
- 67 See BdgT, DW V, p. 44,21ff.: “Furthermore, I say thirdly that a good person, insofar as he is good, has God’s property not only in that he loves and acts for the sake of God, whom he loves and for whose sake he acts, but also in that he who loves loves and acts for his own sake.”
- 68 BdgT, DW V, p. 44,25: “for what he loves is the unborn God the Father”.
- 69 BdgT, DW V, p. 44,25f.: “He who loves is the born God-Son.”
- 70 See Pr. 4, DW I, p. 62,5–7: “Now you might say: How do I know whether it is God’s will or not? Know this: if it were not God’s will, it would not be. You have neither illness nor anything else if God does not will it.” Pr. 41, DW II, p. 291,3f.: “Now you like to say, ‘How do I know whether it is God’s will?’ I answer: If it were not God’s will for even a moment, it would not be; it must (rather) always be His will.”
- 71 BdgT, DW V, pp. 51,17–58,4: “Wanting comes from loving, not wanting comes from not loving. It is much better and more useful for me that God loves me, even if I am sick, than if I were healthy in body and God did not love me. What God loves is something; what God does not love is nothing, so says the Book of Wisdom (cf. Wis 11:25). Therein also lies the truth that everything God wills is good for the sole reason that God wills it.” The only attitude appropriate to man towards God’s will is therefore that of patient trust, cf. *ibid.* p. 58:12ff: “I should wait patiently, especially since his (sc. God’s) gift is one of grace and undeserved. Certainly also: whoever I do not respect and whose will is contrary to mine, and from whom I would only seek his gift, is quite right in giving me nothing, hating me and leaving me in misfortune.”

- <sup>72</sup> BdgT, DW V, p. 51,8ff.: "... for if all is well with me, I want what God wants. I pray every day, and God tells me to pray: 'Lord, thy will be done!' And yet, if God wants suffering, I want to complain about suffering; that is very wrong."
- <sup>73</sup> Pr. 28, DW II, p. 59,7–11; pure charity does not seek to be loved itself, but loves for the sake of loving; it wants nothing but to love and be loved in return: In Ioh. LW III, n. 734, p. 641,3–9.
- <sup>74</sup> God is also our model in loving our enemies, see Pr. 27, DW II, pp. 46,7–47,1; for the love of God is the measure, basis and cause of self-love and love of neighbour, see *Sermo XXX* n. 307, LW IV, p. 272,6–8; on the necessary connection between love of God, love of self and love of neighbour according to Eckhart, see (Kern 1992, pp. 747–51).
- <sup>75</sup> See Pr. 74, DW III, p. 280,9–13.
- <sup>76</sup> In Sap. n. 263, LW II, p. 595,8–12: "Tertio notandum est quod, sicut universaliter divisa inferius sunt unum superius, sic potissime virtutes in sui supremo, perfecto et consummato unum sunt. Hinc est quod doctores dicunt virtutes etiam morales conexas in sui propria perfectione, et Plotinus Platonicus virtutes in quarto et supremo gradu dicit consistere in mente divina." ("Thirdly, it must be noted that, just as things divided below are, universally, one in what is above, so the virtues are most of all one in their highest, perfect, and consummate state. Hence it is that the learned say that even the moral virtues are connected in their own proper perfection, and that Plotinus the Platonist says that the virtues, in the fourth and highest degree, are said to subsist in the divine mind"). Eckhart repeats the first statement of this citation regarding the virtues in In Sap. n. 267, LW II, p. 597,6–7: "virtutes in imperfecto sui plures sunt et divisae, in sui autem supremo et consummato unum sunt."
- <sup>77</sup> See Pr. 33, DW II, pp. 152,4–153,11.
- <sup>78</sup> See Pr. 28, DW II, p. 60,2–5.

## References

- Albert, Karl. 2015. Epilogue. Meister Eckhart—Between Mysticism and Philosophy. In *A Companion to Meister Eckhart*. Edited by Jeremiah M. Hackett. Leiden: Brill, pp. 699–709.
- Bara Bancel, Silvia. 2022a. El pensamiento del maestro Eckhart ¿discípulo de santo Tomás? *Teología y Vida* 63: 81–106. [CrossRef]
- Bara Bancel, Silvia. 2022b. 'Sagesse incréée' et 'sagesse participée' selon Maître Eckhart. *Estudios Eclesiásticos* 380: 107–44. [CrossRef]
- Beccarisi, Alessandra. 2012. *Eckhart*. Roma: Carocci.
- Beier, Kathi, and Martina Roesner, eds. 2023. *Thomas von Aquin/Meister Eckhart: Über die Tugend (On Virtue)*. Baden-Baden: Karl Alber.
- Beierwaltes, Walter. 2014. 'Und daz Ein machet uns saelec'. Meister Eckharts Begriff der Einheit und der Einung. In *Platonismus im Christentum* (Philosophische Abhandlungen, vol. 73). Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, pp. 100–29.
- Eckhart, Meister. 1936–2003. *Die Deutschen und Lateinischen Werke. Die deutschen Werke*. 5 vols, Edited by Josef Quint and Georg Speer. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Eckhart, Meister. 1956–2015. *Die Deutschen und Lateinischen Werke. Die lateinischen Werke*. 5 vols, Edited by Ernst Benz, Karl Christ, Bruno Decker, Heribert Fischer, Bernhard Geyer, Josef Koch, Erich Seeberg, Loris Sturlese and Konrad Weiss. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Eckhart, Meister. 1981. *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*. Translated by Edmund Colledge, and Bernard McGinn. Mahwah: Paulist Press.
- Eckhart, Meister. 1993. *Deutsche Werke II*. Edited and Annotated by Niklas Largier. Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag.
- Eckhart, Meister. 2009. *The Complete Mystical Works*. Translated by Maurice O'C Walshe. Revised by Bernard McGinn. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company.
- Eckhart, Meister. 2019. *The German Works. 64 Homilies for the Liturgical Year. 1. "De Tempore"*. Edited by Loris Sturlese and Markus Vinzent. Leuven: Peeters.
- Eckhart, Meister. 2020. *The German Works. 56 Homilies for the Liturgical Year. 2. "De Sanctis"*. Edited by Loris Sturlese and Markus Vinzent. Leuven: Peeters.
- Enders, Markus. 2008. Das göttliche Wesen der Liebe im Verständnis Meister Eckharts. In *Gelassenheit und Abgeschlossenheit—Studien zur Deutschen Mystik*. Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovac, pp. 77–97.
- Enders, Markus. 2023. Das Wesen und die Bedeutung der sittlichen Tugenden für ein glückliches Leben des Menschen nach Thomas von Aquin und Meister Eckhart. In *Thomas von Aquin/Meister Eckhart: Über die Tugend (On Virtue)*. Edited by Kathi Beier and Martina Roesner. Baden-Baden: Karl Alber, pp. 263–301.
- Flasch, Kurt. 2010. *Meister Eckhart, Philosoph des Christentums*, 2nd ed. München: C. H. Beck.
- Haas, Alois Maria. 2015. Seelenfunken (scintilla animae). *Meister-Eckhart-Jahrbuch* 9: 293–326.
- Kern, Udo. 1992. Der liebende Mensch nach Meister Eckhart. In *Mensch und Natur im Mittelalter*. Edited by Albert Zimmermann and Andreas Speer. Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, pp. 736–51.
- Kobusch, Theo. 2011. *Mystik als Metaphysik des Inneren, In Meister Eckhart und Augustinus*. Edited by Rudolf K. Weigand and Regina D. Schiewer. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, pp. 17–36.
- Lombard, Pierre. 2012. *Les Quatre Livres des Sentences. Premier Livre*. Edited and Translated by Marc Ozilou. Paris: Cerf.
- McGinn, Bernard. 2010. *Die Mystik im Abendland. Vol. 3. Blüte: Männer und Frauen der neuen Mystik (1200–1350)*. Freiburg in Breisgau: Herder.

- Mieth, Dietmar. 2014. *Meister Eckhart*. München: C. H. Beck.
- Mieth, Dietmar. 2018. *Im Wirken Schauen. Die Einheit von Vita Activa und Vita Contemplativa bei Meister Eckhart und Johannes Tauler*. Darmstadt: Wbg Academic. First published 1969.
- Milne, Joseph. 2016. Meister Eckhart and the Virtues. *Medieval Mystical Theology* 25: 96–109. [CrossRef]
- Milne, Joseph. 2024. Meister Eckhart on Living in the World. *Medieval Mystical Theology* 33: 97–109. [CrossRef]
- Ruh, Kurt. 1987. Traktat von der Minne. Eine Schrift zum Verständnis und zur Verteidigung von Meister Eckharts Metaphysik. In *Philologie als Kulturwissenschaft. Studien zur Literatur und Geschichte des Mittelalters. Festschrift für Karl Stackmann zum 65. Geburtstag*. Edited by Ludger Grenzmann, Hubert Herkommer and Dieter Wuttke. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Ruh, Kurt. 1996. *Geschichte der Abendländischen Mystik, Band III. Die Mystik des Deutschen Predigerordens und ihre Grundlegung Durch die Hochscholastik*. München: C. H. Beck.
- Seuse, Heinrich. 1907. *Deutsche Schriften*. Edited by Karl Bihlmeyer. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Speer, Andreas. 2011. Weisheit bei Augustinus und Meister Eckhart. In *Meister Eckhart und Augustinus*. Edited by Rudolf K. Weigand and Regina D. Schiewer. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, pp. 1–15.
- Steer, Georg. 2011. Über die Liebe. In *Meister Eckhart und Augustinus*. Edited by Rudolf K. Weigand and Regina D. Schiewer. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, pp. 221–39.
- Sturlese, Loris, ed. 2008. *Studi sulle fonti di Meister Eckhart I*. Freiburg Schweiz: Academic Press Freiburg.
- Sturlese, Loris, ed. 2012. *Studi sulle fonti di Meister Eckhart II*. Freiburg Schweiz: Academic Press Freiburg.
- Vannier, Marie-Anne. 2018. *Maître Eckhart Prédicateur*. Paris: Beauchesne.
- Vannier, Marie-Anne, ed. 2020. *Maître Eckhart, Lecteur des Pères Latins*. Paris: Beauchesne.
- Vinzent, Markus. 2011. *The Art of Detachment*. Leuven: Peeters.
- Weigand, Rudolf K., and Regina D. Schiewer, eds. 2011. *Meister Eckhart und Augustinus*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Wéber, Édouard-Henri. 1986. Éléments neoplatoniciens en théologie mystique au XIIIème siècle. In *Abendländische Mystik im Mittelalter. Symposium Kloster Engelberg 1984*. Edited by Kurt Ruh. Stuttgart: Metzler, pp. 196–217.
- Zuijdewegt, Geertjan. 2012. “Utrum caritas sit sliquid creatum in anima”: Aquinas on The Lombard’s Identification of Charity with The Holy Spirit. *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales* 79: 39–74. [CrossRef]

**Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.