

The Human Will in Meister Eckhart's Understanding of Deificatory Event

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Abstract: This paper shall explore the human will in the context of Meister Eckhart's understanding of deificatory event. Contrary to Eckhart's view that deificatory event does somehow need no will, I shall argue that willing is required in the said event. The reason for this is that any intentional act necessitates the operation of the will. Second, in connection to the first, taking cue from Heidegger, *Gelassenheit* or letting-be or *releasement* as a condition for deification remains within the domain of the will. Third, in post-deificatory event, a deified person still functions as divinely human creature and so thus the will remains operative. This is because the will serves, as this paper argues, as a 'hinge' where any form of human act is informed by the will.

Keywords: Meister Eckhart, deification, human will, *Gelassenheit*, mysticism

Introduction

Contrary to Eckhart's position that deificatory event somehow does not require willing, I shall argue that such event is a human event which presupposes the act of the will. The reason for this is that any act of willing, that is the will to be in union with God necessitates the operation of the will. Second, in connection to the first, taking cue from Heidegger, *Gelassenheit* or letting-be or

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releasement as a condition for deification remains within the domain of the will. Third, in post-deificatory event, a deified person still functions as a creature, though, divinely yet still human and thus the will remains operative. This is because the will serves, as this paper argues, as a ‘hinge’ where any form of human act is partly influenced by the will.

Among the post-Scholastic philosophers and theologians, Meister Eckhart (1260-1328) is known to be, if not the most, highly influential, speculative and profound thinker,¹ ‘an extremely complicated and multifaceted thinker,’² a speculative mystic,³ a ‘philosopher of Christianity,’⁴ and ‘one of the rarest of beasts: a theological mystic or mystical theologian,’⁵ a ‘synthe-

¹ See Bernard McGinn, “God Beyond God: Theology and Mysticism in the Thought of Meister Eckhart,” *The Journal of Religion* 6, no. 1 (January 1981): 1-19; Richard Kieckhefer, “Meister Eckhart’s Conception of Union with God,” *Harvard Theological Review* 1, issue 3-4 (October 1978): 203-225; Benedict M. Ashley, “Three Strands in the Thought of Eckhart, The Scholastic Theologian,” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 42, no. 2 (April 1978): 226-239.

² Dermot Moran, “Meister Eckhart in 20th-Century Philosophy,” in *A Companion to Meister Eckhart* ed., Jeremiah Hackett (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013), 674.

³ Although not all of Eckhart’s scholars and critical readers agree on this. The likes of Bernard McGinn, Alois Haas, and Kurt Ruh are forerunners of Eckhart’s mysticism while the “Bochum School” represented by Kurt Flasch tries to counter the hegemony of what he calls “Mystical flood” in Eckhart’s studies. See Jeremiah Hackett, “Preface” *A Companion to Meister Eckhart* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013), xxii-xxiii.

⁴ Kurt Flasch, *Meister Eckhart: Philosopher of Christianity* trans., Anne Schindel and Aaron Vanides (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015).

⁵ Oliver Davies *God Within: The Mystical Tradition of Northern Europe* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1988), 37 as cited by Joan O’Donovan, “The Way of Meister Eckhart,” *Eckhart Review*, 11:1 (2002): 23-36, p. 25, n. 4.

sizer of the Neoplatonic and the Aristotelian traditions,⁶ and controversial thinker in the Western tradition of mysticism, theology, and philosophy. As McGinn puts it, “no other figure combines as well as he [Eckhart] the dual roles of professional theologian and mystical preacher and writer.”⁷ Meister Eckhart is not just only a profound mystic but “an original and important speculative thinker”⁸ as well. “It is precisely,” as Jeremiah Hackett quips, of being “a *speculative thinker* that Eckhart stands out among his contemporaries.”⁹ His speculative thinking puts forward in a masterful way “the notion that consciousness is in some sense non-being” which is “basic to any theory of knowledge and which [sic] has been recognized in an especial vivid way only in recent times.”¹⁰ We may then infer that Eckhart is not only considered as a medieval theologian *par excellence* but “an original philosophical thinker who formulated his own philosophical-theological synthesis.”¹¹

As a synthesizer, Eckhart heavily influenced by his predecessors most especially the Augustinian and Thomistic traditions. But this is not to discount the fact that other non-Christian philosophers played significant role in the development of his philosophical and theological reflections.¹² As pointed out by Alessandro

⁶ Reiner Schürmann, “Neoplatonic Henology as an Overcoming of Metaphysics,” *Research in Phenomenology*, 13:1 (1983): 25-41, p. 28.

⁷ McGinn, “God beyond God,” 2.

⁸ John Caputo, “The Nothingness of the Intellect in Meister Eckhart’s *Parisian Questions*,” *The Thomist* 39 (1975): 87; See also, Renier Schürmann, *Meister Eckhart: Mystic and Philosopher* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).

⁹ Jeremiah Hackett, “Preface,” xxiii.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² There are two salient motifs, according to Caputo, in Eckhart’s writings, namely: a Neo-platonic theme, “the unity and

Palazzo, there are several salient Eckhartian concepts which came from the influence of Islamic and Jewish philosophers such as Avicenna, Avicbron, and Averröes.¹³

As a mystic, his brand of mysticism is far distant from other commonly known mystics such as Teresa of Avila or Catherine of Siena. Benedict Ashley, for instance, asserts that unlike the southern contemporary mystics, ‘northern mystics’ – the Germans like Eckhart “thematized ‘innerness’, anticipating that concern for ‘subjectivity’ which has marked the whole course of German thought.”¹⁴ McGinn describes the Eckhartian mysticism as the “type [of mysticism] aims at penetrating the ordinary in order to reveal the extraordinary.”¹⁵ However, Eckhart’s mysticism shared

simplicity of pure being,” and, second, “life and birth, of emergence and pouring forth, of life being passed on to life.” See John Caputo, “Fundamental Themes in Meister Eckhart’s Myticism,” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 42 no. 2 (April 1978): 197-198.

¹³ Alessandro Palazzo, “Eckhart’s Islamic and Jewish Sources,” in *Companion to Meister Eckhart* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013), 254-193. Among these concepts, as argued by Palazzo, are *bullitio* (boiling) and *ebullitio* (boiling over) which believed to be of Avicennian origin. Also, it was Avicenna from whom Eckhart relied greatly by more than a hundred quotations, many of which were explicit all throughout his works. He referred to Avicenna as ‘meister’ for twenty-one times in the sermons. While expressions such as “soul’s breaking-through into God” and “having no ‘why’” were from Avicbron whom Eckhart quoted in his Latin sermons fourteen times. Also Eckhart made use of Averröes’ philosophical ideas. He refered to Averröes for fourty-three times as a ‘commentator’ in his Latin sermons. Among the philosophical concepts, according to Palazzo, that Eckhart borrowed from Averröes were namely: the idea of nature, God as perfect being, time is non-real being, and human intellect as the lowest in the hierarchy of intellectual substances.

¹⁴ Benedict M. Ashley, “Three Strands in the Thought of Eckhart,” 228.

¹⁵ Bernard McGinn, “God Beyond God”, 18. Of course, many interpreters have identified various characterizations of Eckhart’s

certain affinity with another brand of mysticism developed by the Beguine Mystics such as Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Madgeburg, and Marguerite Porete.¹⁶ Most notably among them who influenced Eckhart was Marguerite Porete's seminal work *The Mirror of Simple Souls* which for McGinn greatly influenced Eckhart, "[it] appears to have had a profound effect on one of the most noted scholastics of the day, the Dominican master of theology known as Meister Eckhart."¹⁷ Obvious among Porete's doctrines seen in Eckhart are about annihilation¹⁸ and deification which for Juan Marin "sprouted from a fertile beguine imagination, one that nourished Porete's own distinctive and influential ideas in the *Mirror of Simple Souls*."¹⁹ As to the direct religious-mystical relation of Eckhart with Hadewijch and Mechthild, McGinn contends that

mysticism. For instance, Caputo describes Eckhart's mysticism as "atheistic", (John D. Caputo, "Fundamental Themes in Meister Eckhart's Mysticism," 211); Radler describes it as "fluid mysticism" (Charlotte Radler, "In Love I am more God: The Centrality of Love in Meister Eckhart's Mysticism," in *The Journal of Religion* 90, no. 2 [April 2010]: 171-198), 174. While Lanzetta calls it "anarchic" (See Beverly J. Lanzetta, "Three Categories of Nothingness in Eckhart," *The Journal of Religion* 72, no. 2 [April 1992]: 248-268), 249.

¹⁶ See, Bernard McGinn (ed.), *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics* (New York: Continuum, 1997).

¹⁷ Bernard McGinn, "Introduction," in *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*, 2.

¹⁸ See Joanne Maguire Robinson, *Nobility and Annihilation in Marguerite Porete's Mirror of Simple Souls* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), xii. Robinson observes that "the doctrine of annihilation of the soul was never a mainstream theological doctrine before or after Marguerite Porete, yet it reveals profound insights into the possible relationship between God and the soul." We can see in this study how the Beguine mystics represented by Porete made an extremely radical view of mysticism.

¹⁹ Juan Marin, "Annihilation and Deification in Beguine Theology and Marguerite Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls*," *Harvard Theological Review* vol. 103, Issue 01 (January 2010): 89-109. See, p. 90.

this remains questionable.²⁰ That being said, however this does not discount the fact that Eckhart “*shared* with them, that is, the community of discourse and joint concerns in which his thought and theirs developed and enriched each other.”²¹ Nonetheless, what separates Beguine mystics and Eckhart from their contemporaries is their radical claim that according to Amy Hollywood, “the soul herself can and must be refigured or reimagined, and as such become united without distinction in and with divine.”²² Such “extreme mysticism”²³ made Eckhart a subject of various (mis)interpretations. The replicating tendency of (mis)interpreting Eckhart, according to Mojsisch is due to the “expulsive aspect of Eckhartian aporetic-progressive method” and whose thought is “constantly in motion; then when it come to rest, it provokes doubt, soliciting further thinking.”²⁴ Despite this difficulty,

²⁰ In the case of Hadewijch, Murk-Jansen remark runs quite contrary to McGinn when the former argues that it is false that Eckhart “has been quite unable to read” the work attributed to Hadewijch. See Saskia Murk-Jansen, “Hadewijch and Eckhart,” in *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*, 17. Furthermore, in the case of Mechthild, one can easily identify differences between her and Eckhart. One of these is the kind of mystical character that Mechthild developed in herself which is quite the opposite of Eckhart. The former is an ecstatic and visionary mystic while Eckhart is not. But certainly, Eckhart was aware of this kind of mysticism, more so, of Mechthild which led us to establish similarities or congruences between them. See Frank Tobin, “Mechthild of Magdeburg and Meister Eckhart: Points of Coincidence,” in *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*.

²¹ Bernard McGinn, “Introduction,” 4.

²² Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 24.

²³ Robert E. Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 61.

²⁴ Burkhard Mojsisch, *Meister Eckhart: Analogy, Univocity and Unity* trans., Orrin F. Summerell (Amsterdam: B.R. Grüner, 2001), 5.

some readers and scholars find Eckhart's sermons and treatises a "better example [sic] of a certain mystical dissemination and a religiously joyful wisdom..." by rewriting the "words of Scripture, turns and twists the most familiar sacred stories, reinterprets the oldest teachings in the *most innovative and shocking ways*."²⁵

Being controversial, McGinn contends that Eckhart is "the *only* medieval theologian tried before the Inquisition as a heretic."²⁶ As Oliver Davies points out, the papal bull *In agro dominico* (March 27, 1329) "stands out from other such condemnatory Bulls in a number of ways." As Davies explains,

[I]t was the first and only occasion when the full machinery of the Inquisition was used against a member of the Dominican Order, and it was similarly the first and only time in which a theologian of the first rank was charged with the *inquisitio haereticae privitatis*: the most serious accusation which the Inquisition had at its disposal and the one which carried the heaviest penalties.²⁷ (*italics added*)

But the reason for this condemnation of twenty-eight propositions as argued by Alain de Libera is not because of Eckhart's unorthodoxy and radicality but "[w]hat the Pope was condemning in reality were certain specific expressions of Eckhart's Christian medieval theology" which "from the point of view of Eckhart's opponents, his doctrine was simply poor theology – neither unorthodox qua philosophical, nor unorthodox qua

²⁵ John D. Caputo, "Mysticism and Transgression: Derrida and Meister Eckhart," in *Derrida and Deconstruction*, ed., Hugh J. Silverman (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 34.

²⁶ Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart: The Man from Whom God Hid Nothing* (New York: A Herder and Herder Book, 2001), 1.

²⁷ Oliver Davies, "Why were Eckhart's propositions condemned?," *New Blackfriars*, 71 (1990): 433.

mystical but *unorthodox qua theologically incorrect*.”²⁸ His notoriety as an unorthodox and radical thinker is not only measured by the fact that his theological positions are, *prima facie*, quite contrary to the teachings and doctrines of the Catholic church – the reason why even his fellow Dominicans were disconcerted by his deep reliance on Neoplatonic themes,²⁹ but because of “[his] startling a-theistic and ‘un-Christian’ elements in his thought”³⁰ and comfort on an aberrant use of language. This attunement to a quite different linguistic bent led his readers and astute intellectual opponents to commit grave misinterpretation of his texts. His manner and style of presenting his views both in the sermons and treatises are heavily glued with rhetorical/linguistic tropes and are cognitively daunting and tormenting. The most that Denys Turner could say in describing Eckhart’s use of language is this:

[Eckhart] twists the discourse, breaks it up, recomposes it. His rhetorical devices are *artifices*...Eckhart wants to force the imagery to say the apophatic...he knows perfectly well that the unsayable cannot be placed within the grasp of speech. Yet he will use speech, necessarily broken, contradictory, absurd, paradoxical, conceptually hyperbolic speech, to bring to insight the ineffability of God.³¹ (emphasis added.)

²⁸ Alain de Libera, “On Some Philosophical Aspects of Master Eckhart’s Theology,” *Review of Philosophy and Theology of Fribourg*, 45 (1998): 152-157.

²⁹ Richard Woods, “Meister Eckhart and the Neoplatonic Heritage: The Thinker’s Way to God,” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 54, no. 4 (October 1990): 610.

³⁰ Beverly J. Lanzetta, “Three Categories of Nothingness in Eckhart,” 249.

³¹ Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 151.

This kind of linguistic usage employed by Eckhart made him one of the tough thinkers in German intellectual tradition. The difficulty of understanding properly and correctly his insights and thoughts makes us think about the use of language. That being said, his use of language shows his act of revolt against the language's self-limiting nature. It is this limitation that Eckhart is trying to overcome and experimenting on when he subversively played with it "not only [as] a linguistic strategy designed to prevent the mind from assigning closure to reality but also is a critique of the enclosure of being."³² What this description amounts to is what Oliver Davies is hinting at when he describes Eckhart's employment of language as 'poeticisation'. For Davies this process "involves the loosening of the relation between signifier and signified, and thus the foregrounding of language as bearer of meaning, rather than meaning itself – a phenomenon which is usually judged to be a prime characteristic of poetic texts."³³ But it is by way of doing such violence to language that Eckhart was able to avoid reification of discourse. In the words of Charles Robinson, referring to Eckhart's subtle improvisation of language to avoid reification, "he...[has] 'mapped out' the divine geography on a finer scale than any other man who had ever heretofore undertaken such daring explorations."³⁴ It is through escaping the reificatory power of language that one is able to find a way to express what could not be clearly expressed by some linguistic modalities and categories.

Similarly, Radler describes Eckhart's 'linguistic

³² Beverly J. Lanzetta, "Three Categories of Nothingness in Eckhart," 252.

³³ Oliver Davies, *God Within* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1988), 180.

³⁴ Charles K. Robinson, "Meister Eckhart's Doctrine of God," *Heythrop Journal* 5:2 (1964):150.

flexibility' or upheaval as "symptomatic of his constant use of reversible analogy, mobile perspectives, and apophysis, which emancipates his thought from ossified differentiations"³⁵ of various concepts necessary in articulating his inner thoughts. This, according to Radler, is in order to allow thinking to free itself of the "scholastic categories of substance and accident, analogy and proportion, being and intellect."³⁶ This means that any language that attempts to account for what God is or our true knowledge of Him is bound to fail. Eckhart in Sermon 96 says that "the finest thing one can say about God is to be silent from the wisdom of inner riches. So be silent and do not chatter about God, because by chattering about Him you are lying and so committing a sin."³⁷ Indeed, as Denys Turner asserts, "[o]f God there can be only silence accompanied by a sort of stunned amazement."³⁸ Woods is correct when he said that the "very language he [Eckhart] used to express his profound insights into the mystery of the human encounter with God is challenging and yet elusive."³⁹ His being controversial is not only due to his writing style but due to the fact that his intellectual profundity escapes and evades the limits and restrictions of doctrinal teaching of both Augustine and Aquinas.⁴⁰

³⁵ Charlotte Radler, "In Love I am more God': The Centrality of Love in Meister Eckhart's Mysticism," 175.

³⁶ Lanzetta, "Three Categories of Nothingness," 252.

³⁷ Meister Eckhart, *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*, trans. and ed. by Maurice O. Walshe, rev. by Bernard McGinn (New York: Herder & Herder, 2009), Sermon 96 p. 463.

³⁸ Denys Turner, "The Art of Unknowing: Negative Theology in Late Medieval Mysticism," 479.

³⁹ Richard Woods, OP., "Eckhart's Way," in *The Way of the Christian Mystics*, volume 2, ed. Noel Dermot O'Donoghue, OP., (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1986), 12.

⁴⁰ Walshe, "Introduction," *Complete Works of Meister Eckhart*. As Walshe observes, "whether he was worried about this [his doctrinal teachings] because he truly felt inwardly that the church

Part of Eckhart's tendency of leaning toward unorthodoxy might also be attributed to his Order's intellectual openness allowing their members to engage in "original speculation of their own,"⁴¹ provided that they remain faithful to the Thomistic teachings without any attempt to undermine nor depart from it.⁴²

Given all these, it is apparent how Eckhart tries to go beyond the limits of Aquinas' philosophical system and doctrines. However, despite this tangential departure from Aquinas' tradition, Eckhart remains faithful to the core philosophical and theological teachings of Aquinas. Among these core teachings of Aquinas are his views on the intellect, will, and analogy⁴³ but twisting them a bit.⁴⁴ For example, Eckhart views the intellect as not simply a cognitive capacity but primarily the source of such cognition in the world.⁴⁵ Furthermore, he finds the intellect as the place of the soul, "a light, moreover, which is a 'nothing',

had to be right, or rather because he had to conform, is perhaps to a certain extent open to question. We might tentatively put it that Eckhart, being utterly convinced of the threat of what he was saying, *hoped* it was after all fundamentally orthodox or at least would pass for such, but felt he had to say it just the same" (19).

⁴¹ William A. Hinnebusch, *The History of the Dominican Order* (New York: Alba House, 1965), 155 cited by Benedict M. Ashley, "Three Strands in the Thought of Eckhart, the Scholastic Theologian," *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review*, 42 no. 2 (April 1978): 227.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ For suggested readings, see Burkhard Mojsisch, *Meister Eckhart: Analogy, Univocity and Unity*; Jeremiah Hackett and Jennifer Hart Weed, "From Aquinas to Eckhart on Creation, Creature, and Analogy," *A Companion to Eckhart*, ed. Jeremiah Hackett (Leiden/London: Brill, 2013).

⁴⁴ Of course, other than this is Eckhart's use of the doctrine of Analogy which Eckhart's commentators and scholars believed to be borrowed from Aquinas.

⁴⁵ Oliver Davies, "The Challenge of the Past Meister Eckhart," *Medieval Mystical Theology*, 20, 1 (2011): 16.

an ‘emptiness’, a ‘desert’, it is formless and featureless and it is all these things with the nothingness, the emptiness and the desert-like formlessness and featurelessness of the Godhead,”⁴⁶ a place where deification makes possible. While the will is seen as a human faculty that needs to be abandoned in order for the union of God with the soul is rendered possible.

Of course, equally important is situating Eckhart today. In both philosophical and theological enterprises, we find the echoes of Eckhart’s thoughts. Philosophically speaking, Eckhart plays a significant role in the development of continental philosophical tradition most especially in Hegelian tradition which was also followed by Heidegger, and today by the likes of Jean-Luc Marion.⁴⁷ In theological discourse, Eckhart has made significant contributions to the discussion concerning negative theology, Christology, Christian anthropology, and mysticism. But what is not apparent in Eckhart scholarship is his contribution to pastoral and missiological enterprise of the Church which I think is an interesting and fruitful study to work on. This study will only surmise that Eckhart’s thoughts and teachings may have contributed significantly on how we view and exercise pastoral and missiological works of the church. But to specifically identify those elements is for now quite difficult to determine. However difficult, we may glean from his historical personality connections which are maybe helpful in establishing this fact. First, he belonged to the Dominican order that is undoubtedly known for their pastoral and missiological charism. As a member of the Dominican order, Eckhart

⁴⁶ Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 159.

⁴⁷ See Cyril O’Regan, “Eckhart Reception in the 19th Century”; also, Dermot Moran, “Meister Eckhart in 20th Century Philosophy,” in *A Companion to Meister Eckhart*, edited by Jeremiah M. Hackett (Leiden and London: Brill, 2013).

did not fail to live its apostolic calling. This is seen how Eckhart was admired by his listeners and students because of his prowess in preaching and intellectual acumen. Just like St. Thomas Aquinas, Eckhart exhibited the kind of skills and talents deserving of being a Dominican. Though, as a preacher and intellectual there is no doubt that he is one of the greatest, but as with regard to his theological thought in missiological studies, one has to suspend judgment until one has able to carefully examine his work in relation to this. Hence, this is beyond the scope of this paper. However, based on the discussion below, one can infer with careful attention to the text that Eckhart's account of deification can be interpreted in missiological terms as simply a call for genuine Christian living. It is clear for Eckhart that more than the external practices or mercantile-like religious practices, is the nourishment of the soul, to be one with God, to be in union with God. This is reminiscent of the internal mission of the Church, more than the Church's external mission that springs from the command of Jesus, i.e., the reality that the Church should participate in the mission of the Trinity. This participation does not only require external demonstration or activities but most importantly the internalization of what it means to be called as a member of the missionary Church.

Meister Eckhart's Notions of the Will: Connolly vs Stump

At the heart of Eckhart's anthropology is the trinitarian powers of the soul: memory, intellect, and will.⁴⁸ Many have already undergone examining and problematizing Eckhart's conception of the will and so

⁴⁸ Eckhart, Sermon 96 p. 464.

as far as this paper is concerned, I do not claim any originality in this respect. For instance, John Connolly in *Living without Why: Meister Eckhart's Critique of the Medieval Concept of Will* examines and situates Eckhart's concept of will based on one of Eckhart's famous phrases "liv[ing] without why" in "historical and metaphysical context."⁴⁹ Connolly argues that Eckhart's conception of will in this context refers to will as purpose or goal. As Eckhart in Sermon 11 says, "All things that are in time have a 'Why?' Ask a man why he eats: 'For strength.' – 'Why do you sleep?' – 'for the same reason.'"⁵⁰ For Connolly, the 'why' and 'will' are synonymous terms. Any action is always directed toward something, and this directedness implies goal or purpose. That is why, for Connolly, Eckhart can be considered along with Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas as 'teleological eudaimonist'. Connolly concludes that Eckhart's view of will is not so different from Aquinas and Augustine, and hence is no radical. However, what is lacking in Connolly's study of Eckhart's concept of will is its role and implications for mystical union which both preoccupied Eckhart in his sermons and treatises. What Connolly highlights in his work so far is Eckhart's view of will as an ethical concept.

Aside from Connolly, Eleonore Stump's essay entitled "Not My Will but Thy Will Be Done" discusses though cursorily, Eckhart's view of will in relation to God's will. Stump's central claim has to do with "appropriate response to the problem of suffering"⁵¹ as necessary element in healing 'post-Fall human disorder'

⁴⁹ John Connolly, *Living Without Why: Meister Eckhart's Critique of the Medieval Concept of Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 4.

⁵⁰ Eckhart, Sermon 11, p. 96.

⁵¹ Eleonore Stump, "Not My Will but Thy Will be Done," *Medieval Mystical Theology* 22:2 (2013):155.

in the soul, most especially the will. Stump argues that Eckhart finds the person's will "internally fragmented"⁵² which therefore requires healing in order to be in union with God. As such is the ultimate goal of every person, to "focus their [people] care on their flourishing, their ultimate, spiritual flourishing, and *only* on it."⁵³ Stump calls this 'stern-minded attitude' which she believes is Eckhart's position. This attitude according to Stump takes a no-self view of denunciation. Such attitude, as Stump defines, "seeks to eradicate all desires other than the desire for God's will."⁵⁴ This form of denunciation of self is extremely radical which for Stump characterized Eckhart's 'stern-minded attitude' view. For her, this position runs contrary to the Christian call of self-denial since "one cannot crucify a self one does not have."⁵⁵ I think Stump here committed a category mistake. She thought of the self and person as synonymous concepts. What the Jews crucified was not the self of Christ but Christ himself – as a person. However, Stump suggests a more plausible form of denying the self without eradicating the self altogether. This view of denunciation for Stump does not require shutting down one's own faculties of intellect and will.

Borrowing the modern philosophical categories from Harry Frankfurt,⁵⁶ Stump classifies the will into first-order and second-order will. This hierarchical structure of the will paves the way for articulating Eckhart's understanding of will as a faculty, though 'internally fragmented' but can be unified only when one wills the

⁵² Though the phrase is from Stump, the idea remains to be Augustinian. See Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Doubleday, 1960), Book VIII.

⁵³ Stump, "Not My Will but Thy Will be Done," 161.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁵⁶ See Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 68 no. 1 (Jan. 14, 1971): 5-20.

will of God. Stump gives an example of Christ whose first-order will and second-order will are in conflict. As Stump illustrates, Christ's first-order will is his desire not to die, while his second-order will is letting God's will be done, that is, making the second-order will take precedence over the first-order will. Because the second-order will preceded Christ's first-order will, he remained in conformity with God's will. As Stump explains: "In this rank-ordering of desires, Jesus does not give up his desire not to die. He still has that desire; he just acts counter to it because he desires something contrary to his desire not to die if that is God's will."⁵⁷ We may say then that Christ's 'deferred will'⁵⁸ signals the arrival of the union because as Stump explains "[w]illing what God wills is necessary for internal integration around the good, which is itself necessary for union with God; and union with God is a person's ultimate flourishing."⁵⁹ The point I want to draw from Stump's essay is how she appropriates and understands Eckhart's view of the nature of the human will. To be sure, Stump does not subscribe to what she considers as Eckhart's view of stern-minded attitude. At the end of her essay, she states there that "there cannot be union between God and a human person if there is no will at all in the human person."⁶⁰ But this somehow contradicts the claim of Eckhart on how the mystical union can be achieved. The union as an achievement act does not depend on one's faith nor from grace (Augustine's) alone

⁵⁷ Stump, "Not My Will but Thy Will be Done," 169.

⁵⁸ Davis defines this as "letting one's own will go in favor of the will of another, whether passively acquiescing to, or actively becoming a vessel for, this other will, whether this other be the leader of a state, a god, and so on" (22). See Bret W. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will*.

⁵⁹ Eleonore Stump, "Not My Will but Thy Will be Done", 160.

⁶⁰ Stump, "Not My Will but Thy Will be Done," 171.

but through “awakening to our intrinsic divinity.”⁶¹

Stump’s essay attracted a negative response from Connolly. In the same journal with Stump, Connolly published an essay entitled “Eckhart and the Will of God: A Reply to Stump”⁶² as a reaction to the former’s claims that Eckhart has views of (a) ‘stern-minded attitude’, (b) the no-self view of denunciation, and (c) the impossibility of willinglessness in the act of union with God. Connolly argues that Stump’s understanding of Eckhart’s thoughts is mistaken due to her failure to “situate some of Eckhart’s extreme claims in the framework of his metaphysics and the larger context of his [Eckhart] writings, which show he is clearly not stern-minded.”⁶³ Connolly points out that Stump’s faulty understanding of Eckhart is based on Stump’s view of Eckhart’s concept of will. For Connolly, Eckhart does not hold a view of stern-minded attitude and no-self view just like what Stump believes to be. Eckhart’s view of willing, according to Connolly, should not be taken simply as fulfilling one’s ultimate, spiritual flourishing because this is in fact what Eckhart is rejecting. “What Eckhart was rejecting was making the ultimate goal, i.e., the beatific vision, the organizing principle of our lives and the motivating ground of our good deeds...”⁶⁴ Connolly explains. On the other hand, in relation to denunciation or detachment, Eckhart’s view of willing should not be taken to imply, according to Connolly, “a rejection of ‘the power’ called the will altogether, including intention, choice, consent, etc”⁶⁵ for this is not

⁶¹ Benedict M. Ashley, “Three Strands in the Thought of Eckhart, the Scholastic Theologian,” 236.

⁶² John Connolly, “Eckhart and the Will of God: A Reply to Stump,” *Medieval Mystical Theology*, 25:1 (2016), 6.

⁶³ Connolly, “A Reply to Stump,” 6.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

what Eckhart meant by denunciation. With regard to the impossibility of willinglessness in the union with God, Connolly underscores that Eckhart does not deny man's teleological character but insists we are not just rational beings, "we are also more than creatures, since we are capable of sharing in the divine nature itself; and, as he [Eckhart] often reminds us, God acts without why."⁶⁶ Connolly explains that because we ourselves are like God in virtue of our union with Him, we become one with Him and since we are one with Him, we share the same nature with Him. What Connolly argues against Stump's claims is reflective of what I am doing as well. Connolly and Stump are correct in their assertions that in deificatory process the will functions necessarily but both failed to address the status of human willing in post-deificatory state. This paper will show that following Heidegger, the will as a faculty remains operative both during and after deificatory event. The reason for this is that, the will remains a fundamental faculty of the human person and that all human actions imply the function of the will. Heidegger, commenting on Eckhart's idea of *Gelassenheit* says that Eckhart's view of *Gelassenheit* is still "within the domain of will."⁶⁷ What this means for Eckhart according to Heidegger is that, "casting off sinful selfishness and letting self-will go in favor of the divine will"⁶⁸ which is not for Heidegger meant by *Gelassenheit* but rather non-willing. Whether Heidegger is correct in his interpretation of Eckhart or not is beyond the scope of this paper.

In what follows, I will be discussing the concept of the will in general and with this it is unavoidable to take detours along the way, such as giving brief

⁶⁶ Connolly, "A Reply to Stump," 18.

⁶⁷ Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 61.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 62.

accounts on the concept of the will. The purpose is to see the complexity of the problem of the concept of the will and how Eckhart appropriated the will in his own theological-philosophical synthesis.

The Concept of the Will: Augustine and Aquinas

There is no one-size-fits-all definition of the will. In the history of western philosophy, very few have attempted in providing a somewhat definitive meaning to the concept 'will'. Among them are Augustine and Aquinas. In contemporary philosophical landscape, however, the concept of the will remains problematic and obscure.

Unlike other philosophical concepts and problems, the discourse on the will gains varied receptions among various western philosophical traditions and poses several conceptual difficulties. For instance, Hannah Arendt observes that "the greatest difficulty faced by every discussion of the Will is the simple fact that there is no other capacity of the mind whose very existence has been so consistently doubted and refuted by so eminent a series of philosophers."⁶⁹ Following Augustine, Karl Jaspers finds the will as incomprehensible. For him, "I cannot will this will, but through it, because of it, I can will."⁷⁰ Similar observation is put forward by contemporary philosophers such as Thomas Pink and M.W.F Stone who find the idea of the will "much more obscure"⁷¹ compared to other philosophical ideas. Pink

⁶⁹ Hannah Arendt, "Willing" in *The Life of the Mind* (New York and London: Harcourt, 1978), 4. One of these philosophers as Arendt pointed out was Gilbert Ryle. See Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson, 1959), 62-82.

⁷⁰ Karl Jaspers, *Plato and Augustine*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Ralph Manheim (New York: Harvest Book, 1962), 90.

⁷¹ Thomas Pink and M.W.F. Stone, "Introduction," in *The Will and Human Action: From Antiquity to the Present Day* (London and

and Stone argue that “[t]here is hardly any clear consensus, either among philosophers or within everyday opinion, about what might be counted as a clear case of willing (*thelein*). The very absence of such a consensus might be said to reflect a fundamental lack of clarity about just what the notions of ‘will and willing’ legitimately involve.”⁷² That is why some philosophers such as Ryle violently reject that there is such a natural kind of faculty as ‘will’. Ryle considers the will as an “artificial concept”⁷³ just like any other forms of philosophical dogmas such as the ‘trinitarian theory of mind’ or soul – which for him “is not only not self-evident, it is such a welter of confusions and false inferences that it is best to give up any attempt to re-fashion it. It should be treated as one of the curious of theory.”⁷⁴ Corollary to this of course is the ascription of ‘freedom’ to the will that somehow further complicates the problem. But what exactly, we may ask, is the problem with the idea of the will? If we try to examine it carefully, we find that the problem has to do with an account of its nature. The least that we can say about the will is that it is a human faculty, not just a faculty of the soul.⁷⁵ And since it is a human faculty, then it is a faculty of the subject. Nevertheless, despite the absence

New York: Routledge, 2004), 1.

⁷² Pink and Stone, “Introduction,” 1.

⁷³ Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, 62.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ I think there is something wrong with the idea that the will is a faculty of the soul rather than of human being. For instance, Augustine would consider willing not just an act of the soul but of the human person. Heidegger also contends that the will is essentially the ground of human action. “By the word ‘will’ I mean, in fact, not a faculty of the soul, but rather – in accordance with the unanimous, though hardly yet thought through doctrine of Western thinkers – that wherein the essence of the soul, spirit, reason, love and life are grounded” (cited in Bret W. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will*, p.6).

of consensus as to what to think about the will, it does not mean that no definition or meaning can be functional when talking about it. Moreover, what is more important is not about how to make everyone agree, for this would seem impossible.

Against the skeptical and virulent attack by some contemporary philosophers, other philosophers way back time, as far as I know, never doubted its existence and thus, it is a genuine concept rather than an 'artificial' one. Beginning from the time of the Greek thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, and the Hellenistic schools, the will as a human faculty was a pivotal issue in their philosophical activity. Although, according to W.D. Ross, "Plato and Aristotle have no distinct conception of the will"⁷⁶ since there is an absence of linguistic and conceptual equivalence to what we understood as will and as McIntyre argues "Aristotle, like every other ancient pre-Christian author, had no concept of the will and there is no conceptual space in his scheme for such an alien notion in the explanations of defect and error."⁷⁷ The context of this statement of McIntyre is the contrast or difference between Aristotle and Augustine in terms of understanding the nature of defect and error. As McIntyre explains in his *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry*, Augustine predicates the defect and error of the intellect to the will and thus making the intellect dependent and limited in its judgments. But this does not necessarily imply that the Greeks had not thought of it as part of their philosophical reflections. Also, it is believed that the will is of late linguistic and conceptual invention.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ W.D. Ross, *Aristotle*, 5th edition (London: Methuen, 1949), 199.

⁷⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 111.

⁷⁸ Albrecht Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity* (Berkeley/London: University of California Press, 1982), 123.

Evidentially, Charles Kahn identifies four perspectives on the concept of the will, namely: (1) theological concept, (2) post-Cartesian, (3) Kantian notion, and (4) will in relation to determinism.⁷⁹ This Kahnian classification shows exclusion of the Greek philosophical tradition as important factor in the formation of the concept of the will. But again this does not mean that the early Greek philosophers and the Hellenistic schools have no conception, or at least have not thought of the will. As T.H. Irwin warns:

It would be both a historical and a philosophical mistake, however, to claim that Greek philosophers lack a concept of the will if we simply mean that they are not voluntarists. For the debate between voluntarism and intellectualism is a debate between two views of the will, among disputants who share a concept of the will.⁸⁰

And so there, Irwin challenges our limiting notion of the will because it is only being thought within the conceptual duopolistic framework – which I believe a symptom of disjunctive thinking. Hence, the issue with regard to the origin of the concept of the will has got to do with properly identifying its essential characteristics and features which to some philosophers cannot be found in the philosophical teachings of Plato, Aristotle, and the Hellenistic schools. But what exactly are those characteristics and features of the will?

Simply put, the will is obviously the faculty of the subject.⁸¹ As a faculty, it functions as one of the sources

⁷⁹ Charles H. Kahn, "Discovering the Will: From Aristotle to Augustine," in *The Question of 'Eclecticism': Studies in Later Greek Philosophy*, edited by J.M. Dillon & A.A. Long (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1988), 234-235.

⁸⁰ T.H. Irwin, "Who Discovered the Will?," *Philosophical Perspectives* 6 (1992): 468.

⁸¹ Heidegger reverses this. Instead of thinking that the will is a

of human action. This means that no amount of mental states is translatable to action without the will. This makes will quite powerful in terms of its function. Even Augustine has recognized this fact about the will. It is the will that enables us to perceive, memorize, imagine, believe, and feel. Even the act of unwilling remains to be within the domain of will, i.e., the will acts to perform such action. As long as unwillingness is a form of human act, then we may infer that it is still form of willing. As Sorabji argues “unwilling acts follow the will, even if not the full (*plena*) will. That is why Augustine says even (*etiam*) unwilling acts are done by will. *A fortiori*, all other acts are so done.”⁸² As a source of human action the will exerts influences to the human person in various ways. The will, although, is not an exclusive/essential property⁸³ of human beings and so “[h]uman beings are not alone” as Harry Frankfurt asserts, “in having desires and motives, or in making choices, they share these things with the members of certain other species, some of whom even appear to

faculty of subjectivity, for him, subjectivity is an expression of the will. This radical reversal somehow points to something very crucial in Heidegger as he attempts to overcome the will in terms of thinking without the company of the will. This is where Heidegger departs from Eckhart’s notion of *Gelassenheit*, where the former wants to overcome the will in thinking. See Heidegger’s *Discourse on Thinking*; also David Lewin, “The Middle Voice in Eckhart and Modern Continental Philosophy,” *Medieval Mystical Theology* 20, no. 1 (2011): 42.

⁸² Richard Sorabji, “The Concept of the will from Plato to Maximus the Confessor,” in *The Will and Human Action: From Antiquity to the Present Day* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 16.

⁸³ See, Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, translated by J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper and Row, 1968). According to Heidegger, “‘willing’ here designates the being of beings as a whole. Every single being and all beings as a whole have their essential powers [*das Vermögen seines Wesens*] in and through the will” (91).

engage in deliberation and to make decision based upon prior thought,”⁸⁴ but it remains to be a fundamental faculty of human action. Our consciousness of it moves us up higher in the hierarchy of beings as this capacity becomes reflective of human capacity to form what Frankfurt calls ‘second-order desires’. Provisionally by way of examining the views of the two intellectual giants of their time: Augustine and Aquinas, we hope to find signposts to describe and properly identify essential characteristics of the will, as this will be necessary in understanding Eckhart’s view of the will.

From Plato to Aristotle and down to the Hellenistic schools, the completion of the concept of the will culminated in Augustine. As Sorabji argues “Augustine’s treatment of the will is new in more than one way. Most relevantly, Augustine brings together all the criteria which we have seen occurring separately in others.”⁸⁵ For Sorabji, there are at least six important will-relating concepts which Augustine was able to bring together into one term called ‘will’, namely: (1) rational soul, (2) freedom, (3) responsibility, (4) will-power, (5) ubiquitousness of willing, and (6) perversionality of the will.⁸⁶ For Augustine, the will is thought to be a human faculty that is defective. It is precisely because of this defect that man commits sin. The defectiveness, therefore, makes the will limited. But it is not only the will that is affected but also the intellect. For Augustine, according to Josef Lössl, “the limitations of the will caused by sin are not primarily affecting the physical and moral faculties but the

⁸⁴ Harry Frankfurt, “Freedom of Will and Concept of a Person,” 7.

⁸⁵ Richard Sorabji, “The concept of the will from Plato to Maximus the Confessor,” 18.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

intellect”⁸⁷ because the will has a “special relation to reason and a number of functions associated with it.”⁸⁸ Among the functions of the will has to do with a) freedom and responsibility and b) will-power. This shows the intimate connection between these two faculties of the human person.

In a more general context, Augustine’s view of the will despite its defectiveness, is an essential operative faculty which every being is bound to exercise. That is why for Augustine, human will cannot by itself achieve deification without God’s grace. And since we do not have any capacity through our own will or initiative to be in union with God, we simply render or submit our will to Him. But Aquinas may find will different from Augustine’s.

What then is Aquinas’ concept of the will and how his view departs from or influenced Eckhart?

The will is defined as a rational appetite which belongs to the power of the soul. As an appetite, it has the power to direct the soul to what is the end or goal. Aquinas distinguishes sensory appetite from intellectual appetite. The will belongs to the latter. For him the difference lies on the fact that the will commands not on the immediate impulse of the body unlike other animals but based on the command of the will. Aquinas said,

In other animals, the appetite of desire or aggression is acted upon immediately; thus a sheep in fear of a wolf, runs away immediately, for it has no higher appetite to intervene. But a human being does not react immediately in response to an aggressive or impulsive drive, but waits for the command of a higher appetite, the will.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Josef Lössl, “Intellect with a (divine) Purpose,” 53.

⁸⁸ Richard Sorabji, “The concept of the will from Plato to Maximus the Confessor,” 7.

⁸⁹ Cited in Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 64. See *ST* 1, 81, 3.

As a *rational* appetite it means, according to Gallagher, the following: (a) it involves relating means and ends; (b) capacity for reflection on one's practical judgments; (c) ability to desire universal objects or simply particular objects as instances of some wider universal.⁹⁰ Moreover, the will points to something which is desirable or good. It is the nature of the will, as Aquinas argues to predicate goodness or badness to what it desires to accomplish. That is why, when we think of human action, we value them whether it is good or bad/evil instead whether true or false for this value belongs to the intellect.

While the exercise of the intellect is found in one's capacity to understand the object which the intellect has perceived, the will, on the other hand, exercises affective disposition such as love, charity, justice, etc.⁹¹ In this sense, it sounds as if the will is supremely higher than the intellect since it is the charity – which is a matter of the will, that makes the person a 'something' rather than 'nothing'. This obviously runs contrary to Aristotle's claim, which Aquinas also followed, that among the faculties of the soul, the highest among them is the intellect. Does this mean that Aquinas abandoned the Scriptural affirmation of the superiority of the will and instead opted to side with Aristotle?

It is clear to Aquinas that between intellect and will, the former is the highest faculty. For instance, in *ST I, q. 82 a. 3* Aquinas addresses the question concerning the issue of superiority between intellect and will. For Aquinas, both faculties assume a sense of superiority but as such must be qualified. This means for him that "[t]he superiority of one thing over another can be

⁹⁰ David M. Gallagher, "Thomas Aquinas on the Will as Rational Appetite," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 29, no. 4 (October 1991): 559.

⁹¹ Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind*, 42.

considered in two ways: ‘absolutely’ and ‘relatively’.”⁹² Aquinas continues,

If therefore the intellect and will be considered with regard to themselves [in a sense of absolute], then the intellect is the higher power...[f]or the object of the intellect is more simple and more absolute than the object of the will; since the object of the intellect is the very idea of appetible good; and the appetible good, the idea of which is in the intellect, is the object of the will.⁹³

In other words, for Aquinas the intellect is nobler and greater because it has the capacity to process or cognize something that is not readily cognizable and at the same time comprehending the most abstract of things. However, Aquinas also makes clear that ‘relatively’ the will is superior over the intellect. He explains: “[b]ut relatively and by comparison with something else, we find that the will is sometimes higher than the intellect, from the fact that the object of the will occurs in something higher than that in which occurs the object of the intellect.”⁹⁴ In this sense, while the intellect’s object is found within the soul, thus directs itself introspectively, the will’s object is outside of itself, directing its gaze toward something concrete and thus on things. As Aquinas puts it: “that ‘good and evil,’ which are objects of the will, ‘are in things,’ but ‘truth and error,’ which are objects of the intellect, ‘are in the mind.’”⁹⁵ Toward the end of that section, he insists the superiority of the intellect over the will, despite the fact that love is an expression of will which according to St. Paul makes us ‘something’ rather than ‘nothing.’ Aquinas says, “[w]herefore the love of God is

⁹² Aquinas, ST I, q. 82 a. 3.

⁹³ ST I, q. 82 a.3.

⁹⁴ ST I, q. 82 a.3.

⁹⁵ ST I, q. 82 a.3.

better than the knowledge of God; but, on the contrary, the knowledge of corporeal things is better than the love thereof. Absolutely, however, the intellect is nobler than the will.⁹⁶

It should be noted, therefore, that the position of Aquinas regarding the superiority of the intellect can be thought in line with the thinking that intellect is superior ‘absolutely’ as far as its power to know is concerned. As Anthony Kenny argues, “[b]oth of them [intellect and will] are concerned with goodness: but while the will can want various concrete goods, the intellect can achieve a general theory of goodness.”⁹⁷ It is like saying that the intellect determines the content of what goodness consists in and thus guides the will into it. While the will, though its end is to desire goodness, its determination is dependent on the intellect. It is as if saying, the will is blind though it infinitely desires, without the intellect it cannot find its destined direction.

We see in Aquinas that the will is not entirely independent of the intellect. In a sense that their interaction is so intimate and that each of their vested powers when exercised are shown to be so intertwined. Due to this, Aquinas finds it difficult to give a clear-cut separation line between them. For instance, Aquinas says “it happens sometimes that there is an act of the will in which something of the [preceding] act of reason remains...and, *vice versa*, there is [sometimes] an act of reason in which something of the [preceding] act of will remains.”⁹⁸ It is this intertwining relation between will and intellect that according to Stump is the source of the freedom in the will. The *liberum arbitrium*, as

⁹⁶ ST I, q. 82 a.3

⁹⁷ Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind*, 71.

⁹⁸ Cited in Eleonore Stump, “Aquinas’ Account of Freedom: Intellect and Will,” fn. 29. See Aquinas *ST I-II* q.17 a.1

Stump argues, is “not a property of the will alone. It can be understood as a property of the will only insofar as the will itself is understood to be the *rational* appetite and to have a close tie to the intellect.”⁹⁹ But this view no longer holds water when it comes to Eckhart. To be sure, Eckhart follows the view of Aquinas about the intellect with certain form of radicality but not on the issue concerning the will. Here, Eckhart follows Augustine. But as to whether he has succeeded in getting rid of the will altogether in his speculation on deification remains doubtful. In what follows will be a discussion on Eckhart’s view of the will, and in conjunction with the conditions for the union or deification.

Meister Eckhart on the Human Will and Deification

In *Sermon 9*, Eckhart identifies three kinds of will, namely: *sensible*, *rational* and *eternal* will. According to him:

The sensible will seeks guidance, so that one needs a proper teacher. The rational will means following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and the saints, that is, so that words, deeds and way of life are alike directed to the highest end. When all of this is accomplished, God will give something more in the ground of the soul, that is, an eternal will consonant with the loving commands of the Holy Ghost.”¹⁰⁰

The first two kinds of will are inherent in humans while eternal will is something that humans must work in order to achieve it. The condition for this achievement of the eternal will is to ‘accomplish’ the essential functions

⁹⁹ Stump, “Aquinas’ Account of Freedom,” 285.

¹⁰⁰ Eckhart, *Sermon 9*, p. 88.

of the first two kinds of will. In so doing, according to Eckhart, the eternal will can be attained. It is therefore not in human being's inherent capacity unlike the sensible and rational will to exercise the eternal will.

However, if this happened, humans enjoy the fullness of God's love without ceasing. What then is implicit in this description of the types of will is how the will is understood by Eckhart. Following the views of his predecessors, Eckhart does not deviate radically from what they thought is the proper or formal signification of the will. Eckhart thinks, following Augustine, that the will must be eliminated insofar as the desire for the union with God is concerned. Thus, Eckhart argues "[a]s long as a man is so disposed that it is his *will* with which he would do the most beloved will of God, that man has not the poverty we are speaking about: for that man has a *will* to serve God's will – and that is not true poverty!"¹⁰¹ What this means for Eckhart is that poverty implies the abandonment of the will, relinquishing it totally without condition. One can only become poor when one "wants nothing, knows nothing, and has nothing."¹⁰² In other words, there is nothing more to a human being than to be 'poor' aside from emptying oneself of one's own will – turning oneself into 'no-thing' because what hinders a human being to be no-thing is one's attachment to things or objects. As long as a human being clings to one's will, never will one be able to empty oneself of the same. Here, Eckhart turns extremely radical. He says in the same sermon, "as long as you have the *will* to do the will of God, and longing for eternity and God, you are not poor: for a poor man is one who wills nothing and desires nothing."¹⁰³ That is why Eckhart invokes the figure of the 'poor' to insist the

¹⁰¹ Eckhart, Sermon 87, p.421.

¹⁰² Ibid., 420.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

idea that poverty implies lackness. But, it is because of this lack of something, that gives the poor the privilege to gain ‘no-thing’. Nonetheless, in order to understand more what Eckhart is trying to do here, we may then ask: what does it mean by leaving one’s own will and let God’s will become my will? And what implication/s would it have once one has achieved the flight from the self-will?

In one of his treatises, Eckhart poses a question, “when is the will a right will?” his answer is that “the will is perfect and right when it has *no selfhood* and when it has gone out of itself, having been taken up and transformed into the will of God.”¹⁰⁴ What this passage amounts to is that the key to the relinquishment of the will is to cut-off one of the most essential predicates of the human person – the self. Eckhart might have been thinking that for the will and the act of willing to be abolished, it is the self that we must first eliminate. Interestingly, Eckhart has foreshadowed Heidegger’s project of doing away the will in thinking through his concept of *Gelassenheit*. But most importantly is the fact that Eckhart sees the fundamental connection in the formation of the self to the will and vice-versa. For instance, Eckhart says “we must learn to free ourselves of ourselves in all our gifts, not holding on to what is our own or seeking anything either profit, pleasure, inwardness, sweetness, reward, heaven or own own will.”¹⁰⁵ What does this passage mean in relation to the eradication of the self? Let’s recall the criticism lodged by Stump against Eckhart when she said that Eckhart holds a no-self view of denunciation. In her essay, Stump argues that such view, denouncing oneself altogether without remainder, is totally implausible. But as I argued against Stump, it is a category mistake

¹⁰⁴ Eckhart, *Selected Writings*, 53. Italics added.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 78.

to think of the self as synonymous to person. What was crucified on the cross was the person of Christ and not his self. But in the issue concerning total abandonment of the self as intimated by Eckhart, it is not clear if such an act, which for Eckhart is “one work which is *right* and proper for us to do,”¹⁰⁶ the will will totally disappear. Also, we may wonder as well as to what are we to do once the self has been eradicated, reducing it into nothingness? All the more we think about this, the more we see the complexity of Eckhart’s thoughts.

We should take into account some important considerations in appraising his seemingly conflicting claims and aporias. Eckhart speaks about the will that must be eliminated. But in what sense did Eckhart use the term ‘will’? Eckhart speaks about the will as the source of the production of self-interests and all other externalities which do not help the person forming himself in God. Eckhart insists that in order for the union to operate, one has to be actively passive, in Eckhart’s words ‘potential receptivity’.¹⁰⁷ What this active passivity means for Eckhart is that in the mode of passivity one is not merely just a passive witness to the arrival of the Godhead. But you are instead actively participating in it. This, of course is possible only when one has overcome oneself by having no self at all. Eckhart asserts, “he who has abandoned self and all things who seeks not his own in any thing, and does all he does without Why and in love, that man...is alive in God and God in him.”¹⁰⁸ For Eckhart the Godhead reveals himself to the ‘ground’ of the soul where the union takes place. And so, one is being aware only when one is able to get rid himself of himself. As Eckhart puts it, “your being aware of Him is not in your power but in

¹⁰⁶ Eckhart, *Selected Writings*, 83.

¹⁰⁷ Eckhart, Sermon 4, p. 56.

¹⁰⁸ Eckhart, Sermon 16, p. 125.

His. When it suits Him He shows Himself, and He can hide when He wishes.”¹⁰⁹ And since God is not a being unlike anybody else, the way to know Him is to “come to the state of being *nothing* in order to enter into the same nature that He is.”¹¹⁰ Again, Eckhart insists that this can only happen when the will is annihilated and “where you truly go out from *your* will and *your* knowledge, God with His knowledge surely and willingly goes in and shines there clearly.”¹¹¹

However, it is not only just through the annihilation of the self in order to be nothing that man can be with God. Another condition for the deification is what Eckhart calls ‘unknowing’. This unknowing is still within the bounds of the activity of relinquishment or *Gelassenheit*. In this sense, it is not only the will that is to be abandoned but knowledge as well which is the product of one’s intellectual faculty. All knowledge, according to Eckhart, are images. What this means for him is that any form of representational knowledge by virtue of its being a representation takes a form of an image or a copy of what is real and true. That is why Eckhart keeps on insisting that in order to really know God is to abandon all our knowledge of images and concepts. As Eckhart puts it, “unknowing is the way to be one with God. This means if not knowing that is made of images and such images hinder the soul to be in union with the One.”¹¹² Hence, anything that is an image or a concept and whatsoever are inadmissible in the process of knowing God since those are all forms of hindrances to the accessibility of the hidden essence of the Godhead. Eckhart unceasingly reminds his audience that “*anything* you put in the front of your mind, if it is

¹⁰⁹ Eckhart, Sermon 4, p. 58.

¹¹⁰ Eckhart, Sermon 7, p. 74.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Eckhart, Sermon 8, p. 77.

not God in Himself is – however good it may be – a hindrance to your gaining the highest truth.”¹¹³ It is due to our creatureliness that we have persistently create images or concepts which are only representations of things real. This is inevitable insofar as we are creatures endowed with intellectual faculty but as such falls short to account for what a thing really is in itself. Here, Eckhart rejects the principle of adequation wherein one can have truth by way of correspondence. For Eckhart, in relation to knowing God, such principle cannot be applied. The only way to get access to the inaccessible and ineffable is to exercise the mode of unknowing. This mode of unknowing is “not a lack but your chief perfection, and your *suffering* your highest activity.”¹¹⁴ In relation to knowing and creatureliness, Eckhart says, “where creature stops, God begins to be. Now all God wants of you is for you to go out of yourself in the way of creatureliness and let God be within you.”¹¹⁵

Given all this, there remains the problem concerning the will. On the account of detachment and deification, we find the necessity of cutting off from the person one of its essential properties – the self. Its destruction paves the way for the will to disappear giving an opening for the unwillingness and unknowing as well. These modes of human activity are required for deification to happen. In order for God to be in me and I in God, I must *will* to will the eradication of my selfhood through the process of relinquishment or detachment. This is also true for unknowing. One has to get rid of all intellectual impurities brought about by the images and concepts one has created for oneself. This kind of doing,

¹¹³ Eckhart, Sermon 14, p. 115.

¹¹⁴ Eckhart, *Selected Writings*, Sermon 2, p. 44.

¹¹⁵ Eckhart, Sermon 13, p. 110.

i.e., of non-doing is a precondition for one to know God not in the form of representations but in the direct and true revelation of God of Himself to oneself there in the locus of the union which Eckhart calls the ground.

However, behind this mode of deificatory process is the will that is at play. As I indicated in the beginning of this paper, the will, in general, has not been totally obliterated. Why is that so? When thinking about the abandonment of the will, it is quite implicit therein that one has to will to will such abandonment. In this sense, following Harry Frankfurt, we have structured our will such that we form a ‘first-order will’ and ‘second-order will’. This will to will in Frankfurtian sense is the second-order will. In the case of abandoning the will, it is not a simple willing that is required since what it tries to do is to abandon the thing that which gives the power to do so. It is like saying that I want to abandon my body but in abandoning it you need to get out from it which is extremely impossible. Applying this structural formation of our will to the case of Eckhart, we find that in our will to will the ejection of the will we have arrived at what Michael Sells calls “volitional aporia” which means according to him, “the more one wills to abandon her will, the more one is willing and is caught up in her will.”¹¹⁶ Sells continues,

The paradox of will in Eckhart here finds a new expression. To give up will (in the radical sense of no longer even willing to do God’s will, willing not to have sinned, willing blessedness, heaven, avoidance of hell) is to reach a point where the human will is voided and only the divine will remains a kind of mystical union of will.”¹¹⁷

Similarly, commenting on Heidegger’s attempt to

¹¹⁶ Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, 166.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 167.

overcome the domain of will in thinking, David Lewin argues that the negation or submission of the will

Remain[s] within the economy of the will and are, to that extent, sublimations that serve merely to sustain or even extend, the currency of willful subjectivity. Where mystical theology rests upon the suppression of human will, it fails to radically undercut this structure.¹¹⁸

What they are trying to say is that in the end, Eckhart's view of the will in relation to the abandonment of itself fails to do so. As I argued in the previous section, the will remains operative in trying to detach oneself from the will and in the act of unknowing. I agree with Radler when she points out that what is being deserted is not the will in general but just a form of it, "[a]bandonment of the autonomous self implies the kenotic desertion of the *personal will* and *self-assertiveness* of the individual existence that automatically excludes the other."¹¹⁹ In the same vein, Lewin explains that Eckhart's "conception of detachment does not rest with the suppression or negation of the will, but makes the move to undercut entirely the structure of willful subjectivity."¹²⁰ Does this mean that since the will has not totally eradicated, deification is nullified? My take is that it is not. Deification remains plausible despite the failure to abandon the will in the process. I say so because elsewhere in his works Eckhart himself claims that deification can be attained in the here and now. Richard Kieckhefer enumerates different forms of union

¹¹⁸ David Lewin, "The Middle Voice in Eckhart and Modern Continental Philosophy", 41.

¹¹⁹ Charlotte C. Radler, "Living from the Divine Ground: Meister Eckhart's Praxis of Detachment," *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* vol. 6 no. 1 (Spring 2006): 34.

¹²⁰ David Lewin, "The Middle Voice in Eckhart and Modern Continental Philosophy," 41.

with God, namely: (1) Habitual, (2) Ecstatic, (3) Unitive Life, (4) Abstractive, (5) Nonabstractive.¹²¹ Among these forms of union, according to Kieckhefer, Eckhart holds the (1) and (5).¹²² He explains “Eckhart did not view ecstatic or abstractive union with God as integral to the life of the soul, or even as a goal to be sought or particularly treasured. The state to which he invites his reader is that of habitual and nonabstractive union.”¹²³ The union with God can be attained in this lifetime and so because it is attainable in the spatio-temporal setting, then it is sound to think that the will does not in any way whatsoever nullifies the fulfillment of the union with God. On the contrary, the will remains operative in the process. And so, another issue arises. If deification is spatio-temporally possible, what happens to the will or to the person after reaching the union? In other words, in a post-deificatory event, does the will remain operative? It is clear that in a post-deificatory event, the will remains active. It is due to the fact that despite being deified, the person remains finite whose personhood is informed by his/her intellect and will. As long as a human being lives the will remains intact and working. The same applies to the intellect. Here lies Eckhart’s extreme radicalness when it comes to his notion of the union of God. It is, unlike, other forms of union experienced by mystics, Eckhart’s view of the union requires a kind of active engagement with the

¹²¹ Richard Kieckhefer, “Meister Eckhart’s Conception of the Union with God,” *Harvard Theological Review* 71, no. 3-4 (October 1978): 204.

¹²² For Kieckhefer *habitual* union is “that God is present within the human soul and within creation generally, and that the moral task incumbent upon human beings is to heighten their awareness of God’s indwelling so that they may better manifest it in their lives” (208).

¹²³ Richard Kieckhefer, “Meister Eckhart’s Conception of the Union with God,” 224.

world and its ordinariness. So in a post-deificatory event, when man has been trans-deified he finds the ordinary, may it things or objects or event, extraordinary.

Conclusion

What I have mapped out so far in this paper is the role of the human will in Eckhart's understanding of deificatory event. For Eckhart, in order to achieve deification one has to abandon the self and the will, so that God's will becomes one's own will. In abandoning the will as a faculty and the self as an essential human predicate, it paves the way for the entry to the union with God. For Eckhart these are the preconditions for deificatory event to occur. However, as this paper tries to show, it seems implausible for the will to be eradicated or totally annihilated in the process of abandonment. As argued, this is because the will, despite its limitation and defectiveness, remains an essential source of human action together with the intellect. And so, even in willing not to will or willing to abandon the will, it remains a form of willing which is a function of the will nonetheless. Moreover, despite the ineliminable condition of the will, it does not affect in sinister manner nor nullify the deificatory event. Further, the same will works in post-deificatory event.

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