

# Meister Eckhart and the Interpersonal Productivity of Detachment

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**In the study, I aim to show the interpersonal productivity of detachment in Meister Eckhart's mysticism. I explore Eckhart's doctrine of detachment against the background of his theology and psychology showing that detachment leads not only to a deeper relation with God and oneself, but also to an absolutely inclusive relation with fellow humans. In the first part, I discuss the basic tenets of Eckhart's theology and psychology focusing especially on God as the One and on the ground of the soul. In the second part, I examine Eckhart's theory of detachment, covering both its theological, psychological and interpersonal aspects. I also present detachment as a key pillar of Eckhart's doctrine of love and show its relevance for practical spirituality. In the conclusion, I highlight the central role of detachment in Eckhart's thought and its interpersonal implications.**

## 1 Introduction

Mysticism has an ambivalent reputation in philosophy. On the one hand, it is considered as conducive to sentimentalism and irrationalism, and its asceticism is interpreted as an escape from the world. On the other hand, it is valued for its dialectical innovations and interpreted as a form of speculative philosophy. The latter view has often been associated with Meister Eckhart's mysticism that has, however, also been criticized for interpersonal and ethical unproductivity [1]. In this article, I aim to present the core of Eckhart's mysticism – *the doctrine of detachment* – as interpersonally productive and fruitful. I will demonstrate that detachment leads not only to a deeper relation with God and oneself but also to an absolutely inclusive relation with fellow humans. In the first part, I will discuss the basic tenets of Eckhart's theology and psychology focusing especially on God as the One and on the ground of the soul. In the second part, I will explore Eckhart's theory of detachment, covering both its theological, psychological and interpersonal aspects. I will also present detachment as a key pillar of Eckhart's doctrine of love. In the conclusion, I will highlight the central role of detachment in Eckhart's thought and its interpersonal implications.



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## 2 Eckhart's Theological Psychology as the Basis of His Doctrine of Detachment

Eckhart develops his doctrine of detachment against the background of his theology and psychology. In both of these areas he places a great emphasis on oneness: the oneness of God and the oneness of the soul.

In his theology Eckhart develops the traditional Christian teaching of the *one* God, which he enriches with elements from Neoplatonic philosophical theories of the One. He claims that God is *one* (Lat. *unus*), *the One* (Lat. *unum*), *the pure One* (Ger. *daz einvaltic ein*), and *the indivisible One* (Ger. *daz einig ein*) (Eckhart LW IV, 264; DW I, 43; DW III, 437) [2].

Reflecting on the Christian debate about God's names, Eckhart acknowledges the name *the One* (Lat. *unum*; Ger. *daz ein*) as the most appropriate, since it corresponds best to God's simplicity and indivisibility (Eckhart LW IV, 31) [3; 4]. Eckhart is well-aware of the fact that human talk about God is characterized by a multiplicity of divine names. However, in order for this polyonymy to be meaningful, it "must in the end converge to a single name 'that is above all other names.' 'Unum' ... is superior to all other names, which are combined in its unified perfection" (Lossky 1998, 60). Although Eckhart sometimes attaches to the name *the One* uncontroversial adjectives, such as *pure* or *simple*, he mostly uses the basic nouns alone: *unum* in Latin and *daz ein* in German.

Eckhart interprets the name *the One* in an *apophatic* way. Unlike *kataphatic* names, it does not highlight a partial characteristic or action of God, rather it negates all partiality and particularity. Thus, it can be defined as a negation of a negation. The negation, which it negates is the contradictoriness that is inherent in the created world: created things are opposed to each other, they negate each other and are innerly conflicted. They are in a constant flow colliding with each other. By contrast, the One is characterized by immobility and changelessness, it is innerly at peace and the fullness of being subsists in it (Eckhart LW III, 608–609).

Since the name *the One* does not highlight any particular feature of God, it does not "contaminate" God's being with additional characteristics. It negates all partial negations, since particular attributes exclude and negate their opposites (Eckhart LW II, 486). The One as the negation of the negation is not part of the process of particular negations that takes place in the realm of multiplicity. For this reason, the name

*the One* is preferable to other divine names – such as the Good (Lat. *bonus*) and the True (Lat. *verus*) – that constitute a specific prism, through which we perceive God and direct our attention at a particular mode of his being.

Yet another fact that the focus on God's oneness brings to the forefront is that the One is *indistinct*. Through his indistinctness God distinguishes himself from all created beings, which are distinct from each other and themselves are composed of distinct parts (Eckhart LW II, 482, 490; Beierwaltes 1980, 97–104). God is devoid of inner distinction; He is absolutely simple and indivisible. God is mere unity and none of the inner divine processes are marked by otherness and multiplicity. Eckhart interprets also the mystery of the Holy Trinity along these lines: It is "*Unity, which begets Unity, and its shine is reflected in itself*" (Eckhart LW III, 135; Ruh 1995, 336).

God is indistinct not only in relation to himself but also in relation to the created world, whose source of being he is. While created beings differ from each other and negate each other, God is present in the ground of their being as a unifying indistinct foundation. Drawing on the Neoplatonic doctrine of the One that is simultaneously above everything and in everything, Eckhart argues that the One is "*the exclusion of distinction, the exclusion of number and multiplicity ... [note: it is] in-distinct in itself and simultaneously indistinct from other things, which are in themselves and among themselves distinct*" (Beierwaltes 1972, 40–41). The created otherness is distinct both internally and externally, it is characterized by multiplicity and limitation. God as the indistinct One is absolutely simple and permeates all creation as its indistinct ground.

Eckhart transposes his theological insights into psychology and identifies the indistinct One as the deepest source of one's being. The One is reflected in the innermost "part" of the human soul. When applying a name to this "part" Eckhart follows the line of thought he developed when discussing the issue of the supreme divine name. He refers to the soul's deepest dimension as *the one of the soul* (Lat. *unum animae*) (Eckhart LW IV, 313). However, most commonly he refers to it as *the ground of the soul* (Ger. *grunt der sêle*), while using also other metaphorical names. While all the terms employed by Eckhart to denote the ground of the soul are semantic equivalents, the most frequent Latin counterpart of the German term *grunt der sêle* is *essentia animae* (Langer 1987, 177).

Eckhart developed his thinking in the context of medieval Christian mysticism that was inspired by the Stoic concepts of the "*center of the personality*" (Ivánka 2003, 339). These concepts were adapted for the purposes of Christian psychology and combined with Neoplatonic and Augustinian

terminology. Thus, when referring to the deepest (or highest) dimension of the soul Eckhart used terms, which were common in the contemporary philosophical-mystical discourse: *the essence of the soul* (Lat. *essentia animae*), *the spark of the soul* (Lat. *scintilla animae*), *the supreme part of the soul* (Lat. *supremum animae*), or *the apex of the mind* (Lat. *apex mentis*) (Largier 1993, 764; Langer 1987, 177; Ruh 1996, 336). He complements these with a series of German terms, which – while denoting the same entity – evoke a wide variety of images. Eckhart comments on this variety of terms in the following way: “*I have sometimes said that there is a power [Ger. ein kraft] in the soul, which alone is free. Sometimes I have called it the guardian of the spirit [Ger. huote des geistes], sometimes I have called it a light of the spirit [Ger. lieht des geistes], sometimes I have said that it is a little spark [Ger. vünelîn] ... It is as completely one and simple as God is one and simple, so that no man can in any way glimpse it ... So one and simple is this citadel [Ger. bürgelîn] in the soul.*” (Eckhart 2009, 80–81). Although Eckhart’s imagery is at times quite colorful, we must not lose sight of the fact that it refers to a dimension of the soul, which – as Eckhart incessantly reminds us – is completely one and simple.

In contrast to Platonic and Aristotelian psychological theories the Stoics developed a monistic view of the soul that did not presuppose separable parts of the soul that could be ordered into a hierarchy (Ivánka 2003, 334). Eckhart integrates this approach into his view of the soul when pointing to the ultimate unity of the soul provided by its ground. This ground is not to be identified with any of the higher powers of the soul – reason, will or memory – that are oriented towards the multiplicity of the created world. Eckhart explains that the higher powers of the soul deal with what comes from outside and are active in the realm of multiplicity. The ground of the soul – that is the ultimate source of the powers of the soul – is “inactive” and “silent” in relation to the world, since it is receptive only to the One: “*Whatever the soul effects, she effects with her powers. What she understands, she understands with the intellect. What she remembers, she does with memory; if she would love, she does that with the will, and thus she works with her powers and not with her essence ... this part is by nature receptive to nothing save only the divine essence, without mediation ... None can touch the ground of the soul but God alone. No creature can enter the soul’s ground, but must stop outside, in the ‘powers.’*” (Eckhart 2009, 31). The ground of the soul is inaccessible not only to created things but even to God as manifested in the multiplicity of his actions and characteristics: “*No created being or even God clothed in some robe ever penetrates into the essence of the soul.*” (Eckhart LW IV, 115). Thus, the ground of the soul is a domain reserved exclusively for God without attributes: God as the One.

When explaining the nature of the *ground of the soul* Eckhart avails himself of the theory of the *image of God* (Lat. *imago Dei*). He describes the relation between God and the ground of the soul as the relation between the one, whose *image is reflected* (Lat. *exemplar*), and the *image itself* (Lat. *imago*). The image is fully dependent on the One whom it reflects, it reflects only the One and owes its being to nobody and nothing else: it is not image by virtue of the bearer in whom it is, but by virtue of the One whom it reflects. The image and its origin are inseparable (Eckhart LW IV, 218; Eckhart LW III, 19; Langer 1987, 182). It is clear that the soul is closest to God there, where it is his image. Since a true image of God can only be found in the ground of the human soul, other created beings are related to God in a different, less intimate way. To be sure, God is present in every creature as its indistinct source of being, but only in the ground of the soul is he fully reflected, and thus present in his own element. This is due to the fact that the ground of the soul has an intellectual nature. This brings us to the most controversial part of Eckhart’s psychology.

As we have explained above, Eckhart considers *reason* (Lat. *intellectus*) one of the three higher powers of the soul. However, he attributes an intellectual nature also to the ground of the soul: “*Beyond the soul, which manifests itself as the source of human impulses, is a principle of an intellectual nature. This principle is the ground of the natural essence of the soul and thus also of the essence of man.*” (Sturlese 1998, 95; Largier 2003, 200–201). The intellect as a higher power of the soul is oriented toward the multiplicity of the created world that is incompatible with the ground of the soul. Thus, the intellect as the ground of the soul is an intellect in a very specific sense: it is the undivided intellect, which is the ultimate source of the powers of the soul (Flasch 1998a, 146). With regard to this intellect the question arises to what extent it is the uncreated divine intellect (*exemplar*), and to what extent it belongs to man (*imago*). The role of man in the reflection of the divine intellect in the ground of the soul remains an object of scholarly controversy. Although we do not need to enter into the depths of this controversy, it is important to highlight the role of the intellect in Eckhart’s psychology, as it is a key factor in the debate about the dynamic of detachment that we intend to explore.

### 3 The Ground of the Soul, Detachment and Neighbor-Love

Eckhart's doctrine of detachment is based on his theological-psychological reflections on the interaction between God and man. Thus, it is directly linked to his theory of the intellect, which deals with God's reflection in the ground of the soul. Eckhart draws on the Anaxagorean-Aristotelian metaphysical and psychological tradition, according to which the intellect is *separated* (Gr. χωριστός; Lat. *separatus*), *unmixed* (Gr. ἀμυγής; Lat. *immixtus*), it *abstracts from here and now* (Lat. *abstrahit ab hic et nunc*), and it *has nothing in common with anything else* (Lat. *nulli nihil habens commune*) (Panzing 2005a, 106–111). Eckhart translates the Latin terms *separatus* and *abstractus* into German as *abegescheiden* (Panzing 2005b, 345), from which he derives one of the two German nouns with which he denotes detachment: *abegescheidenheit*. The other noun *gelâzenheit* is derived from the verb *lâzen* – “to let”, “to leave” – that is a translation of the ascetic terminology found in the Latin New Testament: *relinquere* and *abnegare* (Panzing 2005b, 338–341). Both *abegescheidenheit* and *gelâzenheit* are considered neologisms, as they are not documented in German literature before Eckhart (Panzing 2005b, 345). They are synonyms highlighting the fundamental negative nature of detachment that is in one case related to the notion of separation and in the other to the notion of letting go. In Eckhart, however, they are united in denoting the transcending of the characteristic features of creation: corporeality, multiplicity and temporality. Further details will be provided below. The Latin nouns used by Eckhart to denote detachment are *separatio*, *abstractio* and *abnegatio*. In the medieval dispute between Dominican intellectualism and Franciscan voluntarism, Eckhart sided with the former, which affected both his doctrine of detachment and his theory of interpersonal relations. The theological and psychological primacy of the intellect is in line with Eckhart's emphasis on oneness and simplicity, while he associates the will with multiplicity and diversity. In a crucial statement, Eckhart claims that “*the intellect in the true sense is divine, and ‘God is one.’ Therefore, we participate in God, in the One and in the union with God so much as we participate in the intellect and intellectivity. Because the one God is intellect and intellect is the one God. Therefore, God is not God ... anywhere but in the intellect*” (Eckhart LW IV, 269; Imbach 1976, 165; Mojsisch 1983, 86).

The *undivided intellect (the ground of the soul)* is more sublime than the will, because it penetrates to the very essence of God and man and grasps them in their being. The will,

whose object is the good, seeks out the good in God and man, and grasps them only to the extent that they are good. Thus, the object of the intellect is simpler and higher than the object of the will. While the intellect aims for the *one* being of God or man, the will aims for the *many* good aspects of each of them.

Eckhart highlights the primacy of the undivided intellect also *vis-à-vis* the intellect as the power of the soul. The latter is – just like the will – oriented toward the multiplicity of the creation. The undivided intellect transcends both of these powers: “*The proper work of man is to love and to know. Now the question is, wherein does blessedness lie most of all? Some masters have said it lies in knowing, some say that it lies in loving: others say it lies in knowing and loving, and they say better. But we say it lies neither in knowing nor in loving: for there is something in the soul from which both knowledge and love flow: but it does not itself know or love in the way the powers of the soul do. Whoever knows this, knows the seat of blessedness.*” (Eckhart 2009, 422). Eckhart does not suggest that the ground of the soul does not know or love at all (Flasch 1998b, 192–193), rather that it does not know or love in a fragmentary way like the powers of the soul. His aim is to go beyond multiplicity and fragmentariness, transcend the powers of the soul and focus on its ground. The process that enables him to do so is detachment. It creates space for a new type of human activity, which proceeds from the ground of the soul – from the undivided whole of knowing and loving – and is focused on the One.

When describing detachment Eckhart draws on a number of Biblical motifs that he develops in accordance with his theology and psychology. When commenting on the motif of hearing God's voice, he claims that this voice proceeds from the ground of the soul. If we are to hear it, we need to detach ourselves from three principal sources of contradictoriness and fragmentariness: corporeality, multiplicity and temporality: “*Whoever would hear the eternal wisdom of the Father, he must be within, and at home, and must be one: then he can hear the eternal wisdom of the Father. There are three things that prevent us from hearing the eternal Word. The first is corporeality, the second is multiplicity, the third is temporality. If a man had transcended these three things, he would dwell in eternity, he would dwell in the spirit, he would dwell in unity and in the desert – and there he would hear the eternal Word.*” (Eckhart 2009, 295). Thus, corporeality, multiplicity and temporality direct man's attention to the disunity of the creation and cloud his view of the spiritual, the unified and the eternal.

When reflecting on Jesus' sermon on the Mount of the Beatitudes, Eckhart interprets the motif of spiritual poverty as

a symbol of detachment. He presents the image of a *man poor in spirit* – a detached man – as one who “wants nothing, knows nothing and has nothing” (Eckhart DW II, 188). This man has detached himself from fragmentary wanting, knowing and owning, he has transcended the multiplicity of the powers of the soul and focuses solely on the ground of the soul. By means of detachment he has freed himself from “*that, which is not one, i.e., that which is distinct from the ground of the soul, this is present in him in the form of knowing, wanting and owning*” (Altmeyer 2005, 114).

It is obvious from what we have said above that detachment is both a given and a task. It is a given, because both God and the ground of the soul are *per se* detached – they are devoid of multiplicity, fragmentariness and contradictoriness. It is a task, because it represents the ultimate goal of the individual’s ascetic self-formation. In this context the question arises if the goal of such striving should not be something more positive, such as the love of one’s neighbor? A closer examination of this issue will reveal the interpersonal productivity of detachment.

Eckhart develops a theory of love, whose key pillar is the doctrine of detachment. At the center of this theory is not love as human performance but love as self-communication of the One. Detachment enables man to participate in this divine communication. Instead of pursuing partial goals of human love, which focuses on the good, man opens himself to God’s detached love, which proceeds from the ground of the soul. This love directs everything to the One and does not satisfy itself with anything but the One. Detachment disposes man to receive this love, so that it can continue to flow through him into the world. Since the One is reflected in the depth of the soul, the detached love is not something external and foreign to man, rather it is the innermost love that he is capable of. It proceeds from a deeper level of his soul than the love, which he initiates himself at the level of the higher powers of the soul. Through participation in detached love man becomes a collaborator in God’s activity in the world and the mediator of God’s self-communication.

Although detachment includes a negative moment of transcending one’s natural bond to multiplicity, it involves by no means a complete rejection of multiplicity. Rather, it restructures one’s approach to multiplicity and enables a new mode of activity in the realm of multiplicity [5]. Eckhart illustrates the “fertility” of the detached individual with an image of a *virgin* who has become a *wife*: “*If a man were to be ever virginal, he would bear no fruit. If he is to be fruitful, he must be a wife. ‘Wife’ is the noblest title one can bestow on the soul – far nobler than ‘virgin.’ For a man to receive God within him is good,*

*and in receiving he is virgin. But for God to be fruitful in him is better, for only the fruitfulness of the gift is the thanks rendered for that gift, and herein the spirit is a wife.*” (Eckhart 2009, 78). Thus, virginity represents the negation that creates space for God’s activity within man, which subsequently affects the world.

Detachment as the negation of corporeality, multiplicity and temporality is a *conditio sine qua non* of man’s participation in the love with which the One loves the world. The aim of detachment is to overcome the limits and contradictions of multiplicity by perceiving it through the prism of the One. Such a perception is possible due to the fact that the indistinct One is present in the ground of every created being. Through detachment one frees himself from his primary focus on multiplicity and recognizes that the One constitutes the deepest dimension of each being. Creation-as-multiplicity is a negation of its own unity provided by the indistinct One. Detachment is a negation of this negation, since it enables man to focus on the creation’s inner unity and overcome its fragmentariness. Detached love is characterized by the negation of “*everything that causes division*” (Eckhart LW IV, 441).

The love, with which God loves the world, is *one* and it is his very essence. Although it permeates everything, it remains indivisible: “*God does not have more than one love*” (Eckhart DW II, 287). While this love focuses on the One in the deepest ground of every being, it does not disregard the created element. The creation is loved as a whole (Haug 1998, 217). The detached man opens himself to this love in an act of self-transcendence, in which “*he is more in God than in himself*” (Eckhart DW I, 80). He loves according to what he has received, not according to what he has created himself (Eckhart LW IV, 64).

In interpersonal relations detached love focuses on the other in his utmost simplicity. Detached love differs from volitional love by having as its object being, not the good. The other human – the neighbor – is defined by his mere being and is loved for his own sake, not for the sake of the good that he provides. Volitional love is partial and fragmentary, it is dependent on the characteristics of its object. If the object were not good, it would not want him. Detached love, which flows from the ground of the soul, is not conditioned by the object’s characteristics, it grasps him in his “nakedness” – in the purity of his being.

Thus, detached neighbor-love is determined neither by the measure of the neighbor’s goodness nor by the loving subject’s preferences. Since the only determinant of this love is

the unifying One present in the ground of the soul, it makes no sense to compare and hierarchize humans. Detached love is not guided by concepts like *precedence, degree, more or less* (Kern 1992, 750). The image of God in the ground of the soul guarantees that the relation between the one who loves and the loved one is that of equality and inclusiveness. Detachment from the preferences of one's own will facilitates a radical expansion of the capacity of love. Detachment overcomes one's natural bond to corporeality, multiplicity and temporality, which inhibit the spread of inclusive love for every human. Since detached love is *one*, even the difference between self-love and neighbor-love disappears (Langer 1986, 22). Thus, detachment represents the basis of a universal love that includes all people, nobody is excluded due to his characteristics. This love is divine by nature and man's role is to contribute to its dissemination in the world. It has been entrusted to him and proceeds from his innermost depth. It is radically different from the love that is a creation of his own will and seeks in the neighbor a reflection of his own desires. Detached love transforms interpersonal relationships according to God's very nature: it unifies them in absolute inclusivity.

The presented doctrine of detachment has a substantial effect on lived spirituality. It leads man toward a unified spiritual life guided by a single spiritual principle. Instead of focusing simultaneously on a number of different principles – that would raise the issue of their hierarchy and compatibility – the practitioner of detachment pursues a straightforward spiritual formation. As we have explained above, perfect detachment is the ultimate goal of the individual's ascetic self-formation. Gradual detachment is the way of achieving this goal. In this context we can conceive of detachment as the supreme virtue guiding other virtues. Eckhart describes it as “*the best and highest virtue whereby a man may chiefly and most firmly join himself to God, and whereby a man may become by grace what God is by nature*” (Eckhart 2009, 566). Eckhart adds that this is so, because “*all virtues have some regard to creatures, but detachment is free of all creatures*” (Eckhart 2009, 566). Thus, Eckhart's doctrine of detachment is a special take on virtue ethics. Instead of focusing one's spiritual life on the practice of four *cardinal virtues* (prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance) and three *theological virtues* (faith, hope, love), Eckhart proposes a focus on the practice of a single virtue: detachment. As we have demonstrated above in the case of love, detachment is not an isolated virtue, rather it opens the way to the practice of other virtues. In this practice it fosters a strong reliance on God's activity. The development of good habits and the realization of good works would be impossible without the activity of the divine One within man's soul. The conscious

collaboration with this activity is a presupposition of fruitful spiritual life. As for the traditional distinction in the field of practical spirituality between *via purgativa, via illuminativa* and *via unitiva*, detachment clearly relates to the *first way*: it is a separation, a letting go, a negation. It relates, however, also to the *third way*, as it emphasizes from the outset the unity of the ground of the soul with God, whom it reflects. This has been clearly tracked by Robert J. Kozljanič in Eckhart's sermon *In hoc apparuit caritas dei in nobis* that discusses the individual stages of the mystical way (Kozljanič 2001, 166–167). It could be argued in this connection that Eckhart's doctrine of detachment contains motifs that resemble the concepts of nothingness and emptying out in John of the Cross [6]. This is indeed true, but there is no scholarly consensus on the extent of the Spanish mystic's reception of German medieval mysticism. Eckhart's mystical spirituality – and his doctrine of detachment – lived on in the works of his Dominican pupils Johannes Tauler and Heinrich Seuse, and more broadly in the tradition of Rheno-Flemish mysticism. The works of the representatives of this tradition – including Tauler and Seuse – were in the 16<sup>th</sup> century translated into Latin and later into Spanish (Clark 2013, 50–51). Through these translations this spiritual tradition was known to John of the Cross (Mazzocco 2013, 620–621), but a more precise determination of the trajectory of reception and of theoretical intersections is beyond the scope of this paper. It is evident, however, that both Eckhart and John of the Cross developed a spirituality in which negative notions are dominant. Eckhart's spirituality of detachment found an echo also in a number of apocryphal writings ascribed to his pupils. Among these the most important is the Pseudo-Taulerian *The Imitation of the Poor Life of Christ* (1548) – a handbook of detachment spirituality – that included numerous paraphrases of Eckhart's statements on detachment (Šajda 2008, 250).

Thus, for Eckhart the union with God is not some distant goal, it is a present actuality that needs to be uncovered through spiritual exercise. Detachment is both a given and a task. The consciousness of this union infuses man's spiritual life with positivity and makes him aware of his noble character. Overall, we can say that from the perspective of practical spirituality detachment both highlights the limits of human activity and emphasizes the noble character of the human soul. Man's ascetic practice is meaningful only inasmuch as it is a conscious collaboration with God's initiative proceeding from the ground of the soul. The ultimate goal of one's spiritual journey is already present in one's soul, it just needs to be fully uncovered and developed properly.

## 4 Conclusion

Our exploration of Eckhart's doctrine of detachment has made it clear that detachment is positioned at the very center of his thought. It is a key concept of both his theology, psychology and ethics. Detachment is a crucial apophatic characteristic of God and the ground of the soul, whose interaction is a fundamental topic of Eckhart's mysticism. While detachment is a theological and psychological given, it is also an ethical task. Every human individual is called to form his existence in accordance with the divine image in his soul. Detachment is a way of creating space for increased divine activity within man, with which he collaborates and whose mediator he becomes. God and man act simultaneously in disseminating detached love in the created world. This love

focuses on the unity of the creation provided by the indistinct One and thus differs from volitional love that focuses on particular aspects of individual beings. Detached love has a beneficial effect on interpersonal relations, as it looks past everything that creates division among humans. It is a reflection of the absolutely inclusive divine nature and thus does not disqualify anyone on the basis of his characteristics. It is limited neither by the sympathies and antipathies of the loving subject nor by the shortcomings of the object of love. Everyone is included in this love without having to deserve it. Eckhart's theory of love is a clear evidence of the interpersonal productivity of detachment. It also shows that practical spirituality based on detachment prompts the individual to fully unfold the noble character of his soul in which the divine One is reflected.

## Notes

- [1] Eckhart's value for speculative philosophy was highlighted especially by the proponents of German idealism, such as G. W. F. Hegel, F. Rosenkranz, or H. L. Martensen. In turn, Eckhart's thought was described as ethically problematic and interpersonally unproductive by the critics of German idealism, such as C. Schmidt and F. A. Staudenmaier. Both of these approaches had later followers. I discuss both approaches in my previous paper (Šajda 2009).
- [2] Translations are my own unless indicated otherwise.
- [3] I provide a more detailed overview of Eckhart's theological psychology in my previous study (Šajda 2020).
- [4] For a comprehensive overview of Eckhart's understanding of God see Enders (2013).
- [5] Dialectical conceptions, which capture positive effects of negative phenomena, are common in medieval mysticism. See, for example, the conception of sin as an award in Julian of Norwich (Trajtelová 2019, 6).
- [6] I thank the anonymous referee for drawing my attention to this fact.

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