

Dear reader,

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* on 16 Jan 2019, available at
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21692327.2019.1566020>

Original publication:

Avakian, Sylvie

“Eckhart, Heidegger and Caputo: A Reappraisal of The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought”

in: *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, 2020, vol. 81, issue 1, pp. 36–54

<https://doi.org/10.1080/21692327.2019.1566020>

Access to the published version may require subscription.

Published in accordance with the policy of Taylor & Francis:

<https://authorservices.taylorandfrancis.com/research-impact/sharing-versions-of-journal-articles/>

Your IxTheo team

Eckhart, Heidegger and Caputo
A Reappraisal of “The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought”

Sylvie Avakian

Sylvie Avakian – Lecturer for Systematic Theology – University of Tübingen

Sylvie Avakian studied theology at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut and graduated with a Masters in Divinity in 2007. In 2011 she completed her doctoral degree in the field of Systematic Theology at Heidelberg University. The title of her doctoral dissertation is: *The Other in Karl Rahner’s Transcendental Theology and George Khodr’s Spiritual Theology within the Near Eastern Context*. She has been a lecturer in Systematic Theology at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut between 2011- 2015. In July 2018 she completed her post-doctoral dissertation) at the University of Tübingen with the title: “*Being toward Death*”: *Heidegger and the Orthodox Theology of the East*. Presently she is a lecturer (privat Dozentin) for Systematic Theology at the University of Tübingen.

Abstract

This article aims at a reconsideration and a reappraisal of the mystical nature of Martin Heidegger’s thought in juxtaposition with the mystical theology of Meister Eckhart. My purpose here is to demonstrate the similarities between the thoughts of the two authors and to maintain the relevancy of Heidegger’s works to our contemporary times. It is my own conviction that contemporary theology must move beyond the pure metaphysical and scientific ways of doing theology toward a more open, spiritual and mystical perception of the divine, and that Heidegger’s works can be used as tool for making this move.

Thus, contrary to John D. Caputo, who claimed that the similarity between the two thinkers—Eckhart and Heidegger—is a similarity of structure, rather than content, and that Eckhart failed in destroying metaphysics while Heidegger’s thought is ‘dangerous’ and ‘ominous’, I argue here further that the similarity between the two is similarity of content, and that the works of the two authors have a perpetual value, within the fields of both philosophy and theology.

Keywords

Martin Heidegger

Meister Eckhart

Christian Theology

The Mystical Element

Spiritual Theology

John D. Caputo

Philosophical Theology

Through the examination and the elaboration of the thought of the twentieth century philosopher Martin Heidegger in juxtaposition with the theology of the medieval mystic Meister Eckhart, the present article aims at bringing into light the relevance of Heidegger's philosophy to contemporary thought and theology, ascribing the significance of his contribution to "the mystical element" present in his works.

In order to achieve this goal, I will, first, consider the "the mystical element" in Heidegger's thought as presented by John D. Caputo. In his works Caputo succeeds to build bridges between Heidegger's philosophy and the mystical thought of Eckhart. And, yet, he concludes that the similarity between Eckhart's mysticism and Heidegger's thought is a similarity of structure, and not of meaning and content. Thus, in the first part of the article I will introduce Caputo's critique of "the mystical element" in Heidegger's works by presenting several "dissimilarities", pointed out by Caputo, such as: the notion of a transcendent God in contrast to the birth of God in the human soul and the perception of the human being as a created image in contrast to viewing him/her as capable for being a whole. Caputo's claim, that Heidegger was 'historically' influenced by Eckhart's works and had 'appropriated' mysticism as a structural 'model' of thought, without extending this impact far beyond a surface level, will be critically examined. Contrary to Caputo's position, I will argue here that the similarity between the two is a similarity of substance and meaning. Furthermore, I will show that Caputo's critique is founded on a misinterpretation of some of the claims of the two authors. In the second part of this article I will present a reappraisal of the mystical nature of Heidegger's thought, advocating its profound contribution for contemporary Christian thought and theology. Here, I will explore the parallelism between Heidegger's and Eckhart's thoughts by referring back to those dissimilarities pointed out by Caputo, in an attempt to penetrate the depth of their original

meaning and significance.¹ This will make the discovery of the matter of their thoughts and the retrieval of the original meanings of their teachings possible. An attentive consideration of the thought of both authors will also demonstrate the deep similarity and correspondence in meaning and content between the two. This will shed further light on the mystical nature of Heidegger's thought and the theological value of his works, indicating its perpetual value and the indispensability of his contribution for contemporary Christian thought and theology.

I. Caputo's Critique: The 'Dis-analogies' and 'Radical Dissimilarities'

In his works: *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* and *More Radical Hermeneutics: On Not Knowing Who We Are*, John D. Caputo presents an enlightening comparison between the thoughts of Heidegger and the Master of the fourteenth century. He perceives Heidegger's revolution against the high metaphysical conception of philosophy as 'radical', a revolution that maintains the need to leave the sphere of 'rational argumentation' behind and even depart it entirely.² Here Caputo points out the deep affinity between both Heidegger's understanding of thinking and mysticism, resembling Heidegger's overcoming of metaphysics to the 'mystical leap'. And, yet, soon Caputo draws upon the inconsistencies in, and the deficiencies of, the thoughts of both Martin Heidegger and Meister Eckhart. He highlights the analogies between the thoughts of both the mystic and the philosopher and, surprisingly, after such a favorable presentation, he warns the reader from any 'identification' between the two, maintaining that

¹ At many occasions Heidegger shows that he has read Eckhart closely. Already in his Habilitation-thesis (in 1915) he makes a reference to Eckhart. His lecture: "The Concept of Time in Historical Science" begins with a citation of Eckhart's words that maintain the simplicity of eternity compared to the variability and the complexity of the present time. In a letter to his wife, on 22.01.1919, Heidegger writes and comments about the different editions of Eckhart's sermons. In a lecture, from 1930s, Heidegger writes that it is with Eckhart that German philosophy begins. He continues to allude to Eckhart's thought in his lectures between 1940-1950. (See: "The Country Path" [*Der Feldweg*] 1949, in which Eckhart is represented as an old master.) Some major themes of Eckhart that Heidegger indorses are the notions of 'letting be' [*Gelassenheit*] and 'detachment' [*Abgeschiedenheit*]. At several occasions, in the present article, both themes as addressed by Eckhart and Heidegger will come fore. See: Martin Heidegger, *Letters to his Wife 1915-1970*, Gertrud Heidegger (Ed.), R. D. V. Glasgow (Tr.), (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), 61-62. For a study of these themes in Eckhart's thought see: Erik Alexander Panzig, *Geläzenheit und Abgescheidenheit. Eine Einführung in das theologische Denken des Meister Eckhart*, (Leipzig, 2005).

See further: Otto Pöggeler, "Mystical Elements in Heidegger's Thought and Paul Célan's Poetry", (Tr. Henry Pickford), in Aris Fioretos (Ed.), *Word Traces: Readings of Paul Celan*, (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1994), 75-109; Ernst Diederichs (Ed.), *Meister Eckharts Reden der Unterscheidung*, (Kleine Texte für Vorlesungen und Übungen, 117), (Bonn, 1913), Moran Eckhart, „Meister Eckhart in Twentieth-Century Philosophy“ in Jeremiah Hackett (Ed.), *Companion to Meister Eckhart*, *Brill's Companion to the Christian Tradition* Vol. 36, (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013, 669-698.

For recent studies on both Eckhart and Heidegger, and also Caputo's contribution, see: Barbara Dalle Pezze, *Martin Heidegger and Meister Eckhart; a Path towards Gelassenheit*, (Edwin Mellen Pr. 2008), Bret W. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will. On the Way to Gelassenheit*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008); Barbara Mahoney, *Denken als Gelassenheit*, (Freiburg, 1993); Hans-Joachim Simm (Ed.), *Von der Gelassenheit: Texte zum Nachdenken*, (Frankfurt: Insel, 1995).

² John D. Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986), 4-5.

both are separated “by differing dispensations (*Geschicke*) of Being.”³ Caputo claims that behind the analogies between Eckhart’s mysticism and Heidegger’s thought there are ‘dis-analogies’ and ‘radical dissimilarities’.⁴ He concludes by claiming that Heidegger had assimilated mysticism as a mere structural ‘model’ of thought rather than coming close to it in any deeper sense.

A. God as Transcendent vs. Divine – Human Unity

Caputo contends that Eckhart’s God is “transcendent, self-sufficient, timeless, perfect Being”.⁵ And, yet, a deeper look at Eckhart’s works reveals how he, contrary to an transcendent notion of God, maintains that it is the role of the human soul to uncover God and eliminate all that is the outcome of the compiled history of theology, namely that which is the creation of the human mind. His later sermons speak of the union with God, which is utterly non-conceptual,⁶ and describe the need of God to seek for the human being, more specifically for the ‘humble’ one. Eckhart writes:

[F]or the heights of divinity cannot look down except into the depths of humility, for the humble man and God are one and not two. This humble man has as much power over God as he has over himself; ... for what God performs he performs too, and what God wishes he wishes too, and what God is he is too—one life and one being. Yes, by God! If this man were in hell, God would have to come down to him in hell, and hell would have to be for him the kingdom of heaven.⁷

Eckhart writes again:

[I]t is a sure truth and a necessary truth that God has such a need to seek us out—exactly as if all his Godhead depended on it, as in fact it does. God can no more dispense with us than we can dispense with him. Even if it were possible that we might turn away from God, God could never turn away from us.⁸

³ Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 30.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁵ Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 30.

⁶ Gundolf M. Gieraths, *Life in Abundance: Meister Eckhart & the German Dominican Mystics of the 14th Century*. (Dominicans, Province of St. Albert the Great, Autumn 1986, Vol. 38 Supplement.) Accessed: 06.02.2017. <http://opcentral.org/resources/2015/01/28/life-in-abundance-meister-eckhart-the-german-dominican-mystics-of-the-14th-century-fifteenth-century-dominican-spirituality-by-gundolf-m-gieraths-o-p/>

See also: Karl Bihlmeyer & Hermann Tüchle, *Kirchengeschichte. 2, Das Mittelalter*, (13th Edition), (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1952), 425.

⁷ Meister Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart. The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, And Defense*, (Tr. E. Colledge & B. McGinn), (Mahwah, NJ.: Paulist Press, 1981), 190.

⁸ Meister Eckhart, ‘Sermon: “Woman, The Hour Is Coming,”’ in *Wandering Joy: Meister Eckhart’s Mystical Philosophy*, (Tr. & Comm. Reiner Schürmann), (Great Barrington: Lindisfarne Books, 2001), 56. In this same work, in the commentary part, Schürmann writes: “For Eckhart, the necessity that binds God to man is absolute, a necessity of nature. It transcends the relationship of Creator to creature and refers to the energetic identity in the birth of the Son. If we follow Meister Eckhart’s thought to the bottom, we find that there is no God without man. God is placed in dependence on man, to the point of receiving his being and his life from him”. (p. 80)

For Eckhart, the human and the divine are one and not two. he writes, “the humble man and God are one”. They are “one life and one being”.

Caputo avoids those lines of Eckhart and insists that Eckhart’s God is a transcendent, self-subsisting first Cause, who is not in need of the human being, contending that union with God, for Eckhart, emerges as a “super-transcendent being”.⁹ It is true, as Caputo explains, that German mysticism, to which Eckhart belonged, was influenced by scholastic instruction and neo-Platonic dynamics, and thus Eckhart’s specific milieu should be considered for a faithful interpretation of his writings.¹⁰ However, this does not bring the reader to claim that Eckhart’s position is other than the mystical tradition that maintains the mutual self-appropriation of God and the human being, and that Eckhart’s God is in no need to extend the divine life to creatures.¹¹ Caputo’s writes further: “were the relationship of God to creatures in Eckhart assimilated to the relation of Being to beings in Heidegger, then the absolute transcendence of God would be destroyed and the Inquisition would have rightly charged Eckhart with heresy”.¹² He argues that Eckhart’s conception of a transcendent God leaves the human being with no ‘will’. “Eckhart has in mind the man who has become so thoroughly one with God and God’s will that he has no will of his own, a man whose love of God is so perfect that he loves not with his own love, but God’s own.”¹³ Contrary to Caputo’s reading of Eckhart, and following the words in their context, one would realize that genuine human love, for Eckhart, is nothing other than divine love, and human will, whenever is free, it is nothing other than divine will, not in the sense that the human subject is deprived of love and will, but rather the opposite. The true love and will of the human subject are the fullness of love and will, which are the same as divine love and divine will, in such a way that the dichotomy between the human and the divine vanishes. In the following lines we read Eckhart saying:

Do all you do, acting from the core of your soul, without a single “Why.” I tell you, whenever what you do is done for the sake of the Kingdom of God, or for God’s sake, or for eternal blessing, and thus really for ulterior motives, you are wrong. ... for if life were questioned a thousand years and asked: “Why live?”

⁹ Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 30.

¹⁰ Eckhart’s theology was an attempt to reconcile Christian belief with neo-Platonic tradition, somehow similar to the reconciliation of Aristotelian philosophy and Christianity in Thomas Aquinas’ thought. In both Aquinas and Eckhart, the Greek element is present, whether through Aristotelian or Platonic tradition. Furthermore, it is my contention that the Platonic dynamics of Eckhart’s thought brings his works alongside the Greek Orthodox theology. See: Meister Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart: Selected Writings*, (Tr. & Int. O. Davies), [The Introductory word: “Meister Eckhart: An Introduction to His Life and Thought”] (London: Clays Ltd., 1994), xi- xxxix. See also: Vladimir Lossky, *Théologie Négative et Connaissance de Dieu chez Maître Eckhart*, (Paris: Vrin, 1998).

¹¹ Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 183.

¹² *Ibid.*, 184.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 30.

and if there were an answer, it could be no more than this: “I live only to live!”
And that is because Life is its own reason for being, springs from its own Source,
and goes on and on, without ever asking why—just because it is life.¹⁴

Thus, the core or the ground of the soul is so near to God, or is Godself, that whenever one acts or lives in accordance to it, then, surely one is living authentically and in accordance to the will of God. Eckhart’s God is “equally near to every creature.”¹⁵ God is “God in you”, Eckhart writes. He is the one who asks: “Ah, beloved people, why don’t you let God be God in you?”¹⁶ If we further hearken to the master’s voice, we hear him saying: “Indeed, the Kingdom of God is within us”.¹⁷

B. The Notion of ‘Godhead’ vs. the Birth of God in the Human Soul

Caputo contends that there is an inconsistency in Eckhart’s thought between his ‘predominantly Neoplatonic’ notion of ‘Godhead’ and the ‘breakthrough to the Godhead’ and, on the other hand, his ‘Christian’ and ‘orthodox’ notion of the ground of the detached soul, where the human spirit is united with God through the birth of the Son in the soul in a nameless and inscrutable manner. Caputo attempts at demonstrating the differences and the inconsistencies between Eckhart’s two notions: the previous one, he explains, is about ‘substance’, it is ‘stillness and unity’, while the second is about ‘relations’, ‘Trinity’ and ‘process’.¹⁸ Moving to Eckhart’s notion of *Gelassenheit*, Caputo defends it against his own interpretation of Heidegger’s ‘mistaken’ understanding of Eckhart, namely as merely passivity and as an ‘ethico-religious’ attitude. Caputo claims that contrary to this, Eckhart’s *Gelassenheit* is about “emptying out all ‘representations’”, and that it reaches beyond mere passivity and human will to “the realm of will-less unknowing in which God’s ground and my ground are the same”.¹⁹ Afterwards, and somehow in contradiction to his earlier claim, Caputo maintains that “Heidegger’s remark does bring out the fact that in Eckhart the soul is released to a being of infinite goodness, of perfect love and boundless care for His creation. ... there is nothing to fear in God; God is only to be loved”.²⁰ Accordingly, Caputo criticizes Eckhart’s perception of God, as a “transcendent, self-sufficient, timeless, perfect Being”.²¹ He asserts the great divergence between Eckhart and Heidegger, and concludes that “there is all the difference in the world between being released

¹⁴ Meister Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*, (Tr. R. B. Blakney), (New York: Harper & Row, 1941), 127.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹⁸ Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 28-129.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 180.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 181.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

to [Heidegger's] the event of Being and being released to Eckhart's God."²² Caputo claims that Eckhart's God does not need the human being. "For Eckhart, God is a transcendent creator and first cause Who is above being, i.e., creation, and Who could well subsist without the creature from which He is absolutely distinct."²³ Throughout Caputo's discussion the reader is left unsure about Caputo's position, between his earlier advantageous display of the thoughts of the two thinkers and his confounding critiques of them.

In his later work, *More Radical Hermeneutics*, Caputo similarly contends that Eckhart's theology defended a 'super-essential being' and that his discarding of language had a 'hyperousiological agenda', namely it aims at endorsing the transcendent existence of God beyond all language deficiencies.²⁴ Caputo continues to maintain that Eckhart's notion of mystical union is in accordance with the onto-theo-logical perception and that it fulfils the metaphysical longing for presence in a way that metaphysics itself was incapable, replacing conceptual presence with the mystical 'super-presence'.²⁵ He writes:

Eckhart was not above trying to arrest that play and calm the storm he had stirred up, by bringing the onto-theo-logical system which he had disturbed into a higher, mystical closure, into union with The Secret. He was after all a priest and a friar.²⁶

Furthermore, in this same work, and somehow again contradicting his earlier positive assessment of Eckhart's notion of the birth of the Son in the human soul, Caputo criticizes "the timeless unity of the soul's ground with God's ground", claiming that it "is just another creature, another signifier which belongs to an historical-Neoplatonic vocabulary."²⁷

In the second part of this paper I will throw light on Eckhart's two accounts of divine-human unity as two complementary phases. There, I will contend that the Son who is born in the human soul is the same 'Godhead', who is before 'God'—the creator—or the 'God' known and worshiped by human beings. 'God'—the creator—or the one being worshiped and known is, for Eckhart, mostly the creation of the human intellect and the outcome of centuries of metaphysical and religious speculation. While God who dwells in the heart is the core, it is the essence of divinity; it is the one without covers, or without accumulated human prescriptions about the divine.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid, 184.

²⁴ John D. Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics: On Not Knowing Who We Are* (Bloomington [u.a.]: Indiana Univ. Press, 2009), 253.

²⁵ Ibid, 256.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

C. The Human Subject as a ‘Created Image’ vs. as One who is Capable of Being a Whole

Caputo further criticizes Eckhart’s notion of the pre-existence of the human being in the mind of God,²⁸ claiming that it reduces the human being to a mere “created image” and “a weak copy of the original essence”. He writes:

Eckhart’s creatures are created images of their eternal exemplars in the mind of God; their existence is a weak copy of their original ‘essence’ in God’s essential being.²⁹

However, it may not be an insignificant observation here to note that behind Eckhart’s notion of the pre-existence of the soul lies the early Orthodox teaching on the divine origin of the human being. The teaching implies that all human words [λόγοι], or ideas of creation, were pre-existing in God, or in the second person of Trinity [the λογος], and together form the image of God, or the mystic body of Christ. Accordingly, the origin of the human being is to be found in God.³⁰ Caputo himself cites Eckhart’s words, where he says: “Where God is, there is the soul; where the soul is, there is God.”³¹ He cites Eckhart again:

It is God’s nature that He give, and His being depends on the fact that He give to us, if we are submissive to Him. If we are not and we receive nothing, then we do Him violence and kill Him.³²

Though Eckhart describes God as essentially a God who gives, such a God will need the human soul to receive the gift. However, Caputo remarks that “this is not exactly Eckhart’s view.”³³ He says that the birth of God in the soul is grace and grace is not a necessity, which is to say that God would be God even without the human reception of the gift. Furthermore, Caputo hastens to classify Eckhart as a “Dominican master at Paris”, who contrary to ‘German idealists’, would never hold that God’s *esse* could be in anyway lacking or in need of human spirit.³⁴ In order to justify his argument Caputo refers to Eckhart’s defense against charges of

²⁸ Caputo quotes Eckhart’s words: “For if a man should truly have poverty, then he must be so devoid of his created will as if he did not yet exist.” Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*, 228.

²⁹ Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 30.

³⁰ From the Eastern Church Fathers both Basil the Great and Maximus the Confessor claimed that the *logoi* [the human beings or the human words] are “preexistent in the Logos”. Maximus the Confessor wrote: “the many *logoi* are one *Logos*, the very Son of God.” See: Polycarp Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor and His Refutation of Originism*, (Romae: Herder, 1955), 26, 179; Jacques Paul Migne (Ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus / Series Graeca* (162 vol.), (Paris: Migne, 1857-1866), Amb 42-1329A1-B7.

³¹ Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart: Meister Eckhart, Meister Eckhart: Selected Writings*, (The Introductory word), 2-3.

³² *Ibid.*, 174.

³³ Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 124.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 125, 127.

heresy,³⁵ where Eckhart says that he used “emphatic expression, commending God’s goodness and love”.³⁶ Caputo claims that as a preacher Eckhart wanted to encourage the hearers to embrace detachment. By this, Caputo is disregarding the following words of Eckhart, where Eckhart is construing on the relationship that brings the human being to God, as he says: “he [the Father] begets me his Son and the same Son. All that God does is one; therefore he begets me as his Son without distinction.”³⁷ Caputo seems to be selective, concerning Eckhart’s statements, in order to provide justification for his interpretation. He maintains the orthodoxy of Eckhart, that is his “scholastic” and “onto-theo-logic” position,³⁸ while he oscillates between describing Eckhart’s mysticism, on the one hand, and the claim that Eckhart was an onto-theologian on the other.³⁹ Caputo concludes that Eckhart’s mysticism does not succeed in avoiding metaphysics, rather demands supernatural transcendence of the human subject beyond his/her natural abilities, and that it is founded upon Christian supernatural grounds, which perceive God as ‘a being’ or ‘a person’.

Furthermore, Caputo admonishes the reader not to perceive Eckhart’s ‘ground of the soul’ in parallel lines with Heidegger’s ‘*Dasein*’, that is the experience of being. This time Caputo is critical of Heidegger and he contends that Heidegger’s event of being [*Ereignis*] is ‘ominous’ and ‘fearful’ and that being for Heidegger is ‘finite’ and is ‘permeated with negativity’; and that his notion of ‘releasement’ is removed from its religious origin, since it is not about being released to a loving father.⁴⁰ Caputo claims that Heidegger’s being is about the “epochal coming to pass of the event of truth, the successive clearings opened in the various historical ages”, and that to experience being is to take part in the historical movements of the ‘event’

³⁵ This particular charge against Eckhart was concerning his claim that the “Father begets his Son in the soul in the same way that he begets him in eternity and not otherwise. He must do so whether it pleases him or displeases him.” Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*, 296.

³⁶ Caputo writes that Eckhart, at the time of his condemnation, “hastened to assure them [the theologians of the Curia] that he spoke with ‘brother Thomas’ (Aquinas), that he believed in the living God, and that his more extreme formulations were spoken *emphatice* ...” Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics*, 254. Cf. Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 183.

See the whole discussion of Eckhart’s condemnation, to which also Caputo refers: Bernard McGinn, “Eckhart’s Condemnation Reconsidered” in *The Thomist* (1980) 44, 390-414. See particularly: pp. 398-399. McGinn here describes the ‘heresies’ claimed against the Meister and in footnotes 44 and 45 he refers to certain statements which Eckhart denied to have said them, while other statements he never denied saying them. Caputo, however, refers only to the denial-statements, without even discussing the reason behind the denial. On p. 400, of the same article, McGinn cites the words of the Meister: “I am able to be in error, but I cannot be a heretic, for the first belongs to the intellect, the second to the will.” Hence, in his defense, it was clear that the intention beyond any theological claim was an important element for the Meister rather than their verbal construction. (cf. p. 402) McGinn concludes that “Eckhart’s responses were uneven, but they were not without coherence nor without significance as a challenge to the theological basis of the inquisitional process”. (p. 411)

³⁷ Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*, 297.

³⁸ Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 125.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 251-252.

(*Ereignis*).⁴¹ Caputo concludes that this has nothing to do with Eckhart's 'timeless', 'ahistorical' and 'eternal' ground.⁴² And, hence, he contends that Heidegger's being has nothing of what Eckhart implies about God. Rather, he summarizes Heidegger's intentions as to address the technological world and to bring the reader to a realization that "there is a deeper power at work in the history of the West than all human willing and human calculating."⁴³ Contrary to Caputo's claim, Heidegger's event of appropriation is unhistorical [*ungesichtlich*] and without destiny [*geschicklos*], since it is that which sends presence. It gives presence within time and makes it possible. The event of appropriation "is not simply an occurrence, but that which makes any occurrence possible."⁴⁴ One must further ask here: what is, then, that "deeper power" which is "at work in the history of the West" and is other than all human calculation, for Heidegger? We read Heidegger writing:

Being is that which shows itself in the pure perception which belongs to beholding, and only by such seeing does Being get discovered. Primordial and genuine truth lies in pure beholding. This thesis has remained the foundation of western philosophy ever since.⁴⁵

Of course, Heidegger writes about being or "primordial and genuine truth" rather than God. But what is being or "primordial truth", for him? We continue to read Heidegger, who writing about truth says:

Truth (uncoveredness) is something that must always first be wrested from entities. Entities get snatched out of their hiddenness.⁴⁶

Heidegger's truth is not separable from entities. One can see how these words of Heidegger echo Eckhart's words of prayer: "May the loving and compassionate God, who is the truth itself, grant to me ... an inward awareness of truth."⁴⁷ In the second part of this article I will show that the human being, for both Eckhart and Heidegger, is given the potential of becoming a whole, that is of being united with God/being as such. Contrary to this, Caputo concludes that

the likeness between Eckhart and Heidegger which is taking shape for us is a likeness in difference, a similarity of structures and relationships in the midst, however, of very basic differences in content.⁴⁸

⁴¹ Ibid., 161.

⁴² Ibid., 161.

⁴³ Ibid., 30.

⁴⁴ Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, (Tr. Joan Stambaugh), (New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco, London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1972), 19.

⁴⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, (Tr. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson), (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), (written: 1927), 215.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 265.

⁴⁷ Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*, 73.

⁴⁸ Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 30.

Later, Caputo poses several questions, and in one of them he asks whether “Heidegger’s way of detachment (*Abschied vom Seienden*) and “letting be” (*Gelassenheit*), having removed itself from any specifically Christian or religious context, become a dangerous and ominous path?”⁴⁹ Caputo’s use of the analogies between the two devalues the uniqueness of both Eckhart’s and Heidegger’s thoughts, maintaining that Eckhart failed in destroying metaphysics, while Heidegger’s thought is “dangerous and ominous”, “close to the edge of despair” and having no particular significance for ethics. By this, Caputo emphasizes the limitations of the thoughts of both thinkers. It is my own contention that though Caputo succeeds in throwing light upon the analogies between the thoughts of the two authors and, yet, he fails to think through those analogies in a way that their deeper meaning and significance for our contemporary theology and philosophy come to the fore. Neither Eckhart’s mysticism is such a safe undertaking, nor Heidegger’s experience of releasement entails fear and hopelessness, implying the sacrifice of one’s control over one’s life.⁵⁰ Caputo’s quivering claims make the reader conclude that his claimed discrepancy and divergence between Eckhart and Heidegger are built on unsafe and treacherous grounds. Thus, and though Caputo builds many beautiful bridges between the mystical approach of Eckhart and the philosophical thought of Heidegger, but then he sets to himself the duty of destroying them.

II. A Reappraisal of “the Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought”

Meister Eckhart and Martin Heidegger lived and wrote at different epochs, to different generations and had different platforms for their works. Eckhart, a Dominican German theologian and mystic of the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries, was successful in bringing philosophy and theology together, maintaining that both reason and revelation display the same truth, and propagating the movement of one’s intellect and its freedom from one’s own self. Heidegger, on the other hand, was a twentieth century German philosopher, whose thought influenced greatly Continental philosophy, and who criticized modern epistemology’s emphasis on logic that turned being as such, or God, into an ideal of human reason. Through the following comparative analysis of the works of the two authors an attempt at investigating the matter of their thoughts and retrieving the original meanings of their teachings will be

⁴⁹ Ibid., 45.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 252.

undertaken, aiming at bringing forth a parallelism and a correspondence between their contributions.⁵¹

A. Divine – Human Unity: God/Being as Nothing

“The soul must step beyond or jump past creatures if it is to know God.”⁵² By this Eckhart explains the ontological difference between God and creatures, yet, at the same time he indicates the possibility of the human soul to relate to God. God is beyond creatures; nevertheless, to the soul is given the knowledge of God. In his *On Detachment* Eckhart presents the notion of detachment as the highest virtue, which implies freeing and purifying the self from every worldly bondage. God, for Eckhart, is fully detached from all beings and things in the world, hence, God is not-a-thing, or, it is possible to say that God is pure being. Thus, it is in and through God that detachment occurs. As the human being experiences purification and detachment, he/she allows God to be all in him/her.⁵³ Union between the human and the divine occurs, then, whenever the human being opens him/herself up to God/being, or to no-thing.⁵⁴ The no-thing here stands for freeing the self from every boundedness to things or from becoming oneself a thing in the world. Hence, the way for opening the self to God is detachment [*Abgeschiedenheit*] from beings or, as Heidegger suggests, is essential thinking, through which one thinks of being as such, rather than beings.⁵⁵ Such experience of detachment through essential thinking is, nevertheless, accompanied with anxiety as the human subject departs the hectic everyday life with its affections and inclinations to things and beings. Anxiety, however, must be understood ontologically as it reveals that which is completely other, while the experience is secretly associated with serenity and joy. In such experience of anxiety releasement [*Gelassenheit*] is incorporated, and, by this, Heidegger approaches greatly the

⁵¹ It is important to note here that this article does not dwell on the so-called ‘turn’ in Heidegger’s thought. Be that as it may, it is my conviction that Heidegger’s essential claims do not change, particularly his thought concerning the question of being and its relatedness to the human being.

⁵² Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*, 166.

⁵³ Meister Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart, Selected Treatises and Sermons*, (Tr. J. M. Clark and J. V. Skinner), (London: Faber & Faber, 1958), 162-166. See on this: Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 20-21.

⁵⁴ Eckhart, *Selected Treatises*, 164. Cf. Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 12-14, 22. Eckhart uses the word *Abgeschiedenheit* [disinterest], namely the surrender or the renouncement of one’s own worldly attachments. He writes: “I put disinterest higher than love. ... Disinterest brings God to me and I can demonstrate it this way: Everything likes its own habitat best; God’s habitat is purity and unity, which are due to disinterest. Therefore God necessarily gives himself to the disinterested heart.” Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*, 82. On the other hand, the notion of ‘sacrifice’ in Heidegger’s thought, namely the surrender of one’s own self for the sake of preserving the truth of being, is an expression of thankfulness of the human being toward being as such, since any capability of thinking is granted through being. Heidegger’s notions of sacrifice and ‘*Abschied*’ are comparable to Eckhart’s notion of detachment, or indifference, according to which the human soul detaches itself from beings in order to maintain the truth of being, or of God. Martin Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” (1929) & “Postscript” (1943), (Tr. W. F. C. Hull & A. Crick) in *Existence and Being* (Ed. Werner Brock), (Chicago: Regnery Co., 1949), 358. See on this: Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 28.

⁵⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking* (1944-55), (Tr. J. M. Anderson & E. H. Freund), (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 46-47, 53.

mystical stand, particularly Eckhart's notion of detachment.⁵⁶ In his "Postscript" (1943), anxiety for Heidegger is an ontological state, in which that which is completely other than beings is granted revelation. This is the experience of no-thing and of the surrender and withdrawal of the human being from the world of beings, or things, to the inner world of being. This is the same experience of *Gelassenheit*. Such experience detaches the person from his/her earlier concerns of "what is", allowing the true being of "what is" to emerge. Describing the experience of anxiety Heidegger writes:

In the clear night of dread's Nothingness is what-is as such revealed in all its original overtness (*Offenheit*): that it 'is' and is not Nothing.⁵⁷

Hence, 'nothing' is not about nihilism or about that which is apart from 'being', rather it belongs to the essence of being, so Heidegger writes: "Pure Being and pure Nothing are thus one and the same."⁵⁸ This is in line with Eckhart's claim that 'Nothing' refers to Godself. Furthermore, both Eckhart and Heidegger maintain that the human being is more than a mere rational being. There is more to the human being than the capability of representational consideration, namely, there is a hidden ground which is the possibility of an open relationship to the ground of being or being as such.⁵⁹ Hence, both Eckhart and Heidegger urge the human being to open up the self to that which is beyond the human and the worldly, through which the human being is granted one's own essence. In his "What is Metaphysics?" Heidegger explains that it is possible to reach at 'nothing' only through a basic experience of 'being', which reveals that 'nothing' is not other than 'being'. In this sense, Heidegger's 'nothing' is comparable to Eckhart's 'nothing', namely to God.

Similar to Eckhart, who maintained that through a leap toward nothing the human being moves beyond the created temporal reality and shares in the life of God, Heidegger, in his "What is Metaphysics?", expresses the fundamental potentiality within the human being to proceed toward becoming a whole through a leap towards no-thingness.⁶⁰ In his *The Principle of Reason* (1955-56) Heidegger maintains that only through a leap of thought one can move beyond the metaphysician's search for grounds and reasons—as defended by Leibniz—towards a state of openness, through which the reception of the gift of being is made possible. There, Heidegger points out a region where there is no asking for reasons, namely is beyond the influence of

⁵⁶ Ibid., 72-73. Cf. Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 22-23, 27.

⁵⁷ Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?" & "Postscript", 339.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 346.

⁵⁹ Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Reasons* (1929), (Tr. T. Malick), (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 22-23. Cf. Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 160.

⁶⁰ See on this: Herman Philipse, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Being: A Critical Interpretation*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 244.

Leibniz's principle.⁶¹ Furthermore, by reading Leibniz's Principle of Ground [or Reason] from a new perspective—Nothing *is* without *ground (or reason)*—Heidegger turns it from a statement about beings into a statement about being, maintaining that “ground/ reason belongs to being.”⁶² Hence, being itself is the ground of every being, and things carry within themselves their own grounds and reasons, without their need to supply reasons for their existence.⁶³ Hence, the “play of Being” cannot be explained or rationalized through reasons and grounds. Rather one must surrender the inspection of grounds since being is a “mystery” [*Geheimnis*].⁶⁴ However, in order for the human being to uncover being and let it reveal itself, he/she needs to return to one's mortal and temporal reality, namely, to live genuinely in the world.⁶⁵

Here too it is possible to perceive the parallelism between the soul's relationship to God in Eckhart's theology and the human being's relationship to being in Heidegger's thought. Both Eckhart and Heidegger write on God/being, who/which grants the human being one's very essence. Such a gift, however, is not because of any human accomplishment, or the capability of conceptual thinking, rather it is through a necessary leap of faith—or of thought—that the gift is made accessible. The leap, in turn, is made possible through *Gelassenheit*, namely through letting-be, that is through letting God be God, or being be in truth. Both, the leap, and releasement [*Gelassenheit*], imply a step backward from metaphysics and philosophy, in the sense that one surrenders the search for reasons and grounds outside one's own reality.⁶⁶ It is in this sense of surrendering the rational justification of beings that through a leap of faith, or of thought, the Mystery of being itself is revealed and also received as a gift by the human being. Hence God, or being, gives Godself/itself as Mystery, while the human being, in his/her turn, receives the Mystery which he/she him/herself also is. In this way, Eckhart's mystical notion of the leap is comparable to Heidegger's notion of essential thinking, as he finds in the tradition of the mystics something like “thinking” (*Denken*). Heidegger says it clearly:

⁶¹ See: Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 48.

⁶² Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason* (1955-56), (Tr. R. Lilly), (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1991), 51.

⁶³ See: Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 69, 79.

⁶⁴ Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 55.

⁶⁵ Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, 112; Cf. Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 80-81.

⁶⁶ In his *The Principle of Reason [Der Satz vom Grund]* and in contrast to Leibniz's principle, namely that “Nothing is without ground”, Heidegger presents the words of the German mystical poet Angelus Silesius (Johannes Sheffler 1624-77), who, in turn, had borrowed the notion of ‘without why’ from Eckhart: “The rose is without why; it blooms because it blooms; It pays no attention to itself; asks not whether it is seen”, Angelus Silesius, *The Cherubic Wanderer: Sensual Description of the Four Final Things in The Book of Angelus Silesius, With Observations by the Ancient Zen Masters*, (Tr. F. Franck), (New York: Knopf, 1976), 66. The quotation appears in: Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, 35. See: Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*, 126-127; Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 8.

... one is inclined to get the idea that the most extreme sharpness and depth of thought belong to the genuine and great mystics. This is also true. Meister Eckhart proves it.⁶⁷

B. The Birth of God in the Soul and the *Dasein*

The birth of the Son in the human soul, or the human heart, is the work of God, in the sense that God—the Father—is the one being born in the human soul. Eckhart writes:

When God does this work in the soul, that is his birth: his birth is his work and his work is his Son. God performs this operation in the innermost depths of the soul so secretly that neither saint nor angel knows, nor is the soul herself a party to it save that she is the patient; God does it by himself.⁶⁸

The Father bears the Son in the human heart and engenders or generates the human being as the same Son of God. Eckhart writes:

The Father bears His Son incessantly, and I say still more: He bears me as His Son, and as the same Son.⁶⁹

By God's bearing the Son in the human soul the human being him/herself is procreated as the son, or daughter, of God. Thus, the human soul participates in the birth of the Son by willingly providing a place for God. In this sense, the human soul co-works with God in a way that the work of God becomes the work of the soul. Both—God and the human soul—being united share the same work.⁷⁰ The Son is the Word of the Father, since the Father speaks the Word through the Son to the human soul and the soul may respond to the Father by speaking the Eternal Word back to the Father.⁷¹ Eckhart continues further:

Out of the purity, he everlastingly bore me, his only-born Son, into that same image of his eternal Fatherhood, that I may be Father and give birth to him of whom I am born.⁷²

In this sense, the human being is a response to the Word of God in a way that he/she is equally a Word. It should be remarked here that the Word of God has a wider meaning for Eckhart than

⁶⁷ Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 36-37. Cf. Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 27.

⁶⁸ Meister Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart by Franz Pfeiffer. Leipzig, 1857. Translation with some Omissions and Additions*, (Tr. C. de B. Evans). (London: J. M. Watkins, 1956), 125. Accessed on 12 August 2017: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/208694440/Meister-Eckhart-by-Franz-Pfeiffer-Leipzig-1857-Translation-with-some-Omissions-and-Additions-Tr-C-de-B-Evans>]

⁶⁹ Meister Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart: An Introduction to the Study of his Works with and Anthology of his Sermons*, (Sel. & Trans. J. M. Clark), (London: Nelson & Sons, 1957), 188. Cf. Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 115.

⁷⁰ Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart, Selected Treatises and Sermons*, 102; Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart: An Introduction to the Study of his Works*, 135, 214, 235. See: Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 164-165.

⁷¹ Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart: An Introduction to the Study of his Works*, 131, 214.

⁷² Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart. The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, And Defense*, 194.

its common theological use. For Eckhart, all of creation is a book, the author of which is God. All the creation is the offspring, the Son of the Father. Hence one must infiltrate all the outer trivialities and meanings in order to uncover the deeper meaning, through which alone the human being comes to the Father. Similarly, the Scripture must be read through, and in the light of, the Spirit so that the deeper spiritual meaning is revealed, rather than the outer literal one.⁷³ Furthermore, Eckhart describes what he calls the breaking through of the human being to reach at the divine ‘Godhead’. For Eckhart, God as the ‘creator’ is not the primordial being. But, rather, one must penetrate—or break through [*Durchrechnen*—the inner depth of God, which is beyond God the ‘creator’, in order to reach at divine ‘Godhead’.⁷⁴ At this stage, as the soul is united with the inner ‘Godhead’ through a mystical union, God is no longer the ‘creator’ and the human being is no longer a ‘creature’. Somehow a return and a recovery of the original state take place, and only then one is what one originally has been and will remain forever. “For by his poverty the man achieves the being that was always his and shall remain his eternally.”⁷⁵ In such breakthrough, the separation between God—the ‘creator, or ‘the first cause’, and the human being, or the creature, is eliminated through the union between the two, so that “the core of God is also my core; and the core of my soul, the core of God’s.”⁷⁶ There, in the innermost depth or abyss, both God and the human being share the common ground. God’s ground and the soul’s ground are united and identified. In the deepest reality of the human being and of God, the two have one ground and one fused identity.⁷⁷

Like Eckhart, Heidegger maintains that the human being’s relationship to being as such is not the work of the human subject, rather, of being itself. Heidegger uses the word ‘*Dasein*’ [being-there], which implies the very being of the human subject that is given the possibility of being related to being as such. This is to say that he/she belongs always and already to being. Hence by calling the human subject *Dasein* Heidegger means that every human being is to take up that inner possibility, given to him/her, for relatedness to being, and to make it one’s own, namely to become truly the being who carries being as such. Hence, being itself approaches the human being [or *Dasein*], relates to him/her and preserves that relationship. It is possible to note that

⁷³ Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart, Selected Treatises and Sermons*, 133. Cf. Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 169.

⁷⁴ Eckhart writes: “[I]n the breaking-through, when I come to be free of will of myself and of God’s will and of all his works and of God himself, then I am above all created things, and I am neither nor creature, but I am what I was and what shall remain, now and eternally.” Meister Eckhart (Sermon Fifty-Two) in *Light from Light: An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, (Second Edition), (Ed. L. Dupré & J. A. Wiseman), (Mahwah, N.J.: 2001), 171.

⁷⁵ Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*, 232. Eckhart says: “Therefore I pray he may quit me of god, for [his] unconditioned being is above god and all distinctions.” (p. 231) Cf. Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 130).

⁷⁶ Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*, 126.

⁷⁷ Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart, Selected Treatises and Sermons*, 68-70.

for the early Heidegger the human being had greater role in uncovering being and raising the question of being. Heidegger moved later toward perceiving the event of thinking in its deep association with being itself, rather than as the outcome of any human strive. Hence, he contended that the human being must surrender him/herself to being as such and receive the gift of being, which is granted to him/her. Being gives itself to the human being through the gift of thought,⁷⁸ though being is never the product of human thought, rather the other way around. Hence, “essential thinking is an event of Being”.⁷⁹ In this sense, human thought is given to the human subject rather than it’s being the outcome of his/her own achievement. Like Eckhart, the event of truth, for Heidegger, occurs or reveals itself through the language of being as a primordial language, while the human being is the one who responds to the language of being through essential thought. Hence, the human subject is never in control of being.⁸⁰ In this way, Heidegger summons against subjectivism, which corresponds to the notion of pride in religious thought. Thus, *Gelassenheit* is required to let being be, so that every trace of subjective willing is relinquished. By this, a parallelism can be traced between Eckhart’s understanding of the birth of the Son in the soul and Heidegger’s understanding of *Dasein* and his notion of the event of thinking, or of truth, which takes place as the result of the clearing—that is freeing and opening oneself for being as such—which the human being contributes.

C. The Human Subject as One who is Capable of Being a Whole

From the perspective of transcendental philosophy Heidegger describes the human being as part of the entirety of beings, and hence as having the “potentiality-for-being-a-whole”.⁸¹ The human being is capable of reflecting upon the whole of being, as he/she constitutes within him/herself the entirety of beings. The potentiality for being a whole is actualized, however, according to Heidegger, through “being-towards-the-end”, which is the same as “anticipation of death”.⁸² Heidegger’s proposed experience of releasement hopes for no-thing, which is the same as the anticipation of grace⁸³—and, by this, I believe, it becomes the embodiment of faith and courage. In his “What is Metaphysics?” Heidegger writes:

In the trepidation of this suspense where there is nothing to hold on to, pure *Da-sein* is all that remains.

Dread [or anxiety] strikes us dumb. Because what-is-in-totality slips away and thus forces Nothing to the fore, all affirmation (lit. “Is”-saying: “*Ist*”-*Sagen*)

⁷⁸ Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* (1951-52), (Tr. J. G. Gray & F. T. Wieck), (New York: Harper & Row: 1968), 34, 126.

⁷⁹ Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” & “Postscript”, 356.

⁸⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language and Thought* (1936-54), (Tr. A. Hofstadter), (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 6.

⁸¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 352.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 353.

⁸³ See on this: Philippe, *Heidegger’s Philosophy of Being*, 244.

fails in the face of it. The fact that when we are caught in the uncanniness of dread we often try to break the empty silence by words spoken at random, only proves the presence of Nothing.⁸⁴

Surely there is risk in the experience of nothing. The risk is about letting every- 'thing' or 'being' go so that one is left with no- 'thing', and only then one really perceives that which truly is. What happens at that moment, when one discovers that one is left with no- 'thing'? One either becomes overburdened with fear and defeat, or, through courage and inner vigilance, one enjoys the true experience of no-'thing', in the sense that one lets oneself be what one has already and originally been all along, without being the victim of this or that 'thing' or person, or without being subject to this or that aspiration. It is in this second instance that a true experience of nothing, or of being, occurs and through it the true and authentic being of the human subject comes to the fore. Hence, through no-'thing' one encounters truly what-is, namely the human self transcends to that which truly is. Thus, in Heidegger's thought the experience of nothing brings the person to the possibility of transcendence. Without it one is some 'thing'. Without the experience of no-'thing' the human subject is so immersed in the things around that his/her transcendence, apart from the world and beyond it, dissipates. It is in the discovery that the human being is not a 'thing' that all the seeds of transcendence lie, i.e. dignity and sublimity. In this sense all immersion in nothing is immersion in perfection and excellence. All experiences of nothing are experiences of God, who is the highest realization of no-thing. As the human subject, in his/her inner being, approaches no-thing one becomes more and more human and is freed of the limitations, causalities and accidents that are the outcome of conforming oneself to the crowd that surrounds the person. Every experience of nothing is a new discovery of the self and a unique experience of freedom and liberation. Without the movement of the self toward nothing the human being loses him/herself in the crowd, in what-is, namely in the world of 'things'. In this sense being and nothing are inseparable. They are the two sides of the same reality; hence, it is not possible to address one appropriately and disregard the other. To address the question of being one has to give heed to nothing, and the other way around is similarly correct. Since metaphysics—*μετά τὰ φυσικά*—is the study of that which is beyond what-is in order to recover it,⁸⁵ which is to say that it is primarily concerned about the question of being, Heidegger contends that throughout history metaphysics obliterated the nothing, and by so doing it lacked an essential constituent of its meaning. Metaphysics has

⁸⁴ Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?" & "Postscript", 336.

⁸⁵ Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?" & "Postscript", 344.

been misled by concentrating on being while forgetting the no-thing.⁸⁶ It has aspired to prove and justify higher truths concerning what-is by admitting reason and logic, namely through proving and justifying by the means of what-is. Metaphysics “thinks what is as a whole – the world, men, God – with respect to Being, with respect to the unity of what is in Being.”⁸⁷ Hence, metaphysics concentrated on the physical and the substance leaving behind that which concerns the inner reality of a being, while overcoming metaphysics—or better yet redirecting metaphysics—calls logic, which dominates and overrules metaphysics, into question. Redirecting metaphysics is made possible only through turning toward that which has been darkened, toward that which-is-not, i.e. toward no-thing. This whole argument is summarized succinctly in Heidegger’s words:

The essence of Nothing as original nihilation lies in this: that it alone brings *Da-sein* face to face with what-is as such.

... Dasein means being projected into Nothing (*Hineingehaltenheit in das Nichts*). Projecting into Nothing, *Da-sein* is already beyond what-is-in-totality. This “being beyond” (*Hinaussein*) what-is we call Transcendence. Were *Da-sein* not, in its essential basis, transcendent, that is to say were it not projected from the start into Nothing, it could never relate to what-is, hence could have no self-relationship.

Without the original manifest character of Nothing there is no self-hood and no freedom.⁸⁸

To be beyond what-is is to experience transcendence, that is the same as experiencing one’s true selfhood and freedom. In Eckhart’s terms, it is to experience God truly that is the same as experiencing union with God through the birth of the Son in the human soul.⁸⁹ Hence, Heidegger’s experience of nothing corresponds with mystical theology’s denunciation of cognitive, rational knowledge. Such denunciation is the denial of the false human selfhood and pride, bringing the person into humbleness and finally into the reality of the cross. Through such denial, the person perceives clearly and resolutely what he/she ought to be. Along these lines Heidegger maintains that ‘anticipatory resoluteness’ on the way of one’s acceptance of

⁸⁶ A similar blunder has emerged in theology, the result of which God has been perceived in terms that contradict the true sense of that for which God stands, namely the source and origin of spirit and of no-thing. By this, divine reality has been stripped of its true nature and has been covered up. It has been wrapped by garments and cloths that are not God’s own. God has been draped by worldly-human features, which correspond to human understanding and reason. And by this God has been completely darkened, veiled and concealed.

⁸⁷ Martin Heidegger, “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” in (Ed. David Farrell Krell), *Basic Writings*, (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 432.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 339-340.

⁸⁹ Meister Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises and Defense*, 50-51, 56, 200. See further: Bruce Milem, “Suffering God: Meister Eckhart’s Sermon 52” in *Mystics Quarterly*, Vol.22, No. 2 (June 1996), 69-90.

one's own death brings the person into authentic existence.⁹⁰ On the other hand, union with God presumes emancipation of the soul from the worldly things. It implies asceticism and renouncement of one's will, and the experience of poverty in life.⁹¹ Such union demands resoluteness instead of being lost in the crowd. Hence, the knowledge that mystical theology aspires to communicate is the knowledge of the Crucified, which denies all human undertaking to conform God to human intelligence and rational capacity. In this, Meister Eckhart agrees with the early Fathers of the Church. He writes:

Not that humiliation is one thing and exaltation another, but the highest heights of exaltation lie precisely in the lowest depths of humiliation... for depth and height are the same thing.⁹²

The knowledge that mystical theology claims is, as Karl Rahner writes, "knowing through unknowing,"⁹³ which is to say that though mystical theology demolishes knowledge, however it simultaneously claims to have it and to have it with greater resolution. This knowledge, however, is completely different than the kind of knowledge that John D. Caputo ratiocinates when he says that "the mystical theologian invariably knows without knowing to whom she prays."⁹⁴

Conclusion

Throughout this paper I tried to demonstrate and defend a sense of affinity and correspondence between Martin Heidegger's thought and Meister Eckhart's mystical theology, proposing the need for a reappraisal of the mystical nature of Heidegger's thought, and recommending its significant contribution to contemporary Christian theology. It is my contention that though Heidegger, in some of his writings, criticized conventional Christianity, and yet, a deeper understanding of his works unveils a mystical dimension that aligns itself with Medieval German mysticism, represented in this paper through the works of Meister Eckhart, but also with the profound mysticism of Eastern Christianity. In this sense my main concern was to shed light on Heidegger's attempt to find God either within metaphysics, as in his early works, or beyond it as in his later works, where he approached even more the mystical stance.

⁹⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 442.

⁹¹ Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics*, 262.

⁹² Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*, 37.

⁹³ Karl Rahner, "Anzese und Mystic in der Väterzeit" in Karl Rahner, *Sämtliche Werke 3: Spiritualität und Theologie der Kirchenväter*, (Düsseldorf: Benzinger, 1999), 247. [The English translation appears in: P. Endean *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 22.

⁹⁴ Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics*, 253.

Contemporary Christian theology should move beyond conventionalism and aim at reassuming the task of thought, raising anew the essential questions and undertaking the responsibility of a genuine contemplation and reflection. Christian theology needs to strive to perceive the Mystery that transcends human comprehension and rational abilities, distancing itself from the pure scientific ways of rendering the divine truth. This will require undergoing a reinterpretation of its claims in terms that are compatible to the contemporary times, embracing the mystical aspect of Christian faith and theology. For this purpose, the thought and works of Martin Heidegger can serve best.

Primary Literature

Heidegger, Martin, *On Time and Being*, (Tr. Joan Stambaugh), New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco, London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1972.

_____, “What is Metaphysics?” (1929) & “Postscript” (1943), (Tr. W. F. C. Hull & A. Crick) in *Existence and Being* (Ed. Werner Brock), Chicago: Regnery Co., 1949.

_____, *Discourse on Thinking* (1944-55), (Tr. J. M. Anderson & E. H. Freund), New York: Harper & Row, 1966.

_____, *The Essence of Reasons* (1929), (Tr. T. Malick), Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969.

_____, “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” in (Ed. David Farrell Krell), *Basic Writings*, San Francisco: Harper, 1993.

_____, *The Principle of Reason* (1955-56), (Tr. R. Lilly), Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1991.

_____, *Poetry, Language and Thought* (1936-54), (Tr. A. Hofstadter), New York: Harper & Row, 1971.

_____, *What is Called Thinking?* (1951-52), (Tr. J. G. Gray & F. T. Wieck), New York: Harper & Row: 1968.

_____, *Letters to his Wife 1915-1970*, Gertrud Heidegger (Ed.), R. D. V. Glasgow (Tr.), Cambridge: Polity, 2010.

Meister Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart. The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, And Defense*, (Tr. E. Colledge & B. McGinn), Mahwah, NJ.: Paulist Press, 1981.

_____, ‘Sermon: “Woman, The Hour Is Coming,”’ in *Wandering Joy: Meister Eckhart’s Mystical Philosophy*, (Tr. & Comm. Reiner Schürmann), Great Barrington: Lindisfarne Books, 2001.

- _____, *Meister Eckhart: An Introduction to the Study of his Works with and Anthology of his Sermons*, (Sel. & Trans. J. M. Clark), London: Nelson & Sons, 1957.
- _____, *Meister Eckhart: Selected Writings*, (Tr. & Int. O. Davies), [The Introductory word: “Meister Eckhart: An Introduction to His Life and Thought”], London: Clays Ltd., 1994.
- _____, (Sermon Fifty-Two) in *Light from Light: An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, (Second Edition), (Ed. L. Dupré & J. A. Wiseman), Mahwah, N.J.: 2001.
- _____, *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*, (Tr. R. B. Blakney), New York: Harper & Row, 1941.
- _____, *Meister Eckhart, Selected Treatises and Sermons*, (Tr. J. M. Clark and J. V. Skinner), London: Faber & Faber, 1958.
- _____, *Meister Eckhart by Franz Pfeiffer. Leipzig, 1857. Translation with some Omissions and Additions*, (Tr. C. de B. Evans). London: J. M. Watkins, 1956.
Accessed on 12 August 2017: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/208694440/Meister-Eckhart-by-Franz-Pfeiffer-Leipzig-1857-Translation-with-some-Omissions-and-Additions-Tr-C-de-B-Evans>]

John D. Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986.

_____, *More Radical Hermeneutics: On Not Knowing Who We Are* (Bloomington [u.a.]: Indiana Univ. Press, 2009.

Secondary Literature:

Bihlmeyer, Karl & Tüchle, Hermann, *Kirchengeschichte. 2, Das Mittelalter*, (13th Edition), Paderborn: Schöningh, 1952.

Davis, Bret W., *Heidegger and the Will. On the Way to Gelassenheit*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008.

Diederichs, Ernst (Ed.), *Meister Eckharts Reden der Unterscheidung*, (Kleine Texte für Vorlesungen und Übungen, 117), Bonn, 1913.

Gieraths, Gundolf M., “*Life in Abundance: Meister Eckhart & the German Dominican Mystics of the 14th Century*”. *Spirituality Today* 38 Supplement (Autumn 1986), 13-20
Accessed: 06.02.2017. <http://opcentral.org/resources/2015/01/28/life-in-abundance-meister-eckhart-the-german-dominican-mystics-of-the-14th-century-fifteenth-century-dominican-spirituality-by-gundolf-m-gieraths-o-p/>

- Lossky, Vladimir *Théologie Négative et Connaissance de Dieu chez Maître Eckhart*, Paris: Vrin, 1998.
- Mahoney, Barbara, *Denken als Gelassenheit*, Freiburg, 1993.
- Panzig, Erik Alexander, *Geläzenheit und Abgescheidenheit. Eine Einführung in das theologische Denken des Meister Eckhart*, (Leipzig, 2005).
- Pezze, Barbara Dalle, *Martin Heidegger and Meister Eckhart: a Path towards Gelassenheit*, Edwin Mellen Pr. 2008.
- Philipse, Herman, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Being: A Critical Interpretation*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Pöggeler, Otto, "Mystical Elements in Heidegger's Thought and Paul Célan's Poetry", (Tr. Henry Pickford), in Fioretos Aris (Ed.), *Word Traces: Readings of Paul Celan*, Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1994.
- Rahner, Karl, "Anzese und Mystic in der Väterzeit" in Karl Rahner, *Sämtliche Werke 3: Spiritualität und Theologie der Kirchenväter*, Düsseldorf: Benzinger, 1999. [The English translation appears in: Endean, Philip, *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Sherwood, Polycarp, *The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor and His Refutation of Originism*, (Romae: Herder, 1955); Jacques Paul Migne (Ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus / Series Graeca* (162 vol.), Paris: Migne, 1857-1866. Amb 42-1329A1-B7.
- Silesius, Angelus, *The Cherubic Wanderer: Sensual Description of the Four Final Things in The Book of Angelus Silesius, With Observations by the Ancient Zen Masters*, (Tr. F. Franck), New York: Knopf, 1976.
- Simm, Hans-Joachim (Ed.), *Von der Gelassenheit: Texte zum Nachdenken*, Frankfurt: Insel, 1995.

Articles

- Eckhart, Moran, „Meister Eckhart in Twentieth-Century Philosophy“, in Jeremiah Hackett (Ed.), *Companion to Meister Eckhart, Brill's Companion to the Christian Tradition* Vol. 36, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013, 669-698.
- McGinn, Bernard, "Eckhart's Condemnation Reconsidered" in *The Thomist* (1980) 44, 390-414.
- Milem, Bruce, "Suffering God: Meister Eckhart's Sermon 52" in *Mystics Quarterly*, Vol.22, No. 2 (June 1996), 69-90.