LIVING WITHOUT WHY

Meister Eckhart's Critique of the Medieval Concept of Will

JOHN M. CONNOLLY

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Dedicated
to
four great teachers of history and philosophy
who opened the minds of many
to the beauty,
the excitement,
and the lasting importance
of medieval thought:

W. Norris Clarke, S.J.
Robert J. O'Connell, S.J.
Jeremiah F. O'Sullivan
Ernst Konrad Specht

Hæte der mensche niht mê ze tuonne mit gote, dan daz er dankbære ist, ez wære genuoc.

—Meister Eckhart, *Pr.*34

CONTENTS

PREFACE

These are heady days for scholars and lay readers interested in the thought of Meister Eckhart. Since the 700th anniversary of his birth in 1960 there has been an upswell of interest in his writings, and these have become ever more available through the efforts of (mainly German) scholars and able translators. But during my years of university study in the 1960s, Eckhart was still a decidedly marginal and esoteric figure, even (perhaps especially) in Catholic circles. Ewert Cousins, who taught me theology at Fordham University, mentioned him with some admiration, but we were never introduced to his writings.

For me that introduction had to wait until around 1980, when I was living in Germany with my family. My wife, herself German and an interfaith minister, gave me a copy of Josef Quint's very useful one-volume edition of Eckhart's German sermons and treatises. But my initial attempts to befriend these writings hit a road block on the very first page, where the early *Talks of Instruction* begin with high praise of *obedience*: "Oh no," I thought, "another Catholic disciplinarian!" A colossal misunderstanding on my part, no doubt, but the book went promptly onto the shelf.

Fortunately it did not stay there too long. By the later 1980s I was reading the German sermons with great interest. Ironically, the most fascinating idea for me—Eckhart's advice to "live without why (or will)"—is itself intimately connected to his decidedly original notion of obedience. Indeed, the second paragraph of the *Talks* links the two in these words: "Whenever a man in obedience goes out of his own and gives up what is his, in the same moment God must go in there, for when a man *wants nothing* for himself, God must *want it* equally as if for himself." (The translation is Walshe's, emphasis added—see Abbreviations section for details.) Eckhart's use of this notion from his earliest writings onward struck a deep chord within me. It resonated with a favorite theme of another of my Fordham professors, the philosopher and Augustine scholar Robert J. O'Connell, S.J., who pointed out to us a tension between Greek eudaimonist

conceptions of the good life and certain Christian ideals of selflessness and service. Was this clash what Eckhart was talking about?

Other themes in Eckhart's work fascinated me too. One, of course, was detachment (*abegescheidenheit*), which in the Eckhart lexicon is a synonym for obedience. I had become interested in Buddhism in the 1980s and was intrigued to learn that Japanese Buddhist philosophers such as Keiji Nishitani found deep affinities to Buddhism in Eckhart's thought. On a practical level, as well, Eckhartian detachment became important to me as spiritual sustenance during the challenging decade I spent during the 1990s in the administration at Smith College. My personal admiration for the fourteenth-century philosopher, theologian, and administrator of his Dominican order grew during this period, as did my interest in his striking hermeneutical methods in his sermons. This led to a first publication on Eckhart as a biblical interpreter.

When I returned to the Smith philosophy faculty in 2002, I was determined to devote my research efforts to the Meister's work, and at the top of the agenda would be an investigation of his admonition to live without why. But I was by then advanced in my career, very late for an entrant into the complex and dynamic field of medieval philosophy and theology. My earlier work had been devoted to contemporary issues: the philosophy of human action, philosophical hermeneutics, and the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Nonetheless I was greatly aided by two fortunate circumstances: first, that my targeted aspect of Eckhart's thought—his ideas on how we should live—dovetailed nicely with my previous philosophical research; and second, that I found a number of colleagues in the profession who greatly aided my fledgling attempts to build on what I had learned earlier of medieval thought. Tobias Hoffmann of the Catholic University was an enormous aid along these lines, and through him I became acquainted with a number of other helpful colleagues, including Theo Kobusch at the University of Bonn and other German members of the crucially important Meister-Eckhart-Gesellschaft (the British Meister Eckhart Society has also been a blessing). But I owe a still greater debt to the dean of American Eckhart scholars, Bernard McGinn of the University of Chicago. His advice, friendship, and encouragement have played a major role in my ability to produce this book.

Closer to home, many of my Smith and Five College colleagues have also assisted my efforts. Chief among these have been my polymath Smith colleague Jay Garfield, Jonathan Westphal of Hampshire College, Lynne Rudder Baker and the late Gareth Matthews of the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, my colleagues in the Five College Propositional Attitudes Task Force (especially its co-founder, Murray Kiteley, and its current convener, Ernie Alleva), and Lara Denis of Agnes Scott College. Closest to home, my wife, Marianna Kaul Connolly, not only provided my first copy of Eckhart's writings, she has also been my constant and indispensable companion in exploring many of the themes treated

in this book. In addition, she has helped me revise the manuscript. To her I owe the greatest debt.

Smith College, a truly nurturing institution of learning, was extraordinarily generous in providing research support for this project. Many former students helped me at various points to clarify my thinking and proof my texts. These include Claire Serafin, Lilith Dornhuber deBellesiles, Rosemary Gerstner, Maria-Fátima Santos, Caitlin Liss, Erin Caitlin Desetti, and especially Sofia Walker. Finally I am in debt to the anonymous reviewers for Oxford University Press and for the journal *Faith and Philosophy* for helpful criticisms of my work on the topics dealt with here.

If this book can in any way contribute to the recent renaissance of interest in Eckhart's thought, my efforts will have been richly rewarded. But then again, as Eckhart taught, work properly undertaken—i.e., without why—is its own reward.

John M. Connolly
September 27, 2013

ABBREVIATIONS

Eckhart's works were long scattered, surviving piecemeal in various archives, and some in one collection from the early fourteenth century, the *Paradisus anime intelligentis* (which also contained works by other contemporaries). Eckhart's surviving writings are available in a variety of forms today. For scholarly purposes, such as in this book, the standard ("critical") edition is that produced since 1936 under the aegis of the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*:

> *Meister Eckhart: Die deutschen und lateinischen Werke* (Stuttgart/Berlin: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1936–).

Ten (of the eleven foreseen) volumes have been published, five each for the Latin (LW) and the Middle High German (DW) writings. Texts are cited here by volume, section number (where applicable), page number, and line number; so, for instance, *In Ioh.* n.226, LW 3:189, 8–12, refers to the *Commentary on John*, section 226, in volume 3 of the Latin writings, page 189, lines 8 to 12. Eckhart's various treatises and sermons have also been numbered by the editors, and also have numbered paragraphs. Following this convention, the Latin sermons (*Sermones*, all in LW 4) will be given as, e.g., '*S.* XXV', and the paragraphs or sections will be indicated by 'n.' or 'nn.', thus: "*S.* XXV, n.264, LW 4:230, 3–4" for *Sermo* XXV, section number 264, in volume 4 of the Latin works, page 230, lines 3 and 4. The Middle High German sermons (*Predigten*) are rendered thus: *Pr.* 6 (DW 1:102, 4–5) stands for German sermon 6, in volume 1 of the German works, page 102, lines 4 and 5. Similar conventions are used for Eckhart's Latin and German treatises, which are cited according to the following abbreviations:

Latin Works

In Eccli.	*Sermones et Lectiones super Ecclesiastici ch. 24:23–31* (LW 2:229–300), *Sermons and Lectures on Ecclesiasticus ch. 24: 23–31*
In Ex.	*Expositio Libri Exodi* (LW 2:1–227), *Commentary on the Book of Exodus*
In Gen.I	*Expositio Libri Genesis* (LW 1:185–444), *Commentary on the Book of Genesis*
In Gen.II	*Liber Parabolarum Genesis* (LW 1:447–702), *Book of the Parables of Genesis*
In Ioh.	*Expositio sancti Evangelii secundum Iohannem* (LW 3), *Commentary on John*
In Sap.	*Expositio Libri Sapientiae* (LW 2:303–643), *Commentary on the Book of Wisdom*
Prol.gen.	*Prologus generalis in Opus tripartitum* (LW 1:129–65), *General Prologue to the Tripartite Work*
Prol.op.expos.	*Prologus in Opus expositionum* (LW 1:183–84), *Prologue to the Work of Commentaries*
Prol. op. prop.	*Prologus in Opus propositionum* (LW 1:166–82), *Prologue to the Work of Propositions*
Qu. Par.	*Quaetiones Parisienses* (LW 1/2:37–83), *Parisian Questions*
Sermo die	*Sermo die beati Augustini Parisius habitus* (LW 5:89–99), *Parisian Sermon on the Feast of St. Augustine*

German Works

BgT	*Daz buoch der goetlichen troestunge* (DW 5:1–105), *Book of Divine Consolation*
RdU	*Die rede der underscheidunge* (DW 5:137–376), *Talks of Instruction*
Vab	*Von abegescheidenheit* (DW 5:400–434), *On Detachment*
VeM	*Von dem edeln menschen* (DW 5:106–36), *On the Noble Person*

Translations

Many of the Latin translations in this volume are mine. However, where a published English version is available, I have generally used it. Most of Eckhart's Middle High German works have been translated into English by M. O'C. Walshe on the basis of the critical edition, and I have generally used the Walshe translations. Originally in three volumes, these are now happily collected into a single version, which is the one cited in this book. But those with access only to the three-volume version can find the sermons I have cited (using their numbers from the official, German critical edition, which Walshe calls "Quint" or "Q") by consulting the concordance in his third volume.

Essential	*Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense,* tr. and introd. by Edmund Colledge, O.S.A., and Bernard McGinn (New York: Paulist Press, 1981)
Teacher	*Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher*, ed. Bernard McGinn with the collaboration of Frank Tobin and Elvira Borgstadt (New York: Paulist Press, 1986)
Largier	*Meister Eckhart Werke,* 2 vols., ed. and comm. Niklaus Largier (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag 1993)
Lectura	*LECTURA ECKHARDI: Predigten Meister Eckharts von Fachgelehrten gelesen und gedeutet*, ed. Georg Steer and Loris Sturlese, 3 vols. (Berlin/Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1998, 2003, 2009)
Parisian	*Parisian Questions and Prologues*, ed. and trans. Armand Maurer, C.S.B. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1974
Walshe	*The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*, tr. and ed. Maurice O'C. Walshe, rev. Bernard McGinn (New York: Crossroad Publ. Co., 2009)

Other Works cited

Aristotle

The Greek texts of Aristotle used in this book are from the online Perseus Digital Library.

The English versions are all taken from *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, two vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, 1994).

CAT	*Categories*
DA	*De Anima, On the Soul*
EE	*Eudemian Ethics*

Met.	*Metaphysics*
NE	*Nicomachean Ethics*

Augustine

The Latin texts of Augustine used in this volume are, unless otherwise noted, from the online *S. Aurelii Augustini opera omnia.* A number of the translations, as noted below, are from *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* First Series, Vol. 4, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publ. Co., 1887), hereafter *Nicene*. Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1401.htm.

Ad Simp.	*De diversis questionibus ad Simplicianum, To Simplician—On Various Questions.* Translation, John H. S. Burleigh, *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, Volume VI of the Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953)
Contra duas	*Contra duas epistolas Pelagianorum, Against Two Letters of the Pelagians.* Translation, Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallis, revised by Benjamin B. Warfield. In *Nicene.*
Conf.	*Confessiones, Confessions.* Translation, Maria Boulding, O.S.B., *Saint Augustine: The Confessions* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997)
DCD	*De civitate Dei, City of God.* Translation, Marcus Dods (New York: Modern Library, 1950)
DDC	*De doctrina christiana, On Christian Doctrine.* Translation, James Shaw, Dover Philosophical Classics (Mineola NY: Dover Publishing, 2009)
DLA	*De libero arbitrio, On Free Choice of the Will.* Translation, Thomas Williams, *Augustine: On Free Choice of the Will* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publ. Co., 1993)
De mor.	*De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus manichaeorum, On the Life-Style of the Catholic Church*. Translation, Richard Stothert. In *Nicene.*
De Spir.	*De spiritu et litera, On the Spirit and the Letter.* Translation, Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallis. In *Nicene.*
De Trin.	*De Trinitate, On the Holy Trinity.* Translation, Arthur West Haddan. In *Nicene*.
Gen. litt.	*De Genesi ad litteram, Literal Meaning of Genesis.* Translation, John Hammond Taylor (New York: Newman Press, 1982)
QQ 83	*De diversis quaestionibus 83, Eighty-Three Different Questions.*

Translation, D. L. Mosher (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1982/2002).

Retr. *Retractationes, Reconsiderations*

Church Fathers

PG *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Graeca,* ed. J.-P. Migne, 161 vols. (Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1857–66)

Thomas Aquinas

The Latin texts of St. Thomas used in this volume are from the online *Corpus Thomisticum.* Some of the translations are my own.

DVir. *Quaestiones disputatae de virtutibus, On the Virtues*

DVer. *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate, On Truth*

DReg. *De Regimine Principorum, On the Government of Rulers.* Translation, James M. Blythe (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

QDA *Quaestiones disputatae de anima, Disputed Questions on the Soul*

SCG *Summa contra gentiles, Contra Gentiles,* Translation, Vernon Bourke (New York: Hanover House, 1955–57, online edition http://dhspriory.org/thomas/ContraGentiles.htm)

SENT *Scriptum super Sententiis, Commentary on the* Sentences *of Peter Lombard*

SLE *Sententia libri ethicorum, Commentary on Aristotle's* Nicomachean Ethics, Translation, C.J. Litzinger, O.P. (Notre Dame, IN: Dumb Ox Books, 1993.)

STh *Summa theologiae, in 4 parts, called "prima" (Ia), "prima secundae" (IaIIae), "secunda secundae" (IIaIIae), and "tertia" (III).* Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, online edition Copyright © 2008 by Kevin Knight

Introduction

In the spring of 1329 Pope John XXII, the second (and longest reigning: 1316–1334) of the Avignon popes, issued a bull condemning twenty-eight propositions attributed to the German Dominican philosopher and theologian Meister Eckhart von Hochheim. Among the censured propositions were a substantial number expressing Eckhart's views on how we should live, including this one based on one of his German sermons:

> The eighth article [of the bull]. Those *who seek nothing*, neither honor nor profit nor inwardness nor holiness nor reward nor heaven, but who have renounced all, including what is their own—in such persons is God honored.[1]

The pope's point of view might well seem justified: did Eckhart really want to imply in this passage that God is *not* honored by those who seek "holiness," "reward," or "heaven"? Was he, in a back-handed way, condemning those who failed to renounce "all, including what is their own," a point of special sensitivity at the splendid papal court?[2] What we certainly have in this eighth article is the Pope's emphatic rejection of a teaching found in many of Eckhart's works,

[1] *Octavus articulus. Qui non intendunt res nec honores nec utilitarem nec devotionem internam nec sanctitatem nec premium nec regnum celorum, sed omnibus hiis renuntiaverunt, etiam quod suum est, in illis hominibus honoratur Deus*. (Emphasis in the translation added. *In agro dominico,* LW V:596–600, here 598). The Latin text of *In agro dominico* is also available at this web address: http://www.eckhart.de/ (under *Texte*). An English version is in Edmund Colledge, O.S.A, and Bernard McGinn, *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981).

[2] This particular condemned phrase perhaps suggested the highly charged position on "Apostolic poverty" of the "spiritual Franciscans"—a position supported by William of Ockham, and one that Pope John XXII himself had condemned. But Eckhart had in fact nothing directly to say about this dispute.

i.e., that we should "live without why" (or "without will").[3] The suggestion of goallessness as an ideal seems at first glance bewildering, the more so in that Eckhart was himself a highly motivated and successful academic and administrator. Furthermore, he was working in a tradition of Christian ethics and spirituality that, as we will see, was premised on a pervasive teleology, the very opposite of goallessness. In the context of late medieval ethics "why" implies a specific kind of teleological or goal-oriented approach[4] inherited from classical moral philosophy and brilliantly welded—by Thomas Aquinas and others in the thirteenth century—into a monumental edifice that located ethics within a structure of theology, metaphysics, psychology, and political theory.

What may have made Eckhart seem the more dangerous was that he was not some wild-eyed outsider, nor was he basing his views on unheard-of teachings from alien or long-rejected traditions. Instead he was himself a learned scholar, deeply acquainted with Aristotle, the most teleological of thinkers, and a close reader of Augustine and Aquinas; he was commenting on the same Christian scriptures as they, all the while citing them as authorities. The perceived danger may have been that these central sources of Christian doctrine—the scriptures, Augustine, Thomas, and among the philosophers Aristotle and the Neoplatonists—could be interpreted to yield conclusions so uncongenial to the worried church authorities. Indeed, the fact that Eckhart came to what are at first glance such radical and unusual conclusions should spark the curiosity not only of those interested in the history of Western moral philosophy, but also of anyone who thinks that an ethic that has *detachment* as its central concept cannot have been conceived in Christian medieval Europe.

The papal bull was meant to put an end not only to the influence of Eckhart, but in particular to a trial against him, begun in Cologne in 1326 by the local and powerful archbishop, that had dragged on for three years. The bull's focus was primarily theological (though questions of ecclesiastical and political power were certainly also involved), but it is interesting to find among the indicted teachings several propositions attributed to Eckhart that continue to be debated in ethics and the philosophy of human action today:

> The sixteenth article. God does not properly command an exterior act.
>
> The seventeenth article. The exterior act is not properly good or divine, and God does not produce it or give birth to it in the proper sense.

[3] E.g., "Now whoever dwells in the goodness of his nature, dwells in God's love; but love is without why." [*Wer nû wonet in der güete sîner natûre, der wonet in gotes minne, und diu minne enhât kein warumbe*] (*Pr.* 28, DW 2:59, 6–7; Walshe, 129).

[4] In particular, a teleological *eudaimonism*, an ethic whose point is so to live as to secure one's *eudaimonia* (happiness, well-being, in Greek).

> The eighteenth article. Let us bring forth the fruit not of exterior acts, which do not make us good, but of interior acts, which the Father who abides in us makes and produces.
>
> The nineteenth article. God loves souls, not the exterior work.[5]

Eckhart was not denying the goodness of external acts altogether, but he stressed instead the importance of the attitude or motivation of the agent. Here he was following Aristotle (and anticipating Kant), and his teaching—which obviously aroused the Inquisitors' ire—is, as we will see, closely connected to his counsel to "live without why (or will)." It represents a particular position in the age-old controversy over the role of "works" in our quest to live the good life (or find salvation), which came to be one of the principal points of contention in the Reformation, and which echoes still in the disputes between Kantians and consequentialists.

As central as these last—and similar—condemned articles are for this study, Eckhart's continuing notoriety (and in some quarters, popularity) rests more on the immediately succeeding one:

> The twentieth article. That the good man is the Only-Begotten Son of God.[6]

This seemingly audacious claim, like most others made by Eckhart (including those concerning the will), is not really understandable outside the context of what one modern philosopher has called his "extraordinary metaphysic."[7] Given its peculiarity and difficulty, it is not surprising that Eckhart has been either

[5] *Sextusdecimus articulus. Deus proprie non precipit actum exteriorem. Decimusseptimus articulus. Actus exterior non est proprie bonus nec divinus, nec operatur ipsum Deus proprie nec parit. Decimusoctavus articulus. Afferamus fructum actuum non exteriorum, qui nos bonos non faciunt, sed actuum interiorum, quos pater in nobis manens facit et operatur. Decimusnonus articulus. Deus animas amat, non opus extra.* (LW 5:598–99)

[6] *Vicesimus articulus. Quod bonus homo est unigenitus filius Dei* (LW 5: 599). In what is most likely the source of this article Eckhart actually wrote: "Thus in very truth, for the son of God, a good man insofar as he is God's son, suffering for God's sake, working for God is his being, his life, his work, his felicity." [*Alsô wærliche: dem gotes sune, einem guoten menschen, sô vil er gotes sun ist, durch got lîden, durch got würken ist sîn wesen, sîn leben, sîn würken, sîn sælicheit*] (In *BgT,* DW 5:44, 16–19; Walshe, 543). It is noteworthy that the bull omits the crucial phrase, "*insofar as* he is God's son," a sign that the inquisitors did not understand, or chose to ignore, the complexity of Eckhart's teaching.

[7] Jan Aertsen, "Meister Eckhart: Eine ausserordentliche Metaphysik," *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie Médiévales* 66: 1 (1999): 1–20. See also the detailed discussion of Eckhart's overall philosophical approach in Kurt Flasch, *Meister Eckhart: Philosoph des Christentums* (Munich: C. H. Beck Verlag, 2010).

misunderstood or else ignored by friends as well as enemies. But it is only from the standpoint of that metaphysic that one can grasp what Eckhart was trying to say with claims such as this last one, or for that matter see how it is related to his teaching on the will.

In this book I try to decipher the meaning of Eckhart's "live without why" by placing the claim in its historical and metaphysical context. Given that context, what does it mean, and—equally important, perhaps—not mean? How did it arise in a very "why"-oriented tradition of Western philosophy and theology? In particular, how could it flow from the pen of a Dominican confrère of Thomas Aquinas, whose own teachings were initially controversial (for their reliance on Aristotle), but whose reputation had subsequently been so successfully restored by the efforts of the Dominican order that the same Pope John XXII who condemned Eckhart in 1329 had canonized Thomas in 1323? And what are the consequences of Eckhart's teaching for other notions involving the concept of will, such as motivation or intention? Perhaps most importantly, how *does* one actually live a "life without will"? Is it possible outside a hermit's cell? This last question brings us face to face with the question of happiness or human fulfillment, in which the role of will has—from its vague beginnings in Aristotle—been prominent. This classical place of origin is where our own investigation has its roots.

But we begin much closer to Eckhart's own time, noting a few of the main points of Aquinas's influential teaching on the will (chapter 1). That will lead us back to the principal sources of that teaching: the competing teleological eudaimonisms of Aristotle (chapter 2) and St. Augustine (chapter 3). We will then be in a position to explore the role—a problematic one, I will suggest—that the will plays, according to Thomas, in the Christian's path to happiness (chapter 4). Eckhart's dramatically different approach is presented against its metaphysical backdrop in chapters 5 and 6. There we will find, I contend, that "living without why" is not an outlandish doctrine. True, it is anchored in a metaphysical worldview that has grown unfamiliar to modern readers; nonetheless, it still deserves our attention.

1

The Will as "Rational Appetite"

Composed at the summit of his career in the years around 1270, Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae,* epic in scope and epoch-making in its effects, begins with a discussion of its central topic, "sacred doctrine." Although Thomas defends the view that this field of study "is speculative rather than practical because it is more concerned with divine things than with human acts," he immediately adds that "it does treat even of these latter, inasmuch as man is ordained by them to the perfect knowledge of God in which consists eternal bliss."[1] In other words, inquiry into the nature of God leads one to seek "the perfect knowledge of God," but this can only be attained in the afterlife ("eternal bliss"), the path to which consists in the performance of the right sort of "human acts." In the introduction to the second main part of the work, Thomas wrote:

> Since, as Damascene states (John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthod.* ii. 12), man is said to be *made to God's image*, in so far as the image implies an intelligent being endowed with free-choice and self-movement: now that we have treated [in part one of the *Summa*] of the exemplar, i.e., God, and of those things which came forth from the power of God in accordance with His will; it remains for us to treat of His image, i.e., man, inasmuch as he too is the *principle of his actions, as having free choice and control of his actions*.[2]
>
> (*STh* IaIIae, Prologue, emphasis added)

[1] *Sacra autem doctrina est principaliter de Deo, cuius magis homines sunt opera. Non ergo est scientia practica, sed magis speculativa . . . de quibus agit secundum quod per eos ordinatur homo ad perfectam Dei cognitionem, in qua aeterna beatitudo consistit.* The *Summa Theologiae* (*STh*) will be cited, hereafter in the text, in the standard fashion, i.e., by part, question, article, and section of article. Here Ia,1,4,s.c. I generally use the translation of the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (2nd and rev. ed., 1920), which is available in several online formats, e.g., at http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.html.

[2] *Quia, sicut Damascenus dicit, homo factus ad imaginem Dei dicitur, secundum quod per imaginem significatur intellectuale et arbitrio liberum et per se potestativum; postquam praedictum est de exemplari, scilicet de Deo, et de his quae processerunt ex divina potestate secundum eius voluntatem; restat ut consideremus de eius imagine, idest de homine, secundum quod et ipse est suorum operum principium, quasi liberum*

Thomas signals here the general framework within which he will go on to consider questions of the greatest concern to human beings, "the ultimate end of human life and . . . the means by which human beings can reach this end, or deviate from it"[3] (*STh* IaIIae, 1, preface). The trope of humans as the "image of God," or "made to the image of God" (Genesis 1:26) was a commonplace among Christian thinkers, and it will occupy an important place in this study (even in Aristotle there is something similar). As we will see, the notion of "image" can be understood in several ways. For Thomas, in this context—where the focus is on how we humans must live if we are to reach happiness, i.e., the ultimate fulfillment possible to us—the crucial elements of the comparison between the divine and the human are intellect, power, and will. Just as God created the entire world, the macrocosm, through the divine intellect and will, so we humans must fashion our lives, the microcosm, through the use of our human intellect and will. The path to the happiness (*beatitudo*) appropriate to beings "made to God's image" is principally through right action, the key to which is having the right will.

A bit further along in the *Summa,* at the start of the Treatise on Human Acts (IaIIae, 6–21), Thomas claims:

> Since therefore Happiness is to be gained by means of certain acts, we must in due sequence consider human acts, in order to know by what acts we may obtain happiness, and by what acts we are prevented from obtaining it . . . And since those acts are properly called human which are *voluntary*, because the *will is the rational appetite*, which is proper to man; we must consider acts in so far as they are voluntary.[4]
>
> (IaIIae, 6, Prologue, emphases added)

By taking this approach Thomas is not only focusing on a concept much attended to by Christian thinkers since the time of Augustine, but he takes himself to be also emulating Aristotle, "the Philosopher," whose major works had become newly available in Latin translation by the mid-thirteenth century.

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arbitrium habens et suorum operum potestatem. I deviate from a common translation of "*liberum arbitrium*" as "free will" for reasons that I will explain below, in chapter 3. By "principle" Thomas means "source." Further references to this work will generally be given in parentheses in the text.

[3] *Ubi primo considerandum occurrit de ultimo fine humanae vitae; et deinde de his per quae homo ad hunc finem pervenire potest, vel ab eo deviare . . .*

[4] *Quia igitur ad beatitudinem per actus aliquos necesse est pervenire, oportet consequenter de humanis actibus considerare, ut sciamus quibus actibus perveniatur ad beatitudinem, vel impediatur beatitudinis via . . . Cum autem actus humani proprie dicantur qui sunt voluntarii, eo quod voluntas est rationalis appetitus, qui est proprius hominis; oportet considerare de actibus inquantum sunt voluntarii.*

Their arrival on the university scene was a sensation, and they provoked something of a crisis in the intellectual circles of Western Christendom. Traditionalists, generally Augustinian in orientation, were skeptical about their use; the most extreme wanted them banned altogether. Their hand was strengthened by the strong and heterodox enthusiasm shown for Aristotle by some thirteenth-century philosophers, largely in the arts faculty at the University of Paris. But a different party of philosophically oriented theologians—to which Thomas and his teacher, Albert the Great, belonged—soberly embraced Aristotle's works and wanted to show their compatibility with the Christian faith. One place where this challenge was considerable was the attempt to harmonize Aristotle's this-worldly, pagan ethic with a decidedly other-worldly Christian *Weltanschauung*.[5] The form in which Thomas carried out this effort confirmed the central position of the will—understood in a certain way—in Christian moral thought, a position it had earlier attained in the work of St. Augustine, as I will attempt to show.

The central question in this book concerns why Meister Eckhart, himself a student of Aristotle and a successor to Thomas on the Dominican chair of theology in Paris, claimed we should "live without why" (or "will" in a certain sense of the term). What could such a claim mean? How could it arise in the broadly Christian/Aristotelian, will-centered tradition in which Eckhart was schooled? And what would it mean for Christian ethics to be based not on the will, but on detachment from it? Our path to addressing these questions will begin at a principal source, Aristotle's main treatise of moral philosophy, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, by asking what role the notion of will played in Aristotle's construction of the good life. Then we will look at how a fuller, Christianized conception of will arose in the life and writings of St. Augustine (354–430), before returning to Aquinas for a more detailed examination of his teachings on the role of the will in the Christian path to salvation. Only then will we have the materials needed for understanding Eckhart's distinctly different approach to the trope of the likeness between God and humans, as in this citation from his *Commentary on Exodus* (where "why" is closely connected to will in the traditional sense):

> It is proper to God that he has no "why" outside or beyond himself. Therefore, *every work* that has a "why" as such is not a divine work or done for God. "He works all things for his own sake" (Prov. 16:4). There will be no divine work if a person does something that is not for

[5] This task was the more difficult because of St. Augustine's harsh critique of pagan ethics. Cf. chapter 3, below, e.g., p. 78.