In Eckhart’s definition, “Homo means a human person to whom substance is given, and the substance gives him Being and life and a rational Being. A rational human person is one who understands himself with his reason and is in himself abgeschaiden from all matter and form. The more abge-


schaiden he is from all things and turned in upon himself, the more does he clearly and rationally know all things without turning outwards; the more so is he a human person” (DW I, 250, 4–10).

The human person’s happiness “consists…in the knowledge of God” (LW I, 433, 1), that is, in the “knowledge that is Being” (LW IV, 370, 1f.).

These propositions contain essential elements of Eckhart’s understand-


ing of the human person.

1. The Rational Person as the Human Person in the Image of God

The transcendent God, who is not a creature, “is intellectus and intelligere” (LW V, 41, 13f.). With Augustine, Eckhart says that all creatures resemble God and possess the similitudo dei; but the image of God (imago dei) is only in the creature endowed with reason (LW IV, 422, 10f.). The human person is imago dei (Gen 1:26f.). The imago dei must not “lack anything that is in God, nor anything in him that is in some creature or other” (LW IV, 425, 11–426, 1). Eckhart argues, with John Damascene, that imago is the intellectualitas (i.e. the intellectual nature of the human person that has power over itself with free will, and which constitutes the principium and potestas of its working). Unlike Christ, the human person is not the imago dei, but is created ad imaginem Dei (LW I, 276, 5–8). Every being endowed with understanding is created according to the image of God (LW III, 24, 17–25, 1). Only the Son is the imago dei patris, while the human soul is ad imaginem (LW II, 615, 11f.). As the only begotten Son, as the filius naturalis, Christ is himself the imago dei patris. We human beings are imago totius trinitatis, says Eckhart in a Trinitarian interpretation of Gen. 1:26. But although we have many fathers—unlike the only begotten Son who has only one Father—we can become conformed to the nature of the only begotten Son through rebirth (LW III, 107, 9–15).
With Maimonides, Eckhart affirms that the *intellectus* is the highest perfection which God bestowed on the human person, as a being created *ad imaginem dei* (LW I, 349, 6–8). Appealing to Aristotle (*Met.* I, 1 980 b 27), Eckhart defines the human person as an *ens rationale* (LW III, 10, 10f., 2). The human person is a *species*, which in accordance with its nature, is oriented to *cognosere* and *intelligere*, and arrives *qua intellectus* at its authenticity and perfection (LW I, 332, 5–7). “The human person is what he is through *ratio* and *intellectus*” (LW III, 265, 12). It is the *intellectus* that makes the human person a human person (LW I, 358, 10f.). Like Aristotle (*Met.* 1, 9 980 a 21), Eckhart says that all human persons, in accordance with their nature, are rational beings oriented towards knowledge (DW V, 116, 10f.). There is a strict relationship of implication between the act of rational knowing and being a human person: this is why “all human persons naturally” yearn for “knowledge,” and even “the knowledge of evil things is good” (DW V, 116, 10–12).

Created *ad imaginem dei*, the human person is thus an *ens rationale*. He is indeed also a sensuous being (*ens sensitivum*), but he is more: he is a rational being (*ens intellectivum*) created *ad imaginem dei*. Just as human beings cannot build anything without physical tools (*instrumenta corporalia*), so too *intelligere* is impossible for them without conceptual images (*intelligere sine phantasmate*). The conceptual image is a movement that goes forth from the senses. Without the senses, it would be impossible for the human person to realize his *intelligere* and thereby become a complete human person. Nevertheless, there is an essential hierarchy between the *sensitivum* and the *intellectivum*: the former is subordinate to the latter (LW I, 604, 3–605, 2).

To rationality belongs the very highest knowledge, which is not subject to limitation: “Rationality looks in and pierces all the corners of the Godhead and takes the Son in the Father’s heart and in the ground, and puts him in its own ground. Rationality penetrates in; it is not satisfied with goodness or wisdom or truth or God himself. . . . It breaks into the ground” (DW III, 178, 3–179, 5). The object of reason “is the *ens absolute*, not only the *hoc aut illud*” (i.e. this and that existent) (LW I, 272, 5f.). The *intellectus* “abstracts from here and where, from now and from time” (LW I, 358, 11).

Taking up the Aristotelian differentiation between the active (*intellectus agens*) and the possible reason (*intellectus possibilis*),1 Eckhart draws

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1 See Aristotle, *De anima* 3, 5, 430 a 14f.