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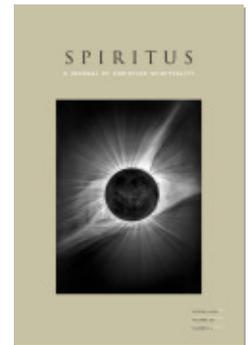
*Meister Eckhart als Denker* ed. by Wolfgang Erb and Norbert Fischer (review)

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*Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, Volume 18, Number 1, Spring 2018, pp. 123-126 (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/scs.2018.0018>



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articulation is needed regarding why Komjathy considers these three as necessary defining characteristics. Defining characteristics are important in this formative stage as this new field articulates its foundation, and Komjathy would do scholars a great service by spelling out his argument here in more detail. Second, as the book *Contemplative Literature* grew out of Komjathy's USD course on comparative traditions, it would be helpful to know what it is that he seeks to compare. Is it practice? Is it theology? Is it the relationship between practice and theology? Is it something else? Third, as Komjathy himself admits, any source book of traditions faces the challenge of criteria of selection for the texts included. In order to compare apples to apples Komjathy chose texts similar in structure. All the texts are how-to guides for contemplative practice in their traditions. In addition, to the question of how many and which sources should be selected from the Christian tradition (why, for example, was a Carmelite source not chosen, since Carmelites have been foundational in articulating the Christian contemplative tradition?), the question of whether the genre of how-to guides best represents the Christian contemplative tradition arises. The inclusion of an autobiographical work, like Teresa of Avila's *Life*, for example, might help better represent the range of genres within the Christian contemplative tradition.

### **A WELCOME CONTRIBUTION**

Overall, these two texts both define and challenge the field of contemplative studies. They map the field of contemplative studies through an impressive array of the dimensions of the field. They accurately trace a brief history of the emergence of contemplatives studies while also creating an impressive taxonomy for understanding the wide variety of practices and experiences that relate to this interdisciplinary field. Additionally, Komjathy's texts challenge the field of contemplative studies to take seriously a wide range of traditions and religiously committed experts as a way of more deeply engaging the phenomena of contemplation. For Christian contemplatives, as well as other tradition-based contemplative communities, Komjathy's leadership and contributions are a welcome addition and he is a great advocate for greater inclusion of more approaches and sources for the field of study.

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Meister Eckhart als Denker. Vol. 4, Meister-Eckhart-Jahrbuch Beihefte. Wolfgang Erb and Norbert Fischer, Editors. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer GmbH, 2017. xiii, 618 pp., \$63.00

Some books are monumental for their sheer size, and this is one of them. Among these, a few are devoted to single figures whose importance overshadows their age—and those that followed—and thus bears the rigorous demands of such an

approach. This is surely the case with this volume of collected essays devoted to “Meister Eckhart as Intellectual” (or, more literally, “thinker”). The fruit of a two-year study project at the Weltenburg Monastery (2014–2015) and an academic conference sponsored by the Bishopric of Mainz (2016), these studies probe the terrain of Eckhart scholarship with often startling new interpretive angles and open unexpected windows into his “unfinished” genius. The weight of this contribution, intellectually considered, is not insignificant; indeed, this volume can be seen to mark a major reorientation in Eckhart studies, for which readers drawn to his writings can only be immensely grateful.

Two essays by the editors open the book: the first, by Norbert Fischer, is devoted to a question fundamental to Eckhart’s thought, viz., “Who are they who serve God?” The second, by Wolfgang Erb exploring “Eckhart and mysticism,” is a wide-ranging essay introducing the varied contributions in this book. The essays that follow lure us into the complex, demanding, and often thrilling world that Eckhart’s writings offer. It is an accomplishment as provocative as it is profound. But readers be warned: this is not Eckhart for the faint-of-heart. Rather, it is a volume that sets the Meister within the wider history of Christian theology, first exploring what precedes his work (i.e., “Vorgeschichte”) and renders it comprehensible (Part I) and, second, examining the varied “stations” of his influence (Part II) in the later tradition (i.e., “Wirkungsgeschichte”). The whole, in its parts, is intellectually demanding in the tradition one expects of German historical scholarship. But it moves beyond the narrowly arcane, discerning in Eckhart ways of deepening the constructive theological and spiritual conversations in which we find ourselves as late-modern people. In this, the volume carries on work in which Eckhart himself, as a theologian of the “schools,” engaged, drawing on the philosophical and theological traditions that preceded him and setting them in often dazzlingly new constellations.

In the first section one finds essays on the “experience of God” in Eckhart and Augustine (Otto Karrer); a critical response to this thesis (Maximilian Brandt); an exploration of “the ground of the soul” that locates Eckhart’s distinctive contribution to the Aristotelian approach as exemplified by the Meister’s forebear, Thomas Aquinas (Otto Langer); a study examining the soul’s “stirring” of God, which considers Plotinus as a forerunner of Eckhart’s approach; a consideration of Eckhart’s exegesis of the Johannine prologue, in contrast to Augustine and Thomas (Ruedi Imbach); a probing of the Meister’s *Book of Spiritual Poverty* in dialogue with Hugo Ripelin of Straßburg’s theological *Compendium* (Georg Steer); a critical analysis of Eckhart’s treatise on *Unterscheidung* or *Distinctions* (N. Fischer); another, by the same author, on Eckhart’s daring and often misconstrued thesis, again focused on the same sermon that the author explored in the volume’s lead essay, that “God and I—we are one”; a broadly construed piece on Eckhart’s “thought, being, and life” (Karl Heinz Witte); and, a closing piece—which is a bridge to the final part—on Eckhart’s difficulties with the “heresy” trial in Cologne and later Avignon (W. Erb).

The second and final section, exploring Eckhart’s influence, is a feast of quite another sort. It opens with an essay on the writings of Henry Suso (Hans-Jürgen Müller), and proceeds with an examination of Nicholas of Cusa (Hermann Schnarr), one exploring Luther’s relation to Eckhart (Georg Steer), a magisterial piece by editor Norbert Fischer comparing Kant and Eckhart on the way each con-

strues the relation between God and humanity, and a piece that probes Eckhart and Husserl on “the essential I” (Martina Roesner). The last essays in this concluding part move the focus to literature, with essays on Thomas Mann’s “ecumenical image of God” (Ruprecht Wimmer), Eckhart and Rainer Maria Rilke (Robert Luff), the notion of “Gelassenheit,” often rendered as “releasement,” in Heidegger’s writings (Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann), a broad overview of Karl Rahner, Eckhart, and late-medieval German mysticism (Albert Raffelt), an introduction of Bernhard Weltes’ thought in relation to Eckhart (Jakub Sirovátka), and a final essay on Joachim Kopper’s use of Eckhart (Lutz Baumann). Such a broad array of essays offers a compelling argument for Eckhart’s significance in the theological trajectories that have given shape to western culture through the ages.

With a feast like this, it is as difficult to single out individual pieces as it is to stand back in surveying a Swedish smorgasbord: one must taste, here and there, to sample the delicacies and staples offered. Among the various offerings, the essays by Norbert Fischer set the pace for the whole, noteworthy for their lucid, penetrating, and often original analyses of Eckhart. Fischer’s approach presses, in a manner both careful and relentless, to the heart of Eckhart’s often subtle theological argumentation. And, as importantly, he points to resonances with other voices and developing themes in the tradition of pre-Christian philosophical sources and later theological traditions, setting the pace for these essays which, Fischer suggests, are meant to address the “need, in western culture, to rethink its fundamental intellectual moorings” (p. 1). In this, he brings Eckhart into a fruitful conversation with Augustine and Immanuel Kant, above all, on the question of “defending the value of human reason” for life—i.e., framing the contribution of this medieval thinker in the span of tradition from its moorings in Late Antiquity to the critical edifice of modernity.

Fischer is intent, in the programmatic essay that leads off this rich volume, on the work of illuminating the ethical clarity and spiritual urgency of Eckhart’s thought, against the mistaken notion that the medieval Dominican was concerned with an inner-mysticism that had no interest in “the world.” To argue his case, Fischer points in several essays to Eckhart’s sermon on Wisdom 5:16—“The just person lives in eternity”—as a means of entering the “center” of his thought, suggesting how Eckhart calls us to “Gelassenheit” (i.e., “abandonment,” “releasement”) in a manner that is at once a summons to a free and other-oriented moral engagement. If this sounds contradictory, it is—at least on the surface of things. But the sermon, as Fischer astutely demonstrates, is not about surfaces. It is, rather, about Eckhart’s call to become aware of the depths of our identity—the “inner spark”—that is never separated from God. Here, there is “no Why,” a typical Eckhartian theme. And here, we find ourselves freed to “work” without intent of reward; to “become nothingness,” as Eckhart put it, so that “all [our] works should be living works.” This points to the Dominican’s compelling notion of the spiritual life as the “being born” in God, which, he suggests, is nothing less or other than a “vision of God.” The formative path is clear, leading from intellection through the “Gelassenheit” to the action of moral engagement, which reveals itself as vision which opens us to the ongoing transformation in love.

What becomes clear in this opening essay finds a nuanced articulation in the varied essays that follow. With this feast in hand, Fischer’s claim that Eckhart’s thought offers a substantive orientation for late-modern theological work is cer-

tainly defensible. The essays, considered as a whole, shift the discourse about Eckhart from the strictly historical to the existential and spiritual—and from reductive arguments about tradition to a renewed appreciation of how texts like Eckhart’s might reframe thinking in our day. The gain for those interested in the constructive contribution of historical sources, in this case Eckhart’s wide-ranging and provocative thought, for both theology and spirituality is clear enough. One can only be grateful to the co-editors, Fischer and Erb, and the chorus of scholars who joined them in this quest and brought this feast to the table.

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