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### Abstract

The work of Georges Bataille occupies an appropriately paradoxical place in the history of philosophy. Though he was decades ahead of his time, Bataille’s main focus was in a tradition that long been out of favor—mysticism. Though he claimed to be an atheist, he talked often of God. In this paper, I examine the ways in which Bataille’s system of thought intertwines and diverges from Meister Eckhart, exploring the possibility of the Nietzschean mysticism Bataille constructed in his *Summa Atheologica*. With this more nuanced understanding of Bataille’s thought in place, his massive importance for post-structuralism and French philosophy more broadly becomes apparent.

# Like Water in Water: The Nihilism of “Why,” the Immanence of “Because”

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## Abstract

The work of Georges Bataille occupies an appropriately paradoxical place in the history of philosophy. Though he was decades ahead of his time, Bataille’s main focus was in a tradition that long been out of favor—mysticism. Though he claimed to be an atheist, he talked often of God. In this paper, I examine the ways in which Bataille’s system of thought intertwines and diverges from Meister Eckhart, exploring the possibility of the Nietzschean mysticism Bataille constructed in his *Summa Atheologica*. With this more nuanced understanding of Bataille’s thought in place, his massive importance for post-structuralism and French philosophy more broadly becomes apparent.

I live by tangible experience and not by logical explanation. I have of the divine an experience so mad that one will laugh at me if I speak of it. I enter into a dead end. There all possibilities are exhausted; the “possible” slips away and the impossible prevails. To face the impossible — exorbitant, indubitable — when nothing possible any longer is in my eyes to have an experience of the divine; it is analogous to a torment. (Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience* 33).

Near the end of the *Big Lebowski*, Jeff Bridges and John Goodman have their final showdown with the “nihilists.” When informed that their convoluted scam has been foiled, one of the nihilists cries out “but it’s not fair!” to which John Goodman screams, “YOU’RE NIHILISTS!” (*The Big Lebowski*). So goes the general critique of nihilism: regardless of its abstract philosophical validity, nobody actually lives as a nihilist.

What would it mean to live one’s life believing in “nothing?” What do we mean when we say “nothing?” More basically, what do we mean when talk about Being as such? In order to answer these questions and paint a clearer picture of the thinkers involved, I will examine how Georges Bataille and Meister Eckhart grappled with these questions — how their analyses were remarkably similar given the immense gulf of time and culture between them and how their answers differ in important ways.

Georges Bataille’s association with medieval philosophy and theology, especially mystical theology, can hardly be contested. He titled a collection of books the *Summa Atheologica* and worked as an archivist of the medieval collections of France’s national library. When encountering Bataille, we must ask the question, “what can be retained from mysticism if we no longer believe in divinity?” Indeed, this question drives much of his thought. The answer lies, at least partly, in Bataille’s interactions with and understanding of Meister Eckhart’s mystical theology. What did Bataille take from Eckhart? Much, I

will argue. Their respective philosophies, however, differ in important ways; in this essay, I will point to those differences and trace their implications in Bataille's thought.

A note on the method and organization of this essay: as far reaching and thorough as Bataille's thought proves to be, it cannot be completely systematized, and the same could be said of Meister Eckhart. I will first lay the foundations of Eckhart and Bataille's commonalities. I will then examine the consequences of their most important points of departure — namely the death of God and the loss of organicism. I have tried my best to present the key concepts in a way that is both systematic and linear, though the idea of the extreme limit of rationality, of the breakdown of discursivity, necessitates a certain degree of arbitrariness in my organization.

Furthermore, if the tensions set up here seem anachronistic or misguided, I remind the reader of Bataille's characterization of philosophy from the introduction of *Theory of Religion*: "The foundation of one's thought is the thought of another; thought is like a brick cemented into a wall ... thus the adjoining bricks, in a book, should not be less visible than the new brick" (*Theory of Religion* 8). This essay attempts to perform "the work of the mason" (9) in order to properly situate Bataille's thought in the wall of the Western tradition of mysticism. To do this effectively, I am operating under the assumption that truly great thinkers, though indeed conditioned by their historicity, can be placed into dialogue with ideas and philosophies far outside their literal point in durational time.

### **The "Entire Human," Transcendence and Immanence, and Nothing(ness)**

Fundamentally, an entire human being is simply a being in whom transcendence is abolished, from whom there's no separating anything now. An entire human being is partly a clown, partly God, partly crazy ... and is transparence. (George Bataille, *On Nietzsche* xxvi)

A few important terms from the quote above need to be clarified before I can proceed: "entire human" and "transcendence" (and implied by transcendence, "immanence"). Bataille's "entire human" is his interpretation of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*. An entire-human, for Bataille does not define his or her worth through recourse to a higher or external purpose. For an entire-human<sup>1</sup> being, the experience of life is valuable in itself and "itself is authority" (*Inner Experience* 7). This understanding of the immanent value of "experience" separates Bataille drastically from existential-phenomenology:

For some time now, the only philosophy which lives — that of the German school — tended to make the highest knowledge an extension of inner experience. But this *phenomenology* lends to knowledge the value of a goal which one attains through experience. This is an ill-sorted match. (8)

Throughout his oeuvre, Bataille insists that his project is one of "abolishing transcendence" or one of "immanence." These two terms have a convoluted usage in the history of philosophy, and Bataille uses them in a particular way. Transcendence is the quality of being "outside oneself/something" while immanence designates the opposite — being "inside" oneself/something, "self-contained," or unmediated. In orthodox Catholic theology, for example, God is transcendent to the world—God exists beyond the world and therefore must be contacted through priests etc.<sup>2</sup> These definitions are vague, but

because they lay the groundwork for Bataille’s thought, they need to stay appropriately broad and will become clearer.

Additionally, any discussion of nihilism needs to address the question of nothing. Before we can even discuss the possibility of believing in nothing, the “nothing” itself must be clarified. The word nothing has an important multi-valence for both Eckhart and Bataille. Consider the statement, “I believe in nothing.” It could designate a negation of any and all possible beliefs. This is the most common understanding of nihilism (recall John Goodman screaming at the Nihilists in *The Big Lebowski*). It could, however, designate a belief in nothingness. To use Heidegger’s language from “What is Metaphysics,” “I believe in...” (“What is Metaphysics” 100). Finally, it could designate a belief in no thing. Eckhart defines a “thing” as an entity understood or encountered through the mediation of concepts. Consequently, a belief in “no thing” would be a belief in unmediated experience. All of these possible definitions are at play in the discussions of no-thing(ness) in Bataille and Eckhart and should be held in mind as we proceed.

### **Bataille’s Theory of Religion**

Additionally, I need to make explicit the understanding of religion and spirituality being used in this paper. In *Theory of Religion* Bataille posits the wish to return to a state of being “in the world like water in water” as the primal motivation of religion (*Theory of Religion* 19).<sup>3</sup> Bataille’s poetic turn of phrase designates a state of “oceanic oneness” (Freud 725). For reasons we will discuss shortly, Bataille sees humans as alienated from the world around them through discourse, through utility, and through durational time. Religion, then, is an attempt to return to a feeling of “intimacy” of feeling connected to the world around us, or the “absence of individuality, the imperceptible sonority of a river, the empty limpidity of the sky” (50).<sup>4</sup> Intimacy designates Bataille’s understanding of immanence — being “like water in water” is the definition of immanence for Bataille (and is therefore the abolition of transcendence).

Bataille’s position on the possibility of living in a state of intimacy seems to vary depending on the text, but he describes moments or experiences of intimacy in great detail in his more personal texts.<sup>5</sup> Eckhart, however, exemplifies a life of “intimacy,” at least in his writings:<sup>6</sup> “only then may we be all in all, as God is all in all” (Eckhart 132). Though Eckhart’s thought breaks with previous mysticism, the aspiration to “oneness” can be seen throughout the history of mysticism.

### **Meister Eckhart’s “Why” and the Critiques of Duration and Utility**

In his sermon “Woman, the Hour is Coming” Meister Eckhart presents a deceptively radical conception of the “true adorer ... [of] the Father:”

“Why do you love God?”—“I do not know, because of God.”—“Why do you love the truth?”—“Because of the truth.”—“Why do you love justice?”—“Because of justice.”—“Why do you love goodness?”—“Because of goodness”—“Why are you living?”—“*My word, I do not know! But I am happy to be alive.*” (54, emphasis added).

Just before presenting this dialogue of the “good man,” Eckhart notes “all things that are in time have a why” (54). The point then, seems, to be a simple one: God is eternal, and therefore cannot have a “why.” But what exactly would it mean to live without a “why?” In a sense there are two questions at stake here: the first is the question of durational time; the second is the question of transcendent meaning or utility.<sup>7</sup>

Let us begin with durational time. As I move through the world, I experience time in the three-fold manner of past, present, and future. I set some goal in the future so that my present feels meaningful, and I narrativize my past so that I can “make sense” of how I ended up where I am today (which of course, as I have already mentioned, gestures towards where I hope to go). I will refer to this structure of temporality as “durational time.” If, for example, I desire to be a professor of philosophy, I know that I need to do certain things in the present to make that happen — familiarizing myself with the history of philosophy, for example, by studying Eckhart, Bataille, and Heidegger. Furthermore, I then tell myself that even though I once wanted to study literature, what I *really* liked about literature was its capacity for philosophical expression — I always wanted to study philosophy, I “just didn’t know it yet.” Assuming this goal (this *desire*) stays in place and I do what needs to be done in order to achieve it, someday I will hopefully get a job as a professor and feel “fulfilled” — I have accomplished a goal of mine ... for now. At that point my life will no longer have a meaning-point in the future to anchor my sense of meaning and purpose in the present — I might begin work on a study of the implications of queer theory for rereading Hamlet as an expression of Foucaultian power dynamics; I might try to get tenure; I might try to get married; I might try to travel to Iceland and watch the aurora borealis; I might even secretly try to become a high paid sex-worker in addition to my professorship. The “project” is ultimately interchangeable; I simply need something towards which I can work.

Readers familiar with Buddhism will see an obvious problem — the “fulfillment” and joy I get from completing these projects will be fleeting and ephemeral. I might save up five years to afford my trip to Iceland, for example, and the trip will only last a week or two. I’ll spend exponentially larger amounts of time being miserable than I will spend feeling fulfilled. The problem lies in the structure of desire inherent in durational time. Desire is constituted by a lack — I can only desire something insofar as I do not already have it. For this reason, God cannot “desire” anything — God cannot experience meaning (in the strict sense of meaning as conceived by durational time). If God were to desire anything, God would be lacking something and would therefore not be God: “Above this intellect that seeks, there is another intellect which is not a seeker” (Eckhart 120); God never seeks anything at all, for God already contains all that has been, is, or can be. For Eckhart, then, God is (in-itself) meaningful. Examining the structure and problems of durational time shows that god has no “will,” no “desires” in the way we experience them. Therefore God is, strictly speaking, “meaningless” — God experiences no sense of “meaning” as we do and any attempt to talk of “God’s will” anthropomorphizes God.

There is another dimension of “meaning” — what does God mean for *us*? “Why do you love God?” This question, the question of utility, proceeds similarly but is distinct. Because we experience meaning as a condition of durational time, we find ourselves asking of daily activities “how is this *useful* to me? How will this help me accomplish my goal?” There are several implications here, but one is especially important — something must be useful to some end beyond itself in order to be (experienced as) meaningful. We define things in terms of how they are useful *to us*<sup>8</sup> — hence Heidegger’s introduction of the ready-to-hand versus the present-at-hand (*Being and Time* 135). A chair, for example, cannot be

defined as a certain surface with a given number of legs and of a certain height; a chair, most accurately defined, is anything on which you sit. We experience objects as meaningful only insofar as they are useful in a particular way. If all the legs of the chair I am sitting on snap, the chair no longer appears to me as being properly a chair — it becomes a *useless* collection of various pieces of wood (it becomes present-at-hand). Phrased otherwise, a chair is a chair only insofar as it is a means to the end of sitting.

But is sitting an end-in-itself? Almost certainly not, given what we have discussed about meaning-making in durational time. I am currently sitting, for example, in order to comfortably type on this computer. I am typing on this computer in order to complete this paper. I am completing this paper in order to better understand figures in the history of Western philosophy ... and so on and so forth. We are left with two unsettling understandings: infinite regress or a complete renunciation of meaning: "The absurdity of an endless deferral [of value not defined by utility] only justifies the equivalent absurdity of a true end, which serves no purpose" (*Theory of Religion* 28). Whatever is the "ultimate end" or the "end-in-itself" of this cycle, if one exists, *has to be useless*. Otherwise, we are stuck in the "endless deferral."

For Eckhart, then, God must be literally use-less. Any account of divinity that says anything beyond the tautology "God is good because God is God" has already subjugated God to some outside source<sup>9</sup> — it has made God's meaning "transcendent," or parasitic upon some outside source. Consequently, if a Christian answers the question of "Why do you love God?" with "because it makes me feel safe, connected to something higher, comforted," etc, she has subjugated God to her own happiness. More radically, if she answers, "because it is the right thing to do," she has subjugated God to an external system of ethics. Both Eckhart and Bataille point to this destruction of transcendent ethical systems. Eckhart, for example, claims that a person who loves God "without why" would witness "with [his] own eyes [his] father and all [his] friends killed" and be unmoved (132). Bataille similarly claims "the apathy of the gaze of the animal" after killing another animal "expresses ... an existence that is ... on level with the world ... like water in water" (*Theory of Religion* 25).

In these two critiques, we see why Bataille insists on the entire-human being someone "in whom transcendence has been abolished." Transcendence designates a subjugation or a deferral; in order to be fully human, to immerse ourselves as "water in water," we have must abolish transcendent justifications — and therefore justification as such.

These two critiques largely lay the foundation of Bataille and Eckhart's thought. If we accept these critiques, the obvious question is, in a strange sense, an ethical one: how are we to live? If we truly give up on meaning and utility, how can we possibly function in the world? To understand these questions is to understand what it means to call Bataille a "nihilist." What does it mean to believe in nothing?

### **The Annihilation of Created Things**

"Therefore the only man thoroughly just is he who has annihilated all created things" (Eckhart 99).

"And above all 'nothing,' I know 'nothing' — I moan this like a sick child, whose attentive mother holds his forehead (mouth open over the basin). But I don't have a mother, the basin is the starry sky (in my poor nausea, it is thus)" (George Bataille, *Inner Experience* 48).

Given the critique of utility, duration, and meaning just examined, we can now say that “meaning” (as defined through orientation to the future or utility) is arbitrary and not inherent to the object. My cell phone, for example, seems to me to be a device inherently “meant” to help me communicate with people. To a person who has never used a cell phone, however, it will appear simply as a hunk of plastic and glass — something to be thrown perhaps, or used to prop open a door. Neither of these interpretations, however, reveals my phone in its Being — strictly speaking, my phone “is nothing” except as serving some function *for me*.<sup>10</sup> Beneath all “things” lies nothing; all things are primordially nothing, to use Heidegger’s language. We can now state the particular use of the world “thing” in Bataille and Eckhart: a “thing” is precisely a “created thing,” or an entity which has been assigned (arbitrary) meaning

The obvious consequence of this for Eckhart, towards which I gestured earlier, concerns the fact that we cannot ever say God has a “meaning,” because meaning necessitates a “for me,” which in turn implies a subjugation of God. Given that we are made in “God’s image,” Eckhart asserts that nothing(ness) is also the only proper comportment for a human being in the world.<sup>11</sup>

“Annihilating all created things,” then, essentially amounts to living “like water in water;” Eckhart and Bataille agree about the primordial “nothing” and the problems created when durational time and utility intervene to conceal this fundamental emptiness of Being. There is, however, an important divergence revealed in the juxtaposition of the two quotes in the previous sentence. Eckhart’s “annihilation of all created things” refers to making human beings more like God, while Bataille’s “like water in water” explicitly designates the being-in-the-world of animals.<sup>12</sup> This divergence indicates one of the central questions of Bataille’s thought: what would a mystical atheism look like? What can be saved of immanence in a world devoid of divinity?

### **Getting Beyond Meaning and *l’Extrême***

Therefore, to speak, to think, short of joking or ... is to dodge existence: it is not to die but to be dead (George Bataille, *Inner Experience* 46).

What counts is no longer the statement of the wind, but the wind (13).

Eckhart believes that in order to reach a state of being “all in all” we must move beyond “knowing, willing, and having” (Schürman 209) — we must make ourselves virginal. In the sermon “Jesus Entered,” Eckhart uses the word “virgin” to designate a person “devoid of all foreign images” (3).<sup>13</sup> For Eckhart, images are always created things, and therefore conceal and misplace the proper understanding of God. Eckhart never explicitly explains how such a divorce from desire and attachment might be possible, though he often critiques various ways that people normally attempt to unify with God. He tells his audience, composed mostly of nuns, that so long as they pray with the hope or purpose of achieving salvation or enlightenment, they have failed to love God appropriately (given, of course, the critique of project and utility we have already seen). In “Blessed are the Poor,” he makes a remarkably Nietzschean point about ascetics:



It is those people who in penitential exercise and external practice, of which they make a great deal, hold fast to their selfish I. The Lord have pity on such people who know so little of divine truth. Such people are called holy on account of their external appearance; but internally, they are asses. (211)

Eckhart gives very little detail about how we might go beyond attachment — he simply argues we cannot love God without doing so. Eckhart's lack of commentary on a method, however, is justified by his thought — in order to be completely virginal, Eckhart cannot present us with metaphors or images of how to reach mystical oneness. Furthermore, Eckhart wants to stay completely removed from projects and therefore cannot give a "plan" to reach the "goal" of mystical experience — to do so would be to already betray his thought.

Bataille, however, has a more intricate understanding of how we might get beyond created things to a state of intimacy. Bataille, unlike Eckhart, explicitly names language and discourse as the barriers to intimacy.<sup>14</sup> Bataille even goes so far as to call the problem of utility "one of the most remarkable and most fateful aberrations of language" (*Theory of Religion* 28). Language, as a formal system, sets up a distinction between subject and object. When I say that I know God, I am already separating God from myself, and even an attempt to say that I know myself bifurcates the self in a subject-self that knows and an object-self that *is known*. All I can say is "I know..." which, of course, does not qualify as knowledge at all — knowledge must be knowledge of an object. Bataille begins to refer to the knowledge of ... as "non-knowledge." It could be, however, less vaguely termed non-discursive knowledge.<sup>15</sup>

Since Bataille explicitly associates language with project and utility, he also considers language one of the structures we must go beyond to achieve intimacy. In order to get beyond reason, however, we cannot abandon it. Simply rejecting discursive knowledge is not sufficient. A rejection of discourse would slip into asceticism; it would be the intentional self-deprivation of some resource. Asceticism, as we have already seen, cannot be an appropriate comportment for an entire-human. Bataille's concept of the "entire-human" asserts its full meaning and weight here; Bataille wants to radically open the possibilities for human existence, not limit it. The experience of isolation and anguish (spurred by project and utility) that leads to the overcoming of discourse is uniquely human: "My words poorly announce the melancholy of being neither God nor an oyster" (*The Unfinished System* 103). God does not feel anguish because God is necessarily complete and unified, while an oyster is not a being "for whom its being is an issue" (*Being and Time* 322); humans exist in the unique (and tormenting) space between these two extremes.

Instead Bataille argues we must "emerge through project from the realm of project" (*Inner Experience* 46). We can only go beyond the structure of project once we have transgressed its "extreme limit" (*l'extrême*): "Inner experience [mystical experience/intimacy] is led by discursive reason. Reason alone has the power to undo its [own] work, to hurl down what it has built up" (46). By "[assuming] the mistake and [going] to the end" (*Žižek*), we push reason past its breaking point. At the extreme limit of discursivity, we bear witness to its failures and recognize its truth — its limitations.<sup>16</sup> Bataille is explicitly arguing that discursivity is simultaneously the only means by which we can access inner experience, and the obstacle that prevents us from immersing ourselves in it; in Derrida's language, discursivity is inner experience's condition of (im)possibility.

## Constant Joy and the Torment

Throw all anxiety out of your heart, so that in your heart there be nothing but constant joy (Meister Eckhart, “See What Joy” 133).

*Not enough!* Not enough anguish, suffering ... I say it, I, child of joy, whom a wild, happy laugh — never ceased to carry [...] But...to maintain a finger in boiling water ... and I cry out “not enough!” (George Bataille, *Inner Experience* 59)

This aporia points towards the fundamental difference in Bataille and Eckhart’s respective systems — the loss of God, and therefore, holism. Eckhart proposes a system that radically eliminates alienation — a constant sense of being “all in all” with God, a constant joy. For Eckhart, renouncing project and attachment is the only true “happiness” and is only attained when that happiness pervades and overwhelms ones whole existence. Whether or not Eckhart actually lived his life in such a constant state of joy, we can only speculate. His thought, however, clearly and explicitly suggests that such “constant joy” is not only possible, but is a necessary condition of true happiness as such. *Only* the joyous person is immersed in Eckhart’s inner experience.

Bataille differs from this conception in two incredibly important ways: Bataille’s inner experience is neither constant nor completely joyful. Given what we have already said about discourse’s role as the condition of (im)possibility of inner experience, Bataille’s thought can never fully renounce discursivity, and can therefore never fully embrace inner experience. Bataille is quick to note, for example, in his discussion of the practice of potlatch that while potlatch wastes necessities (and therefore annihilates them as created things), it always-already entails the expectation of reciprocation (*The Accursed Share*). The work of the subject seeking inner experience is never complete:

In the abyss of possibilities, proceeding, thrown always further, hastening towards a point where the possible is the impossible itself, ecstatic, breathless, experience thus opens a bit more every time the horizon of God (the wound); extends a bit more the limits of the heart, the limits of being (*Inner Experience* 104).

The logic of the “extreme limit” asserts itself here in full force. Every transgression of the extreme limit always-already both posits and surpasses it. Limits are constituted by their transgression — I only know I have had too much to drink by drinking too much. In this sense, transgressing the limit retroactively discovers and reaffirms it. In going past the limit, however, I simultaneously have done just that — I have opened up new possibilities for myself. Continuing my previous metaphor, every time I drink too much, I build up alcohol tolerance. Here we see why Bataille’s inner experience, in contrast to Eckhart’s, can never be holistic. For Eckhart, there is still God, and therefore there is still an organic whole, a unity with which we can join. Bataille, however, adds the death of God to Eckhart’s thought. Bataille’s inner experience, therefore, always operates within a dialectic of transgression — constantly both surpassing and affirming the power of discursive reason.

This dramatic difference leads to the second, more noticeable difference in their thought. Eckhart, as I have already mentioned, sees inner experience as constant joy, unending ecstasy: Eckhart’s inner experience announces itself *only* “when man no longer feels any torment in his heart for anything

whatsoever” (“See What Love” 133). Again, for Eckhart, “perfect unity and simplicity” with God relieves any suffering that might remain in an entire-human being: “those things man suffers for God and for God alone, God makes light and gentle for him” (“Jesus Entered” 7).

In both linguistic and conceptual contrast to Eckhart’s “man [who] no longer feels any torment in his heart,” Bataille titled one of the most powerful sections of his *Inner Experience* “The Torment.” Because of the inescapability of discursivity (and therefore project and utility), Bataille’s mysticism must be tormented and incomplete. With no God with whom we can unify, no ground to which we can return, Bataille’s entire-human being is always-already “lacerated.” Bataille’s torment is that of fully understanding the gravity of the only two certainties he concedes to human experience: “that we are not everything and that we will die” (*Inner Experience* xxxii). Though an Eckhartian “constant joy” is possible within the coordinates of Bataille’s non-theistic mysticism — indeed Bataille speaks of ecstasy as often as he does anguish — Bataille does not designate such joy as necessary or constitutive in the way Eckhart does. Bataille explicitly says that the powerful emotions associated within inner experience are, in a certain sense, irrelevant in their particularity. It does not matter whether going “beyond good and evil” brings me overwhelming ecstasy or crushing anguish — “intensity alone matters” (17).<sup>17</sup>

### Supplication Without Response

Bataille and Eckhart undoubtedly share much in common — their critiques of project and utility run almost identically (with the exception of Bataille’s focus on discursivity), and Bataille undoubtedly intentionally borrowed much of his vocabulary from Eckhart. And indeed the use of Eckhart’s vocabulary makes clearer just how radically ahead of his time he was; Eckhart seems to be aware of this fact as he makes constant references in his sermons to the fact that most people will not understand him and suffered the Inquisition.

Their differences illuminate not only the undercurrents of their respective systems of thought, but also the debt they both owe to their specific conditions of historicity — Bataille’s thought differs from Eckhart’s precisely at the death of God, at Bataille’s position as post-Nietzschean.

Through this marriage of Nietzsche and Eckhart, of atheism and mysticism, Bataille strikes at what he sees as the “sole truth of man, glimpsed at last:” humility without meekness, knowledge without discourse, “supplication without response” (13).

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<sup>1</sup> Bataille points towards the important difference between "entire-human" and "entirely-human" near the end of the above quote. An entire-human being does limit itself to human possibility: and entire-human is precisely *not* only (or entirely) human.

<sup>2</sup> This is, of course, a gross oversimplification, but for the purpose of illuminating definitions, it serves its purpose.

<sup>3</sup> Bataille's use of "being in the world" here places him in dialogue with Heidegger. A reader familiar with Heidegger's early work will note that Bataille shares much with Heidegger's analysis of meaning and time, but ultimately draws a different conclusion.

<sup>4</sup> Here we begin to see the problem of discussing intimacy discursively: these are "negative definitions, from which the essential is still missing" (51).

<sup>5</sup> In *On Nietzsche*, for example, Bataille suggests that constant mystical experience is possible, though in *Theory of Religion* and *Inner Experience* he argues that such constancy is impossible; this is the difficulty of systematizing Bataille's thought — he explicitly points to its inconsistencies.

<sup>6</sup> Obviously we could never know whether or not Eckhart proceeded through life "like water in water," but his work at least expresses a belief in its possibility.

<sup>7</sup> Importantly these two phenomena are what Heidegger would call "equiprimordial" — each is a necessary condition of the other. The reasons for this will become clear as we proceed, but bear in mind that either phenomenon could be discussed first.

<sup>8</sup> The "to us" will become more and more important as this paper progresses, but for now it is enough to emphasize the "for us" to suggest that the use (and therefore meaning) is always "for us."

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<sup>9</sup> Or, in Socrates' famous formulation, "is it pious because the gods love it or do the gods love it because it is pious?" (Plato 12a). Eckhart would have to answer the former.

<sup>10</sup> Going back to *The Big Lebowski*, we see the "nothing" of created things in the Dude's response when asked about his bowling ball: "Obviously you're not a golfer" (*The Big Lebowski*).

<sup>11</sup> Eckhart has a specific conception of what it means to be an "image" of something and what it means for us to be made in God's image, but fully exploring this concept is not necessary to our proceedings.

<sup>12</sup> Of course Bataille often uses religious language in his work, but his references to God are metaphorical and an attempt to explicitly place his work in dialogue with the mystical thinkers he draws so much from — Eckhart included.

<sup>13</sup> For Eckhart, metaphorical "virginity" is necessary but not sufficient for loving God appropriately; he also posits the concept of a "spouse," but for our purposes here we need only focus on the virgin.

<sup>14</sup> There is perhaps something to be said for Eckhart's renunciation of "images" as a gesture towards a similar critique. Eckhart, however, does not focus on language in the way Bataille does — an important difference, as we shall see.

<sup>15</sup> Discursive knowledge includes not only language, but logic and reason as well.

<sup>16</sup> Here we should hear the echoes of Nietzsche in Bataille: "In some remote corner of the sprawling universe, twinkling among the countless solar systems, there was once a star on which some clever animals invented knowledge. It was the most arrogant, most mendacious minute in 'world history,' but it was only a minute. After nature caught its breath a little, the star froze, and the clever animals had to die — one could invent a fable like this and still not have illustrated sufficiently how miserable, how shadowy and fleeting, how aimless and arbitrary the human intellect appears in nature" (*Nietzsche* 17).

<sup>17</sup> This also points towards why Bataille sees meditation and drug abuse as equally efficient and legitimate ways to abolish transcendence.