C4

CHAPTER FOUR

Medieval Mystics on Persons*

WHAT JOHN LOCKE DIDN'T TELL YOU

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C4.P1 The thirteenth to fifteenth centuries were witness to lively and broad-ranging debates about the nature of persons. In logical and grammatical discussions, "person" indicated individuality (as opposed to universality or commonality). In the legal-political realm, "person" separated subjects from objects, *whos* from *whats*. In theological contexts, "person" appears most often in Trinitarian and Christological debates: God was three persons in one Being, and Christ was one person with two natures (human and divine), where the broadly accepted definition of person was Boethius's "an individual substance with a rational nature."

C4.N* * For their feedback on earlier drafts of this essay, I am grateful to audiences at the Society of Fellows in the Humanities at Columbia University, at Georgetown University, and at the Symposium in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy—Feminine* Perspectives in Montreal.

C4.P2   In this chapter, I look at how these uses of "person" overlap in the works of thirteenth- to fifteenth-century contemplatives in the Latin West, such as Hadewijch, Meister Eckhart, and Catherine of Siena. After explicating the key concepts of individuality, dignity, and rationality, I show how these ideas combine with the contemplative use of first and second person perspectives, personification, and introspection to yield a concept of "person" that both prefigures Locke's classic seventeenth-century definition and deeply influences the development of personalism.

C4.S1   ## 1 Background

C4.P3   By the thirteenth century, the Latin word *persona* was regularly employed in the Latin West in a number of different contexts: grammatical, logical, legal, political, and theological. As chapters 1–3 demonstrate, these contexts have complicated, overlapping histories. For the purposes of this chapter, a general overview of the main traditions is all that is necessary: my goal is merely to identify the core concepts each contributes to the working notion of "person" in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries.[1]

C4.S2   ### *Grammatical and Logical Context*

C4.P4   Twelfth-century logical and grammatical discussions use *persona* both to distinguish constructions with a subject from those without one and to contrast individuals with classes, species, groups, and universals. In suppositional theory, for instance, personal supposition applies when there is an individual subject for a grammatical sentence (such as "Hildegard wrote to the bishop"), in contrast with impersonal supposition (such as "It is true that Hildegard was an abbess"). In grammatical

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C4.N1   1 See Theo Kobusch, *Die Entdeckung der Person: Metaphysik der Freiheit und modernes Menschenbild* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997).

and logical contexts, the distinction drawn between *persona* (as individual) and *populus* (as a particular group of persons) becomes common enough that the plural of "person" eventually becomes "people" in the emerging English vernacular, rather than "persons"—a term increasingly reserved for technical discussions.

C4.P5   These contrasts yield a grammatical and logical notion of "person" that emphasizes subjective individuality. Another feature that "person" connotes in these contexts is incommunicability. Universals such as "human being" or "green" are inherently communicable insofar as they can be instantiated in any number of objects both at a time and over time. My mother and my sister are both human beings at the same time as seven billion others; the leaves on the trees outside my window are green now, as were the different leaves on the same trees last year. Humanness and greenness are properties that can be shared in this way. Persons, by contrast, are not universals. They are inherently nonrepeatable and cannot be shared or held in common between individuals. Incommunicability carries theological significance in medieval Trinitarian explanations of how God can be three persons in one being. It also becomes relevant in philosophical and theological discussions during the Averroeistic controversies in the thirteenth century, which center on whether there is a universal agent intellect for all individual human thinkers.[2]

C4.S3   *Legal and Political Context*

C4.P6   The concept of person is firmly established in the Roman tradition in the first century BCE. The Latin term *persona* captures the different sorts of roles available to individual human beings within Roman law, such as spouse, property owner, or defendant, drawing on the way the Greek word *prosopon* referred not just to the masks used in drama but

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C4.N2   2 For further discussion of the importance of the property of incommunicability for persons, especially as it applies in theological contexts, see chapter 2.

also to the various roles indicated by those masks. Roman law was set up in terms of the relation between persons (*personae*), things (*res*), and events or transactions (*actiones*)—a distinction that carries over into western legal theory. By the twelfth century, when Gratian compiles the *Decretum*, the term "person" indicates an individual subject who has certain inherent rights, capacities, and duties. The *Decretum* and subsequent *Decretals* become "the" source for canon law in the Middle Ages and beyond, and thus establish this concept of person as central in both civil and religious legal discussions.[3]

C4.P7   Given the extensive overlap between legal and religious life in this period, it comes as little surprise that theologians and philosophers as well as canon lawyers knew the *Decretals,* drew from them as necessary, and frequently used the word *persona* as well as *homo* in discussions with legal overtones.[4] The concept of *persona* (and its distinction from *res*) also features in the increasingly sophisticated medieval theories of just war theory. Discussions of right conduct in war (jus in bello), for instance, employ the concept of person in detailing appropriate rules of conduct toward the enemy, whether combatants, noncombatants, or prisoners of war. The concept of "person" is also used in delineating a group of human beings who merit special protection under the law: *miserabiles personae* (lit.: persons deserving of mercy or pity). One of the main considerations in generating this category was ensuring that all persons had access to fair legal representation by the clergy.[5] Meant to pick out those who are simultaneously in need and worthy of aid, the term originally applies to widows, children (particularly

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C4.N3   3 The *Decretals*, for instance, continued to be used by Roman Catholic Church canons until 1918. For an overview of Gratian's compilation of the *Decretum* and the history of the *Decretals*, see Brian Tiereny, *Medieval Poor Law: A Sketch of Cannonical Theory and Its Application in England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 7–10.

C4.N4   4 See, for instance, Aquinas's discussion of marriage in *Summa contra gentiles* 3.125.

C4.N5   5 "The term *miserabiles personae* was used, in the *Decretum* and thereafter, to designate precisely a category of persons recommended to judicial benevolence, whom the clergy would represent in cases where this was normally forbidden." Janet Coleman, "Property and Poverty," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350–c. 1450*, ed. J. H. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 627.

orphans), and the poor; by the mid-thirteenth century it has been offi-cially expanded to include lepers, merchants, and pilgrims.[6]

C4.P8   The term *miserabiles personae* also appears in theological discussions from the thirteenth century onward. It is Francis of Assisi's experiences with lepers (qua *miserabiles personae*), for instance, that convinced him that "every person without exception was seen to be graced with the same inestimable worth and dignity given by God, one to another."[7] The idea that all human beings are equal in the eyes of God and that the "least of these" need to be treated with respect and compassion becomes increasingly central in the age of the mendicant orders, which are established in the early thirteenth century.

C4.P9   Associated with Christ as the Second Person of the Trinity and with human beings both via the Incarnation and via humans' cre-ation in God's image, dignity also becomes one of the features that distinguishes persons (*personae*) from things (*res*). Thus, the radical Franciscan Ubertine de Casale, in his *Arbor vitae crucifixae Iesu* (1305), denounces "stripping the poor Crucified One [Christ] in the persons of the poor, who had a right to be sustained in dignity by creation" (1.1). Casale argues that treating a pauper as lacking in dignity or worth is equivalent to treating God that way; the poor possess a positive right to better treatment. Legal and political notions of persons overlap here with grammatical and theological uses of the term: persons are sub-jects, not objects or things; they are individuals with intrinsic worth.

C4.S4   *Theological Context*

C4.P10   So far, I have discussed the application of the term "person" primar-ily to human beings. Yet, although all human beings were considered

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C4.N6   6 For further discussion of this category and the complications involved in determining to whom it applied, see Robert Shaffern, *Law and Justice from Antiquity to Enlightenment* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), 131–133. See also Michael Cusato, "Poverty," in the *Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy,* ed. Robert Pasnau and Christina Van Dyke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

C4.N7   7 Cusato, "Poverty," 587.

persons, no one in the Latin West in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries would have supposed that human beings were the only persons. Indeed, in theological contexts, discussions of persons focus much more on God's nature than on humans'—particularly on how the term "person" applies to the mysteries of the triune God (who is professed to be three persons in one God) and the Incarnation (Christ as one person with two natures).[8] Discussions of human persons generally follow treatments of how the concept applies to Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, who is both fully human and fully divine.[9]

C4.P11   Boethius's definition of "person" as "an individual substance with a rational nature" is accepted as standard in the theology faculties at Paris and Oxford by the thirteenth century and employed by all major scholastics, including Aquinas and Bonaventure. Taking each part of the definition in turn, we see that—as in grammatical and logical contexts—one important feature of persons is individuality, where that involves subjectivity, particularity, and incommunicability. Theological discussions particularly emphasize the incommunicability involved in individuality in spelling out how the Three Persons of the Trinity remain distinct despite their being one God. As I'll show in section 2, this idea of "personal distinction within unity" also provides medieval contemplatives with a model for both understanding and communicating mystical experiences of union with God.

C4.P12   The use of the term "substance" in Boethius's definition indicates that persons have nondependent existence. That is, although God the Creator, God the Savior, and God the Holy Spirit are one God, the *esse* (being) of each Person of the Trinity is independent from the being of the other two Persons, in that the Savior is not dependent for existence

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C4.N8   8 Nestorianism is the objectionable view in the neighborhood, where Christ's human and divine natures are viewed as separate persons.

C4.N9   9 For a detailed philosophical discussion of the concept of "person" specifically as it relates to the Incarnation, see Timothy Pawl, *In Defense of Conciliar Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

on the Creator, nor the Spirit on the Savior, nor the Creator on the Spirit, and so on.

C4.P13   In the case of human beings, this aspect of the definition of "person" raises questions about the nature of the rational soul—in particular, whether the soul is a substance in its own right or only one part of the substance that is the human being. On the one hand possessing the capacity for independent subsistence is one of the primary characteristics of a substance, and the rational soul was widely believed to subsist in separation from matter between death and the general resurrection. On the other hand the doctrine of the bodily resurrection was taken to entail that body and soul together make up the human being, and the view that the soul is the human being or the person was associated with gnostic heresies.[10]

C4.P14   Debates about the status of the rational soul rage throughout the thirteenth century,[11] but general consensus emerges that the soul is, by nature, only *part* of the human person and, thus, cannot be a person in its own right. As Bonaventure writes in his discussion of the assumption of the Virgin Mary, "[Mary's] blessedness would not have been complete unless she were there [in heaven] as a person. *The soul is not a person, but the soul joined to the body is a person.* Thus, it is clear that she is there in soul and in body."[12] Thomas Aquinas agrees, writing that in the case of human beings, "person" signifies "this flesh, these bones, and this soul" and stating definitively that "neither the name nor the definition of 'person' belongs to the rational soul."[13] As he explains in his *Disputed Questions on Power*, "the separated soul is

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C4.N10   10 For detailed discussions of the philosophical issues this doctrine raises, and how Aquinas at least attempts to deal with them, see my "Human Identity, Immanent Causal Relations, and the Principle of Non-repeatability: Thomas Aquinas on the Bodily Resurrection," *Religious Studies* 43 (2007): 373–394; "Not Properly a Person: the Rational Soul and 'Thomistic Substance Dualism,'" *Faith and Philosophy* 26, no. 2 (2009): 186–204; and "I See Dead People: Disembodied Souls and Aquinas's 'Two-Person' Problem," *Oxford Studies in Medieval Philosophy* 2 (2014): 25–45.

C4.N11   11 See Richard Dales, *The Problem of the Rational Soul in the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), for a comprehensive discussion of the issues and which figures took which position on them.

C4.N12   12 *Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary* I.2.9.

C4.N13   13 *Summa theologiae* Ia 29.4.co and 29.1.ad5, respectively. The rest of ad 5 reads as follows: "the soul is *part* of the human species; for this reason, since it is still by nature unitable [to a body] even when it is separated, it cannot be the sort of individual substance which is called a 'hypostasis' or 'first

part of [something with] a rational nature, namely, a human [being], but it is not the *whole* rational human nature, and therefore it is not a person."[14]

C4.P15   As Aquinas's response makes clear, the question of whether the human soul is a person touches not just on the soul's ability to subsist in separation from the body but also on the fact that it is a *rational* soul. The stipulation in Boethius's definition that a person is an individual substance "with a rational nature" is crucial. It separates beings who are self-aware and reflective from those who are not, beings who are capable of consciously working toward their final ends and attaining happiness (*beatitudo*) from those who merely move as they are naturally inclined.[15] As Aquinas states in the Prologue to his extensive discussion of morality in part 2 of the *Summa theologiae*, "What it means for us to be an image [of God] is that we are intellectual creatures endowed with free choice and capable of controlling our own acts."[16] The medieval conception of "rational nature" encompasses all aspects involved in having control over one's own actions—intellect and free choice of the will, first and foremost, but also memory, imagination, understanding, and creativity.

C4.P16   Individual substances with a rational nature—persons—are the only beings in the medieval world seen as capable of love and knowledge. Love in its ideal form is the desire for the highest good; knowledge in its purest form is possession of the truth. God is understood both as the Highest Good and as Truth itself, and so union with God in

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substance' any more than a hand or any other part of a human being can." All translations mine unless otherwise marked.

C4.N14   14 Disputed Questions on Power 9.2.ad14.

C4.N15   15 See Aquinas's *Treatise on Happiness* (*Summa theologiae* IaIIae 1–5) for further discussion, as well as his all-too-often overlooked discussion of happiness in *Summa contra gentiles* chaps. 25–63.

C4.N16   16 Prologue to the *Treatise on Happiness and Human Acts* (*Summa theologiae* I–II, Qq 1–5). He immediately goes on to motivate his discussion of morality—the entire, massive, second part of *Summa theologiae*—as follows: "Now that I have discussed the one whom we image—namely, God—and the things that have issued from God's power in accordance with his will, it remains for us to investigate God's image—namely, human beings—insofar as we are the source of our own acts because we possess free choice and have power over what we do."

both intellective and volitional form is the final end (that is, happiness) for all rational beings.[17] This conception of the final end of persons, particularly as it applies to human beings, becomes famously important in scholastic debates between the Dominicans (who tend to stress the centrality of intellect in the activity of perfect happiness) and Franciscans (who tend to stress the centrality of love). As I'll show, this conception of God as our final end also features prominently in contemporaneous portrayals of mystical union and grounds the contemplative emphasis on introspection and the self.

C4.S5

2 Individuality, Dignity, and Rationality in Medieval Contemplative Literature

C4.P17 Although the various contexts which employ the term "person" (logical/grammatical, legal/political, and theological) generate understandings of it with different emphases, none of these understandings are incompatible with the others. Rather, they overlap in ways that highlight three particular features: agential individuality, intrinsic dignity, and self-reflective intellection and volition. In what follows, I discuss how these features of personhood appear and are developed in the contemplative and mystical literature of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. Modern philosophers have tended to overlook the medieval contemplative tradition(s), but this massive literature (which includes but is not limited to books of spiritual instruction, guided meditations, letters, poetry exploring the love between the soul and God, and reports of and reflections on mystical experiences) gives us much broader insight into medieval understandings of persons than

C4.N17 17 Only God enjoys this state in its fullest form; created beings share in participation to greater and lesser degrees. For a classic discussion of this, see Aquinas's *Treatise on Happiness*. For secondary discussion, see Rebecca DeYoung, Colleen McCluskey, and Christina Van Dyke, *Aquinas's Ethics: Metaphysical Foundations, Moral Theory, and Theological Context* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), particularly the section on metaphysics.

can be gleaned just from scholastic discussions, which tend to focus on set topics.

C4.P18   Scholastics and contemplatives alike in this period hold that human beings are persons. Because *homo* is the more specific term, however, it is used much more often than *persona,* which is applied to human beings primarily in contexts with legal overtones. As contemplative texts begin to appear in the vernacular as well as Latin, this preference for using the species term for human beings is carried over; the word for "person" in whatever language (Middle Dutch, Middle High or Low German, Middle English, Tuscan Italian, etc.) is used almost exclusively for God—particularly Christ, as the Second Person of the Trinity.[18]

C4.P19   For the purposes of this chapter, the rise of texts composed in the vernacular has two central, related consequences. First, because both composing and reading in the vernacular is available to people with or without university education or formal training in Latin composition, these texts represent a wide range of voices. The thirteenth-century mystic Hadewijch, for instance, wrote her works in Middle Dutch and appears to have been highly educated and most likely came from a noble family, whereas the fourteenth-century Catherine of Siena was the twenty-fourth child of a cloth dyer and dictated the *Dialogue* in her native Tuscan dialect.

C4.P20   Second, the rise of the vernacular is associated with the development of a new, deeply personal piety.[19] This religious sensibility, which emphasizes humility and self-reflection, seeks a deeply emotional

C4.N18   18 This fact is often obscured in modern English translations of these texts, which tend to render the vernacular terms for "man" or "human being" as "person" to capture the more gender-neutral sense of those terms in their own time.

C4.N19   19 For an extended discussion of this connection, see Barbara Newman, "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling," in *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 138–189. For "the" source on this general shift in religious devotion, see Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages: The Historical Links between Heresy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Women's Religious Movement in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century, with the Historical Foundations of German Mysticism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

attachment to the incarnate God. The wildly popular devotional *Meditations on the Life of Christ* (*Meditationes vitae Christi*), for instance, which is written in Latin but translated into the vernacular and disseminated widely, explicitly guides the reader in imaginatively placing herself at Christ's birth, crucifixion, and death "as though you were hearing it with your own ears and seeing it with your own eyes."[20] Arising in part in response to the gnostic heresies of the Cathars, this piety was also influenced by the popularity of the contemporary courtly love tradition. As Caroline Walker Bynum notes, "the major literary genres available in these [vernacular] languages were various kinds of love poetry and romantic stories: the vocabulary provided by such genres was therefore a vocabulary of *feelings*."[21]

C4.P21   Although hardly the exclusive purview of women—men such as Bernard of Clairvaux, Francis of Assisi, Jan Ruysbroeck, and Richard Rolle also famously exemplify such piety at different times and in different places—this embodied and creative piety was particularly well-suited to women as they were perceived at this time, and the virtual explosion of affective devotional literature written by and for women across Europe in this period testifies to the extent to which it spoke to them,[22] while the explicit ban on women entering universities and higher echelons of the church in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries means that these works are overwhelmingly composed in the

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C4.N20   20 John of Caulibus, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, trans. F. Taney, A. Miller, and C. M. Stallings-Taney (Asheville, NC: Pegasus Press, 2000), 4. The *Meditationes* is addressed to a woman, as was common from the 1200s onward. As Thomas Bestul notes, "this fact is a reflection of the expanded audience for devotional texts of all kinds occasioned by the increase in literacy, particularly among laypersons of the aristocratic and bourgeois classes, and the growth of opportunities for private leisure and devotion." "Meditatio/Meditation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism,* ed. A. Hollywood and P. Dailey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 163.

C4.N21   21 "The Female Body and Religious Practice," in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 196.

C4.N22   22 For a good overview of this development, see Daniel Bornstein, "Women and Religion in Late Medieval Italy: History and Historiography," in *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, ed. D. Bornstein and R. Rusconi, trans. Margery Schneider (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1–27.

vernacular.[23] The development of this "vernacular piety" thus crosses gender lines as well as social hierarchies, including the split between religious and lay identities, making it an especially rich source for inquiry into the development of the notion of "person."

C4.S6

Individuality and Agency

C4.P22   One feature of this more affective piety is an awareness of the self as an individual with subjective agency. Personhood might be a property all human beings possess simply by dint of existing, but humans' status as persons comes with unique rights and responsibilities. All and only persons are capable of representing to themselves different potential courses of action, judging between those options, choosing which to enact, and reflecting on the results. In the case of human beings, the ability to choose consciously in accordance with or against God's will separates humans from all other material creatures (who lack second-order reflective capacities) at the same time that it connects humans to the other sorts of beings (God and the angels) who are responsible for their actions and, thus, can be blame- or praise-worthy.

C4.P23   Although much can be said about medieval views concerning the collective nature of sin and guilt (particularly as it relates to original sin and its consequences), the status of the person qua *individual* is always what is most at stake in discussions of punishment and reward: a fact that carries gains particular force when the punishments and rewards in question are potentially eternal, as with damnation and salvation. In contemplative literature, the status of the person qua individual is also significant because unmediated union with God is achieved (or not) on an individual basis. At the same time, there is an apparent paradox

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C4.N23   23 See Bynum, "The Female Body"; for a collection of the complications involved in the transmission of the works women wrote or dictated, primarily in the vernacular, see Catherine Mooney, ed., *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

here, insofar as it seems that particularity is precisely what is lost in mystical union.

C4.P24   As I've discussed elsewhere, contemplative attitudes toward individuality in mystical union and in the afterlife differ widely.[24] Contemplatives in the apophatic mystical tradition, for instance, such as Marguerite Porete, Meister Eckhart, and John Tauler, advocate a form of self-abnegation in which any sense of individual experience is lost.[25] Porete, for instance (who is burnt at the stake in 1310 for refusing to recant her views), describes the final stage of the spiritual life as one in which the human person so fully merges with God that it is as though she is "without existence, where she was before she was created."[26] Eckhart also argues that in the quest to unite with God, one must cease to think of (or experience) oneself as a person with distinct intellects and wills, relinquishing individual personhood to become united with the Second Person and, thus, God.[27]

C4.P25   In explaining how emptying one's self allows God to enter, Eckhart also appeals to the distinction between individual human beings and common human nature—a move that echoes the logical/grammatical contrast between the individual member of a species and the common species nature itself. When God took on human nature and "united it with his own Person," Eckhart writes, Christ assumed "bare human nature"—not the nature of any particular human being. Eckhart's advice to human beings is to mimic this action to whatever extent possible: "The eternal Word did not put on a [particular] human being, so go out of whatever is a human being in you . . . and take yourself just as

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C4.N24   24 See my "The Phenomenology of Immortality (1200–1400)," in *The History of the Philosophy of Mind*, vol. 2, *Philosophy of Mind in the Early and High Middle Ages*, ed. M. Cameron (London: Routledge, 2019), 219–239.

C4.N25   25 The question of whether the person herself ceases to exist in the ultimate state of this sort of union is subject to debate; Porete appears to go the furthest toward advocating this possibility.

C4.N26   26 Marguerite Porete, *Mirror of Simple Souls,* trans. E. L. Babinsky (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1993), chap. 135.

C4.N27   27 See Sermon 70 in *Complete Mystical Works of Eckhart*, trans. Maurice O'C Walshe (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2010).

bare human nature, and then you will be the same to the eternal Word as human nature is to him. For between your human nature and his there is no difference: it is one, for it is in Christ what it is in you."[28] This admonition highlights the sense in which emptying oneself of particularity is seen as a necessary precondition for merging with God on a level that allows one to identify oneself *with* God, because there is no individual self remaining, but only God.[29] Johannes Tauler agrees, explaining that even devotion to God should be understood in terms of self-loss. Instead of portraying love as a burning fire (as Richard Rolle, Hadewijch, and Catherine of Siena do)[30] or as a positive uniting or driving force, Tauler writes that the highest form of love "is nothing else than a loss of self, there is no affirmation. It does not consist of a possession . . . but it is a privation."[31]

C4.P26   Other mystics, including Hadewijch, Angela of Foligno, and Mechthild of Magdeburg, talk of union with God in paradoxical terms that involve both self-loss and continued personal distinction. Hadewijch, for instance, writes of how God and the Beloved "penetrate each other in a way that neither of the two distinguishes himself from the other" but immediately goes on to comment that although "one sweet divine nature flows through both and they are both one thing through each other, at the same time they remain two different selves—yes, and remain so forever."[32]

C4.P27   Angela of Foligno, a late thirteenth-century Franciscan tertiary, describes the regular experience of two different sorts of mystical

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C4.N28   28 Sermon 92, *Complete Mystical Works of Eckhart*, Maurice O'C Walshe, 450.

C4.N29   29 For discussion of this, see Ben Morgan, *On Becoming God: Late Medieval Mysticism and the Modern Western Self* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

C4.N30   30 Rolle's most famous work is titled simply *The Fire of Love*. Regarding Hadewijch see Letter 14 in *Hadewijch: The Complete Works*. ed. and trans. Mother Columba Hart, O.S.B. (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1980), 76. Regarding Catherine see *Catherine of Siena, The Dialogue*, trans. Suzanne Noffke, O.P. (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1980), 85.

C4.N31   31 Sermon for the Twenty-Second Sunday after Trinity (V 76), as quoted in Bernard McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany (1300–1500)*, vol. 4 of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 2005), 274; trans. Bernard McGinn.

C4.N32   32 Letter 9.

union: in the first, she is embraced in an unspeakable darkness in which she does not remember "anything about anything human, or the God-man [Christ], or anything which has a form" but in which she sees "all and nothing"; in the other, she experiences being in the God-man with "no intermediary between God and myself." Angela connects this second sort of union quite closely with Christ's humanity. Once, for instance, after looking at the cross (as encouraged by the *Meditationes vitae Christi*), she "saw and felt that Christ was within me, embracing my soul with the very arm with which he was crucified," at which point she understands "how we will see that through [Christ] our flesh is made one with God."[33]

C4.P28 Angela is hardly alone in this emphasis on the eternally embodied Second Person of the Trinity and its implications for the final end of humanity. Mechthild of Magdeburg, for instance, writes in her *Flowing Light of the Godhead* of the joy she feels on reflecting that "divine nature now includes bone and flesh, body and soul." Christ's nature as fully human and fully divine also provides Mechthild with an embodied model for the afterlife: "The soul with its flesh is mistress of the house in heaven, sits next to the eternal Master of the house, and is most like him."[34]

C4.P29 Finally, other contemplatives, including Marguerite of Oingt, Richard Rolle, and Jan van Ruysbroeck, employ a clear "personal distinction within unity" model in their depictions of both mystical union and the afterlife. Marguerite of Oingt, a thirteenth-century Carthusian nun (and the author of some of the earliest extant texts written in Franco-Provençal) describes the beatified in her *Mirror* as completely immersed in God but nevertheless retaining distinct, individual existence: "The saints will be within their Creator as the

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C4.N33 33 Chapter 6, 4th Supplemental Step from the *Memorial*, in Angela of Foligno, *Angela of Foligno: Complete Works*, trans. Paul Lachance, O.F.M. (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1993), 175.

C4.N34 34 *Mechtild of Magdeburg, The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, trans. Frank Tobin. (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1998) IV.14.

fish within the sea: they will drink as much as they want, without getting tired and without diminishing the amount of water. The saints will be just like that, for they will drink and eat the great sweetness of God."[35] In his *Fire of Love*, the influential fourteenth-century English mystic Richard Rolle describes affective embodied experiences of mystical union that enhance intellective and volitional fulfilment, such as "glowing" or heat in the chest, a taste of unimaginable sweetness, and the sound of celestial music. Ruysbroeck—strongly influenced by the earlier Hadewijch—describes humans' final end as a "blissful unity . . . in which there is nothing but God and the spirit united with God without intermediary."[36] He is explicit that this unity does not involve an actual loss of self, however: "I just said that we are one with God, something to which Scripture bears witness. I now wish to say that we must forever remain different from God, which is also taught us by Scripture."[37] Although united, human and divine persons remain forever distinct in this line of thought.

C4.P30   The concept of individuality plays a key role in contemplative thought in the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries, and is closely associated with both subjectivity and agency—whether as something to be lost or something to be retained. As I'll show, this feature of personhood is also linked to the dignity and rationality (in the broad sense) that is central to the concept of "person" in this period.

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C4.N35   35 Chap. 2, para. 19, in *The Writings of Margaret of Oingt, Medieval Prioress and Mystic (d. 1310)*, trans. (with introduction, essay, and notes) Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990), 44.

C4.N36   36 *John Ruusbroec: The Spiritual Espousals and Other Works*. Wiseman, John A., ed. and trans. O.S.B. (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1985), bk. 2, pt. 4, p. 119.

C4.N37   37 This is the opening of a section in *The Sparkling Stone*, titled "Our Union with God Is Not an Identification: Four Ways of Experiencing This Union," trans. p. 174. In his description of the Third Way, he writes that the "highest of all our experiences" is when we "feel ourselves to be one with God, for by means of our transformation in God we feel ourselves to be swallowed up in the groundless abyss of our eternal blessedness, in which we can never discover any difference between ourselves and God." Nevertheless, "when we are raised up and drawn into this highest of all our experiences, our powers stand empty and idle in a state of essential enjoyment. *They are not, however, annihilated, for in that case we would lose our creaturely status*" (176, emphasis added).

C4.S7   *Dignity*

C4.P31   The centrality of the dignity of the human person in the Italian Renaissance is well-known, and so it comes as little surprise that it features prominently in the writings of fifteenth-century mystics such as Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.[38] Ficino—deeply involved in the translation from Greek of Plato's dialogues, the works of Plotinus, and other Platonists—stresses the role of dignity in human activities, not just as it manifests in intellection but as it appears "in every aspect of human creativity."[39] Pico della Mirandola disagrees with Ficino on how best to understand the nature of unitive love but shares Ficino's emphasis on the importance of dignity for understanding human nature and humans' place in the cosmos. (His *Oratio*, in fact, becomes known as the *Oration on the Dignity of Man.*) What has at times been overlooked in these works, though, in looking for Platonism's impact on Renaissance thought, is the extent to which their understanding of dignity is both contiguous with and indebted to that of the contemplative traditions which proceeded them.[40]

C4.P32   The concept of dignity appears extensively in earlier legal, political, and theological discussions of persons, and with considerable overlap between the contexts. In civil law and political theory, as I have shown, all human beings are considered persons—*whos* rather than *whats*, subjects rather than things (*res*). As such, human beings possess certain

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C4.N38   38 See, for instance, Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Dignity of Man," in *Renaissance Concepts of Man and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 1–21, as well as any number of his other works on Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, and Charles Trinkaus, *"In Our Image and Likeness": Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

C4.N39   39 Bernard McGinn, *The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism (1350–1550),* vol. 5 of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad 2016), 257. For a helpful overview of Ficino and Pico della Mirandola's Platonic-influenced mysticism, see McGinn, *The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism,* 252–284.

C4.N40   40 McGinn acknowledges this, writing: "This work [Ficino's *Oratio*], especially over the past three centuries, has been hailed as 'the' classic statement of Renaissance emphasis on human freedom and dignity, but it is actually a complex negotiation between Christian anthropology, based on Genesis 1:26 (man's creation in the image and likeness of God), and Pico's attempt to create a concordance of all sources of wisdom" (*The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism*, 273).

rights and responsibilities that set them off from "brutes" (nonrational animals), plants, and nonanimate objects, rights and responsibilities that ground which actions and events are permissible and which are impermissible. The boundary which marks off persons from things in legal and political theory corresponds precisely to the boundary which is drawn in theological discussions between persons, who have intellects and free choice of the will, and the beings who lack such capacities. By the thirteenth century, the quality of dignity is consistently attributed not just to those fortunate enough to be born into the nobility but to human nature itself.[41]

C4.P33   Given the stress in contemplative literature on humility as a precondition for spiritual growth,[42] it might seem surprising that dignity would have an important role to play as well. Yet dignity features prominently in the work of a number of contemplatives—and not as a vice but as humility's complement. In Mechthild of Magdeburg's *Flowing Light of the Godhead*, for instance, the Bride of Christ appears with four bridesmaids; the first is love, "clothed in chasteness and crowned with dignity," and the second is humility, "clothed with lowliness and crowned with eminence."[43]

C4.P34   The connection between humility and dignity also forms an important theme in Catherine of Siena's *Dialogue* (which would have been known to both Ficino and Pico della Mirandola). At the outset of the *Dialogue*, the best way to pursue truth is described as "continual humble prayer, grounded in the knowledge of herself and of God."[44]

C4.N41   41 At the outset of the thirteenth century, for instance, Alexander Nequam writes in his Commentary on Proverbs that "in meditating on humanity, the meditator considers the *dignity* of human nature as well as its fragility"; as reported by Thomas H. Bestul from Nequam's unpublished manuscript in Oxford, Jesus College, MS. 94, fol. 57r, in Bestul, "Meditatio/Meditation," 161.

C4.N42   42 For a discussion of the role humility plays in spiritual progress, see my "'Many Know Much, but Do Not Know Themselves': Self-Knowledge, Humility, and Perfection in the Medieval Affective Contemplative Tradition," in *Consciousness and Self-Knowledge in Medieval Philosophy: Proceedings of the Society for Medieval Logic and Metaphysics,* vol. 14, ed. G. Klima and A. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2018), 89–106.

C4.N43   43 *Flowing Light of the Godhead*, bk. 1, chap. 46, p. 63.

C4.N44   44 *Dialogue*, Prologue (1), 25.

In response to that prayer, God tells Catherine that if she opens her mind's eye and looks within God, she will see "the dignity and beauty of my reasoning creature" (*la dignità e bellezza della mia creatura che ha in sé ragione*).[45] Humble prayer centered in introspection thus yields recognition of humans' dignity as created by God and gifted with reason. Knowledge of the complementary relation between humility and dignity is what later grants Catherine the ability to "stand with confidence in God's presence" to intercede for the world.[46]

C4.P35 The dignity of human persons is sometimes attributed in contemplative literature to humans' status as image-bearers of God, as when Catherine of Siena writes: "In the gentle mirror of God she sees her own dignity: that through no merit of hers but by his creation she is the image of God." Most often, however, it is directly attributed to the fact that the Second Person of the Trinity assumed human nature in the Incarnation.[47] Marguerite Porete and the fourteenth-century English anchoress Julian of Norwich both attribute humans' nobility to Christ's, while the thirteenth-century Flemish beguine Hadewijch also makes it clear that human dignity comes via humans' connection to the Incarnation, stressing Christ's divine power and human justice: "With his whole heart and his whole soul, and with all his strength, and in each and every circumstance, Christ was ready to perfect what was wanting on our part. And thus he uplifted us and drew us up by his divine power and his human justice to our first dignity, and to our liberty, in which we were created and loved, and to which we are

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C4.N45 45 One of the standard English translations omits "dignity" and leaves "beauty," which importantly obscures what Catherine is saying in this passage. As Suzanne Noffke notes in a footnote to her translation of the *Dialogue*, "*la mia creatura che ha in sé ragione*" is "one of Catherine's favorite expressions for the human person"; 26, n. 3.

C4.N46 46 *Dialogue*, 49. Our dignity stems from the goodness and love of the Creator, while humble recognition of our "wretchedness" opens us to experiencing Christ's mercy, as she comments later (104).

C4.N47 47 Catherine of Siena also reports God saying: "Because of the union I effected between my Godhead and human nature, your excellence and dignity is greater than that of the angels. . . . I, God, became a man, and humanity became God through the union of my divine nature with your human nature." *Dialogue*, 205, modified translation.

now called and chosen in his predestination."[48] The dignity conferred on humans by association with Christ also constitutes a standard to live up to. As Hadewijch writes in Letter 18, "Oh, you have much to do if you are to live the Divinity and the Humanity and come to full growth, according to the measure of the dignity in which you are loved and destined by God!"

C4.P36 In sum, the idea that human beings possess intrinsic dignity runs throughout the vernacular contemplative traditions of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. This dignity is linked to humans' status as persons qua subjective individuals, and is conferred via humans' possession of the *imago Dei* and by the humanity of the Second Person of the Trinity, whose assumption of human nature links humans eternally with the divine.

C4.S8 *Rationality*

C4.P37 While dignity is a property that humans share with God, the most important point of similarity between human beings and God is humans' rational natures (which in fact ground the dignity of all persons). As I have discussed, the medieval conception of "rational nature" goes beyond mere reasoning abilities to include such things as intellection, volition, understanding, memory, love, and imagination. Scholastic discussions tend to take an impersonal, analytic approach in addressing what these powers are and how they are related in both human beings and in God: the conflict between the Dominican emphasis on the primacy of knowledge and the Franciscan emphasis on love is well-known in the history of medieval philosophy, but not for its phenomenological insights. As one might expect, contemplative texts focus much more on first person experiences. They give counsel about how to cultivate spiritual progress (everything from "seek humility via introspection" to "abandon reason and knowledge altogether

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C4.N48 48 *Hadewijch: The Complete Works* Letter 6, trans. Hart, p. 63.

in order to conform your will with God's"); they advise spiritual pilgrims as to how to understand certain experiences (such as visions and auditions); they increasingly emphasize wisdom (*sapientia*) over formal knowledge (*scientia*); they both report and explicate first-hand mystical experiences. Taken as a whole, these discussions provide an important complement to the more familiar scholastic narrative about the concept of "person"—especially insofar as the contemplative texts demonstrate both the breadth and the depth of medieval understandings of "rational nature" in relation to humans' final end.

C4.P38 One of the primary purposes of contemplative literature in this period was to provide spiritual counsel. I've already shown various authors advising one to abandon one's self in order to allow God to enter. That piece of advice by itself is insufficient, and so such authors also describe how to progress toward self-annihilation—a crucial stage of which involves abandoning the use of reason and any claims to knowledge. Marguerite Porete, for instance, who presents the *Mirror of Simple Souls* as a dialogue between the personifications of Love, Reason, and the Soul, portrays Reason primarily as the foil and counterpart in Love's all-important conversation with the Soul. When in chapter 87 the Soul realizes that "Love has no beginning, no end, and no limit, and I am nothing except Love," Reason is so overcome by this pronouncement that she dies, and Love speaks in her place for the remaining fifty-one chapters.[49]

C4.P39 Meister Eckhart repeatedly counsels detachment as necessary for the sort of self-abnegation that allows humans to become one with God. Such detachment also requires humans to let go of reason. In Sermon 76, for instance, he contrasts the type of knowledge that humans can have via their having one being with God with the knowledge that comes through reason and the senses: "The soul has something in it,

C4.N49 49 Porete, *Mirror of Simple Souls*, 162–163. The Soul's response to this death is to rejoice: "Why did it take so long, this death! For as long as I had you, Lady Reason, I could not freely receive my inheritance, what was and is mine. But now I can receive it freely, since I have wounded you to death with Love."

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a spark of intelligence, which never goes out. . . . There also exists in our souls a capacity for knowing external things. This is a knowing through the senses and through reason, that is, a knowing through sensible images and through concepts. Such knowing conceals this other knowing from us. How are we Sons of God? By having one being with him."[50] Not only does the use of reason and knowledge of "external things" not help one in one's quest for union, it actively impedes spiritual progress. Johannes Tauler also counsels that we must leave reason behind. To expand on a passage quoted earlier: "This love is nothing else than a loss of self, there is no affirmation. . . . In it there is ignorance and unknowing; it is far above understanding, above all essence and modes of being."[51]

C4.P40   The idea that reaching one's ultimate end as human person requires abandoning the use of reason, and the knowledge it yields becomes an increasingly common theme from the late thirteenth to the fourteenth centuries, even among contemplatives who don't advocate self-annihilation. The popularity of downplaying or denigrating *scientia*, understood as formal knowledge arrived at via arguments and especially demonstrative syllogisms, reflects increasing dissatisfaction with the elitism of education in the universities and the increasingly specialized discussions they churned out.[52] As Bernard McGinn notes, "in the course of the fourteenth century, the professionalization of scholastic theology and its increasing obsession with technical debates concerning epistemology and language had clearly come to seem counterproductive for believers who sought more than just discourse about God."[53] One of the most popular English devotional texts of the fourteenth

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C4.N50   50 "Sermon 76," in *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher*, ed. B McGinn, trans. B. McGinn, F. Tobin, and E. Borgstadt (Mawah: Paulist Press, 1986), 327–328.

C4.N51   51 Sermon for the Twenty-Second Sunday after Trinity (V 76), as quoted in McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany*.

C4.N52   52 For more about the development of *scientia* in this period, see Robert Pasnau, "Medieval Social Epistemology: *Scientia* for Mere Mortals," *Episteme* 7, no. 1 (2010): 23–41.

C4.N53   53 McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism,* 248.

century, the anonymous work *The Cloud of Unknowing,* consistently stresses the importance of loving without knowing, informing its audience that God may be loved but cannot be understood: "by love may [God] be gotten and held; but by thought neither."[54] By the outset of the fifteenth century, frustration with technical scholastic discussions of minute details was widespread enough that Jean Gerson, a master at the University of Paris himself, gave two lectures titled "Against the Vain Curiosity of Students."

C4.P41   Despite this trend, it is important to note that reason and knowledge as well as wisdom and love remain central in the works of many contemplatives. The early twelfth-century Hugh of St. Victor was a staunch defender of the claim that reason and mysticism could have a close and mutually beneficial relationship; his works greatly influenced later "Victorine" and Augustinian contemplative attitudes toward the relation between intellect and spiritual progress. Hadewijch, the "most important exponent of love mysticism and one of the loftiest figures in the Western mystical tradition," also praises reason and counsels its use.[55] As she writes to a fellow beguine, "it is truly fitting that everyone contemplate God's grace and goodness with wisdom and prudence: for God has given us our beautiful faculty of reason, which instructs us in all our ways and enlightens us in all works. If man would follow reason, he would never be deceived" (Letter 14).[56] Here, reason is seen as enhancing and guiding progress toward one's final end, rather than impeding it.

C4.P42   Other contemplatives known for their emphasis on the unifying power of love, such as Catherine of Siena and Julian of Norwich, also highlight the interplay between knowledge and love. Their understanding of what it means for human beings to have a "rational nature"

C4.N54   54 *The Cloud of Unknowing,* chap. 6, in *English Mystics of the Middle Ages,* ed. B. Windeatt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 76.

C4.N55   55 Preface by Paul Mommaers, S.J., to *Hadewijch,* xiii.

C4.N56   56 *Hadewijch,* 77.

involves all the components of the *imago Dei*, rather than stressing the role of the will to the exclusion of intellect, knowledge, or wisdom. The *Dialogue* in particular displays Catherine's Dominican training, frequently characterizing the relationship between knowledge and love as a symbiotic spiral. When contemplating the "perfection of this unitive state in which souls are carried off by the fire of charity," for instance, Catherine hears God tell her that in the fire of love with which beatified souls burn, they receive a "supernatural light" which lets them love God even more. "For love," God goes on to say, "follows upon understanding. The more they know, the more they love, and the more they love, the more they know. Thus, each nourishes the other."[57]

C4.P43   Some contemplatives even describe mystical union with God as enhancing their ability to reason. As Margaret Ebner, an early fourteenth-century German Dominican nun, writes in her *Revelations*: "I received a great grace from the inner goodness of God; the light of truth of divine understanding. Also, my mind became more rational than before, so that I had the grace to be able to phrase all my speech better and also to understand better all speech according to the truth."[58] This gift also allows Ebner to perceive the truth in others: "I could understand, read, and write what I could not before, as I have already written. And a new understanding of truth was granted me, with which I can often detect when someone speaks untruthfully in my presence. When that happens, I can answer nothing except that I often have to say, 'I believe that is not true.'"[59] Such gifts are often explicitly linked to particular devotion to the Second Person of the Trinity, Christ, who is also identified with the personification of wisdom.[60]

C4.N57   57 Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue,* 85.

C4.N58   58 Margaret Ebner, *Revelations,* in *Margaret Ebner: Major Works*, trans. and ed. Leonard Hindsely (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1993), 100. Although little read today, Ebner's correspondence with Henry Nordlingen is the earliest known extant exchange written in German.

C4.N59   59 Ebner, *Revelations*, 155.

C4.N60   60 See Barbara Newman, "Sapientia: The Goddess Incarnate," in *God and the Goddesses,* 190–244, for a detailed discussion of this identification and the ways it intersects with the also-prevalent

C4.P44 The range of understandings of both it means for persons to have a "rational nature" and which aspects of that nature were considered most important in achieving the final end of that nature is impressively broad—and contemplative literature employs and develops all three of the features which are central to thirteenth- to fifteenth-century conceptions of persons: individual agency, inherent dignity, and "rational nature" (broadly understood). In the next section, I discuss how these features combine with the use of the first and second person perspectives, personification, and an emphasis on self-reflection to produce a very "personal" understanding of what it means to be an individual substance with a rational nature.

C4.S9 ## 3 Personal Perspectives, Personification, and Introspection

C4.P45 Scholastic texts typically take an impersonal approach to their subjects. Disputed questions, for instance, lay out both sides of a debate and then "settle the matter," beginning with the formulaic *Respondeo dicendum* ("I respond that it should be said that"). The goal of these works is to present the truth in an analytic, objective manner.[61] Contemplative literature, by contrast, is highly dynamic and often employs all three personal perspectives to give counsel, admonish wandering audiences (which include everyone from young beguines to bishops and popes), share insights, and express inner pains and joys. The first person perspective, for instance, is often used to report individual mystical experiences and to give voice to Love, Soul, Reason, Body, etc., as well as in correspondence. The second person appears

personification of Wisdom as a woman, particularly in the works of Henry Suso and Julian of Norwich.

C4.N61 61 One can see that this is a feature of the genre rather than of the authors of such works by comparing their theological treatises with their sermons and correspondence. Bonaventure and Eckhart are prime examples here: they express the same general ideas quite differently in their Latin theological writings and their more mystical writings and sermons.

frequently in correspondence as well as in sermons, in books of counsel, and in contexts where God or a personified quality is talking to the subject, or the subject is speaking directly to God. The third person also appears, sometimes for modesty's sake (as when Marguerite of Oingt, Mechthild of Hackeborn, and Catherine of Siena put their own divine revelations in the third person), sometimes by way of introducing the speaker (as at the outset of Julian of Norwich's *Showings*), and often in hagiographies of mystics and contemplatives. This range of voices, which gives creative and fresh expression to time-honored images and themes, encourages the development of a sense of the self as such—setting the stage for later articulations of the person as the inner self, capable of self-conscious "reason and reflection."[62]

C4.P46   The contemplative use of personification is particularly worth noting in this respect. Unlike the dialogues of the earlier Plato and Augustine, or the later Berkeley and Hume, the lively conversations found in the works of mystics like Marguerite Porete and Mechthild of Magdeburg take place between various facets of the *inner self*. As mentioned earlier, Porete casts her *Mirror of Simple Souls* as a conversation between Soul, Love, and Reason; true to character, Reason consistently asks for explanations, while Love seeks to lead the Soul toward union. In one important exchange, Reason's questions compel Love to share her true nature and foreshadow the self-abnegating union which Soul experiences toward the close of the *Mirror*:

C4.P47   "To whom does [the Soul] belong then?" says Reason.

C4.P48   "To my will," says Love, "which transformed her into me."

C4.P49   "But who are you, Love?" says Reason. "Are you not one of
the Virtues with us even though you be above us?"

C4.N62   62 See, e.g., Locke's famous definition of the person, discussed in section 4: "thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider it self as it self, the same thinking thing in different times and places; which it does by that consciousness, which is inseparable from thinking"; *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 2.27.9.

C4.P50   "I am God," says Love, "For Love is God and God is Love, and this
Soul is God by the condition of Love. I am God by divine nature
and this Soul is God by righteousness of Love. Thus this precious
beloved of mine is taught and guided by me, without herself, for
she is transformed into me."[63]

C4.P51   By the end of the dialogue, it is only the Annihilated Soul who speaks,
having become one with Love.

C4.P52   These dialogues employ personifications of Love, Reason, Virtues,
and the like to portray inner conversations and conflicts, with the goal
of both modeling and encouraging personal growth. The personifica-
tion of various aspects of the self in these dialogues is also often humor-
ous as well as instructive. In chapter 2 of the first book of Mechthild's
Flowing Light of the Godhead (which moves between a number of
genres, including poetry, prose, and dialogue), for instance, Soul leaves
the body, sees "one complete God in three Persons and knows three
Persons in one God undivided," experiences "a blissful place"—and
then is sent back down to earthly life, where she has a decidedly prosaic
squabble with her body:

C4.P53   Then the body speaks: "Well, woman, just where have you been?
You come back so love-struck, lovely and vibrant, free and witty.
Your carrying on has cost me my appetite, sense of smell, color, and
all my strength."

C4.P54   She says: "Shut up, murderer! Quit your bellyaching. I'll
always be on my guard with you around. That my enemy has been
wounded—what do we care about that? It makes me glad."[64]

C4.P55   These sorts of imaginative conversations allow their authors to articu-
late complex theologies and experiences in vivid and relatable ways,

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C4.N63   63 Porete, *Mirror of Simple Souls*, chap. 21, 104.
C4.N64   64 Mechthild, *Flowing Light of the Godhead*, bk. 1, chap. 2, p. 41.

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"showing" rather than "telling" how the various aspects of the human person relate to one another.

C4.P56   The use of inner dialogue also reflects the enormous importance of introspection and self-knowledge in thirteenth- to fifteenth-century mystical and contemplative thought.[65] A precondition for spiritual growth and mystical union, introspection is also portrayed as the best means for gaining knowledge about both self and the divine. Even contemplatives with vastly different conceptions of the final end of human beings (such as Porete and Julian of Norwich) enjoin their readers to look inward, not just at the beginning of their spiritual journeys but at various intervals along the way.

C4.P57   A classic formulation of this common injunction is found in the prologue to Catherine of Siena's *Dialogue*, where Truth proclaims: "Here is the way, if you would come to perfect knowledge and enjoyment of me, eternal Life: *Never leave the knowledge of yourself.*"[66] Hadewijch gives a fuller description of what this process should look like in a letter to a fellow beguine: "If you wish to experience [God's perfect love], you must first of all learn to know yourselves: in all your conduct, in your attraction or aversion, in your behavior, in love, in hate, in fidelity, in mistrust, and in all things that befall you." This self-examination is not bound to the present, either, but involves projecting oneself forward into the future: "You must examine yourselves as to how you can endure everything disagreeable that happens to you, and how you can bear the loss of what gives you pleasure."[67] A stress on how the self develops and changes over time runs throughout contemplative texts from this period, demonstrating an underlying assumption about the temporal continuity of the self-reflective subject.

C4.N65   65 For more detailed treatments of self-knowledge in the contemplative tradition, see my "Self-Knowledge, Abnegation, and Fulfillment in Medieval Mysticism," in *Self-Knowledge*, ed. U. Renz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 131–145, and "'Many Know Much, but Do Not Know Themselves.'"

C4.N66   66 Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue*, 29.

C4.N67   67 *Hadewijch,* Letter 14, 77.

C4.S10   4 Looking Forward: Locke and Personalism

C4.P58   So far, I have laid out how the different contexts in which the term
"person" is employed in medieval discussions (legal, political, gram-
matical, logical, and theological) overlap in their emphases on sub-
jective individuality, intrinsic dignity, and a broad understanding of
"rational nature." I have shown not only how those three features play
out in thirteenth- to fifteenth-century contemplative literature but also
how they combine with the use of first—and second—person perspec-
tives, personification of inner dialogue, and an emphasis on introspec-
tion to create a far more "personal" conception of "an individual with
a rational nature" than is typically associated with the Middle Ages. In
this concluding section, I briefly sketch how this conception prefigures
both Locke's notion of the person and the theory of personalism.

C4.P59   Contemporary philosophical discussions of persons often go back
only as far as John Locke's seventeenth-century *Essay Concerning
Human Understanding*, in which he characterizes the person as a
"thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can
consider it self as it self, the same thinking thing in different times
and places; which it does by that consciousness, which is inseparable
from thinking."[68] There are obvious differences between Locke's defi-
nition and medieval understandings—most significantly, the fact that
Locke distinguishes between the human being and the human person,
which medieval treatments of the term "person" do not, and the use of
the word "consciousness," which is not yet in play in medieval discus-
sions.[69] At the same time, I'm now in a position to show that there is
a great deal of overlap between thirteenth- to fifteenth-century con-
templative conceptions of what it means to be an individual substance

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C4.N68   68 Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 2.27.9.

C4.N69   69 As I've shown, the dignity of humanity and the dignity of the person are inextricably intertwined
in the Middle Ages via their relation to God; they become separable only after a mechanistic
worldview starts to crowd out the teleological notion of substantial form, and "human being"
starts to connote something different from what "person" connotes—an animal body with a soul,
as opposed to subject of consciousness.

with a rational nature and Locke's definition. Central to both are the emphases on thinking and intelligence; central to both is the idea of the self as reflexive and introspective. Locke and the contemplatives also crucially agree that this capacity for self-reflection is what connects humans' past with their present and future selves.

C4.P60   Another way the medieval contemplative tradition influences later theories of persons is via its relation to personalism, a theory that takes root in the nineteenth century and flowers in the early twentieth century.[70] Personalism sees the line drawn between persons and nonpersons as carving nature at its joints: only persons have an awareness of themselves as subjects and agents, only persons are free, and only persons bear moral responsibility for their actions. In section 2, I described the development in medieval contemplative discussions of the ideas of individuality, dignity, and rationality—both in relation to self and in relation to God (as triune and as the fully human and fully divine Second Person of Christ.) Personalism has a similar emphasis, stressing the "moral and religious dimensions which are part and parcel of the person's nature as a conscious, intelligent, free, willing subject in relation with God and others."[71]

C4.P61   Finally, both the medieval contemplative tradition and personalism see creativity and emotionality as intimately connected with rationality. The contemplative genre is designed in part to encourage certain affective modes, and one of the main tools of contemplation is introspection, whose language is intimately personal, stressing individual accountability and experience. As I showed in section 3, attempts to convey the results of such self-reflection give rise in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries to a variety of forms of creative expression, including but not limited to poetry, dialogues, and journals which record and

C4.N70   70 See chapter 8 here for further discussion of personalism.

C4.N71   71 Thomas D. Williams and Jan Olof Bengtsson, "Personalism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Summer 2018 ed.), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/personalism/.

explicate mystical experiences. Personalism shares this outlook: "As free, thinking subjects, persons also exercise creativity through their thought, imagination, and action, a creativity which affects both the surrounding world and the person [herself]."[72] Personalism often acknowledges its debt to medieval scholastics such as Thomas Aquinas; perhaps it is time for personalism to rediscover its connection to the contemplative movement as well.

C4.N72   72 Williams and Bengtsson, "Personalism."