

### *Meister Eckhart on Creation*

In his *Expositio libri Genesis*, Eckhart comments on the statement that God created “in the beginning,” that the “‘beginning’ is the ‘now’ of eternity, the indivisible ‘now’ (*nunc*) in which God is eternally God and the eternal emanation of the divine Persons takes place.” “[I]n the same ‘now’ in which God the Father exists and generates [God’s] coeternal Son, [God] also creates the world.” “God created the world simultaneously with the generation of the Son, by whom ‘all things were made.’” “It is possible . . . that Eckhart did not mean that the object of the creative act, the actual world, is eternal, but rather that God eternally conceived and willed creation in and through the Word. This, in any case, is what he later said he had meant. ‘Creation, indeed, and every act of God is the very essence of God. Yet it does not follow from this that if God created the world from eternity, the world on this account exists from eternity, as the ignorant think. For creation in the passive sense is not eternal, just as the created itself is not eternal’ [Commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchy* of the Pseudo-Dionysius, 4]. Eckhart obviously utilized sayings like that of St. Albert the Great: ‘God created from eternity, but the created world is not from eternity,’ and of St. Augustine: ‘In the eternal Word dost Thou speak eternally all that Thou speakest; and yet not all exists at once and from eternity that Thou effectest in speaking’ [*Conf.* 11, 7].”

“God is creator but [God] does not create ‘outside’ [Godself]. . . . ‘Therefore God created all things, not to stand outside [Godself] or near and beside [Godself], like other craftsmen, but [God] called (them) from nothingness, that is, from non-existence, to existence, which they found and received and had in [God]. For [God Godself] is existence’ [*Opus tripartitum, Prologus generalis*: 16]. . . . [Eckhart also] declares that God is to the creature as act to potency, as form to matter, and as *esse* to *ens*, implying apparently that the creature exists by the existence of God. Similarly he says that nothing so lacks distinction as that which is constituted and that from which and through which and by which it is constituted and subsists; and he concludes that nothing so lacks distinction (*nihil tam indistinctum* [better: nothing is so indistinct] as the one God or Unity and the multiplicity of creatures (*creatum numeratum*).”

Two points in this are of particular interest to me. One is the close parallel between Eckhart's statement that in the same "now" in which God exists eternally God simultaneously generates God's Son and creates the world and my contention that the same act of love whereby *ad intra* God is triune in Godself as well as in God's self-revelation is *ad extra* God's creation and consummation of a world of creatures other than and distinct from Godself. Of course, there is the not unimportant difference that, for Eckhart, the creation involved in this one act is distinguished "actively" as God's eternal act and "passively" as the temporal actual world resulting from God's act, whereas, in my view, Eckhart's distinction is either merely verbal or else self-contradictory and the relevant distinction is between God's eternally creating *some* world of creatures and God's temporally creating just *this*, that, or the other world of creatures.

The other point is also a close parallel—namely, between Eckhart's insistence that nothing is as indistinct—I would say, rather, inseparable—as the one God and the many creatures and my contention, following Hartshorne, that to be related to the whole that is itself related to everything is as essential to any part of the whole as its identity with itself. To be and to be related to the whole that itself is related to all are inseparable properties of anything that is. Here, too, however, any attempt to distinguish Eckhart's view from pantheism is bound to be either merely verbal or else self-contradictory.

(Comments occasioned by re-reading F. C. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 3:187 f., 190 f.).

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