

Language, Birth and Death in Meister Eckhart: A Literary-Philosophical Study in Apophasis

Abstract

ABSTRACT

This dissertation titled “Language, Birth and Death in Meister Eckhart: A Literary-Philosophical Study in Apophasis” is an attempt to dwell on the vernacular sermons of Meister Eckhart to understand the dynamics of birth and death in Eckhart’s preaching within the linguistic paradigm of apophasis. By exploring the interplay between language, birth and death in the Middle High German sermons of Eckhart, this study will revisit the vernacular moment that facilitated the birth of apophasis in a vernacular. The research is both literary and philosophical as every analysis and interpretation intersect and evolve within the parameters of literature and the principles of philosophy. Literary in this dissertation points to a radical poetics that is getting manifested in the vernacular sermons of Eckhart through paradoxes, hyperboles, contradictions and above all negation. Philosophical in this study points to the lucidity of thinking and the logic of eisegesis getting revealed in the Biblical and liturgical sermons of Eckhart in Middle High German for (un)knowing the ineffable. Thus, this dissertation will be a thorough examination of the vernacular sermons of Meister Eckhart to find the parallel move happening in apophasis (linguistic regress) for semantic shift and rigour and in Birth and death (non-attachment) for releasement unto the One. The study contends that in Eckhart apophasis extends beyond the boundaries of language, that is saying and unsaying, to the ontological and existential structures of being, where birth, death and language make a simultaneous move towards a breakthrough in the mystical path within the dynamic of non-attachment. In apophasis meaning is generated through the sustained tension between the saying and unsaying or by negating a negation by another negation. This linguistic device is profusely used by Eckhart to teach the lessons of eternal birth and death within the dynamics of non-attachment. In Eckhart, apophasis is both a critique of the scholastic cataphatic approach and also an act of making available a new path of (un)knowing the ineffable. Thus, this research concludes that Birth and death in Eckhart points to a parallel shedding in the self as there is a regress in apophasis. So, I argue that Eckhart’s reliance on apophasis-an ongoing linguistic regress ushering in a new semantic force - in the teaching and the happening of eternal birth and death- allows a voice (*stimme*) to be heard in the middle (*Mittel*) of the saying and unsaying which is silence, where the (non)temporal event of breakthrough (*Durchbruch*) leads to the final releasement (*Gelassenheit*).