



**Marguerite of Porete on the Will**

# Overview

Marguerite of Porete

The Mirror

- The importance of love

- The annihilation of the soul

- The virtues

# Marguerite of Porete (†1310)

- French mystic; “medieval version of Socrates”?
- perhaps a beguine, but not clear
- influenced by: Hildegard of Bingen (Germany, 12th c.), Mechtild of Magdeburg (Germany, 13th c.), Hadewijch (Amsterdam, 13th c.); cf. also Meister Eckhart (contemporary)
- Arrested for heresy; does not recant, etc.; in prison, then burned to death in 1310.



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# The Mirror of Simple Souls



- written in Old French; shortly after her death, translated into Latin, middle English, middle French.
- a dialogue between M's own Soul, Love, and Reason (occasionally some other characters too).
- Love has an agenda; Reason is skeptical and slow (and “one-eyed”); M's Soul is growing in understanding.

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## Main topics:

- 1 the importance of love for God
- 2 the annihilation of the soul
- 3 the uselessness of the virtues

## Summary:

- Love is an act of the will that brings the soul to God
- this love so transforms the soul that the soul is now annihilated
- the annihilated soul does not will anything; it is God who wills through her
- this transformation makes the practice of virtues superfluous.

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# 1. The Importance of Love

- what brings the soul to God is love
- what transforms the soul once with God is also love.
- the encounter with God takes place through love, not through understanding.
- Is love an act of will?
  - When I make a choice, it seems that it is something I do.
  - When I love something or when I hate something, it seems that it is something that I suffer.
  - The love for God seems to be something more active, because this love impels the soul to be with God.

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## 2. The Annihilation of the Soul

- 1 **Epistemic annihilation:** the soul is annihilated by her humility.
  - The soul knows that she is nothing without God, that she is the source of evil.
- 2 **Volitional annihilation:** The soul's will is annihilated.
  - The will does not originate any act of volition, it just seems to be a power that undergoes a divine act of willing.

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# 3 Types of Souls

All of them want to get to God.

## 1 The dead ones:

- they mortify their bodies and practice the virtues.
- they obey their reason.
- their act of willing is still their own → it is mixed with self-interest.



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# 3 Types of Souls

## 2 The sad ones:

- they recognize something higher than themselves → do not follow their reason.
- they still practice the virtues and have their own will.



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# 3 Types of Souls

- ② **The simple ones:** they do not will anything anymore.
  - In case 1 and 2, there are two wills: we will something and God wills with us. In the third case, there is only one will, God's will.



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The soul and its will:

“all that this soul wills in consent is what God wills that she will, and this she wills in order to accomplish the will of God, no longer for the sake of her will. And she cannot will this by herself, but it is the will of God which wills it in her. Which is why it appears that this soul has no will without the will of God, who makes her will all that she ought to will” (p. 92).

Does the soul have a will of its own or not?

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# The Soul's Transformation

The soul does not originate the act of willing what God wills. Still, because the soul undergoes this act, it can be said that she wills what God wills of her. This act of will is itself an act of God's will, and so divine. The soul is transformed by undergoing this act:

- The soul is transformed into God. (p. 128)
- She is free, not a slave to her own will, and her own limited powers, for example, the power of intellect. (p. 126-127)
- The soul is at peace (p. 126)
- The soul does not care about herself (p. 89)
- The soul suffers no anxiety (p. 98-99)
- The soul is self-sufficient: the soul cannot be taught anything, nothing can be taken from her, nothing can be given to her. (p. 90-91)
- The soul does not need the virtues anymore.

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# 3. The Virtues

## Reason's view:

- the virtues enable us to live well; without them, nobody can be saved nor attain the ultimate end of her life. (Cf. Aquinas?)
- to attain God, the soul should practice the virtues: bodily sacrifices and renunciations, giving alms, doing good works.
- practice of virtues = the soul moderates its love for God according to reason. One has to decide what good works to do, when to do them, to whom etc.



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# The Uselessness of the Virtues

Love's view: the virtues are useless.

- 1 they do not go far enough: they mortify the body and maybe the intellect, but not the will.
- 2 the practice of virtues is dangerous for the soul:
  - It requires means; to have means, people need to continuously engage with other things than God.
  - It is followed by honors.
  - It goes against the nature God gave to the soul!



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- When the soul is transformed by the love of God, it has “better virtues than any other creatures” and does not need to practice the virtues.
- a transformed soul would not have a guilty conscience when she will take what she needs from her neighbour: “why would such souls feel guilty about taking what is necessary if necessity asks it? For these souls, this would be to fault the innocence and to encumber the peace in which such a soul rests from all such things.”
- A transformed soul has a different relation to Nature: “the soul gives to Nature whatever she asks.” (p. 99)

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# Concepts of Freedom

- **Augustine**: Free will is a power for opposites (can be abused too) (FCW 2.18, 3.1)
- **Boethius**: Rational creatures must have choice, but need not be able to exercise it, provided they can do what they truly want.
- **Anselm (OFC)**: “Freedom of choice is the power to preserve rectitude of will for the sake of rectitude itself.” (OFC 3, p. 36).
- **Al-Ghazali**: free will is what can discriminate and choose between altogether similar things.
- **Aquinas**: free will is rational deliberation about the best means to a desired end.
- **Henry**: the will is free because it moves itself.
- **Scotus**: the will is free because it can will otherwise *even when it wills*.
- **Marguerite**: we are free when we don't have a will!

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