



Reason in Marguerite Porete (1250/60–1310)

Melanie Förg

Munich School of Philosophy

Reason is an allegorical figure in Porete's book *The Mirror of Simple Souls brought to nothing, and who live only in the will and desire for Love* (trans. Colledge et al. 1999). Accordingly, human souls should identify with Love, not Reason who is characterized as one-eyed (*Mirouer* 43,24f.) and as missing the point when asking about the meaning of Love's paradoxical utterances (e.g. ch.11; 29f.; 53-55). After long disputes, Soul identifies with Love, proclaiming "She [Reason] will be no more, but I am [...] always without fail, for Love has no beginning or end or bounds, and I am nothing but Love." (87,7-9). Since Reason cannot understand this, she dies (87,11-13).

The death of Reason does not mean Porete argues for a state bare of reason. On the contrary, the truth is where reason is proved to be a true part of love. When this is not the case, it is a minor form of reason and love. Accordingly, after the 'death' of Reason, Love announces that she will speak for Reason from now on (87,20f.; 88,4f.).

Other evidence against a state bare of reason is Porete's self-confident teaching through her writing by drawing on the (Neo-)Platonic tradition (see Förg & v. Lüpke 2019; Kobusch 2011, 363-366). Notably, in the central description of the seven states of being (ch.118), Reason is seated on the throne, "en la chaere" or "ex cathedra" in the Latin translation, an expression coined to signify complete authority when referring to the Pope as head of the church. However, it is humility which seats Reason on the throne (118,143f.). Accordingly, Porete distinguishes "Holy Church the Great," governed solely by divine Love, from the official church, "Holy Church the Less," governed only by Reason (19,11-13).

Porete distinguishes two types of knowledge, the wisdom of life and university book-learning, criticizing "Men of theology and scholars [...] [who]/Will never understand this writing properly. [...] You must let Love and Faith together be/Your guides to climb where Reason cannot come" (*preface* 8-13). Therefore, Porete's book can be read as a critique of human reason.

Primary Sources:

- Guarnieri, Romana and Paul Verdeyen (eds.). 1986. *Margaretae Porete Speculum Simplicium Animarum/Marguerite Porete, Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*. Turnhout: Brepols (Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis 69).
- Babinsky, Ellen L. 1993. *Marguerite Porete, The Mirror of Simple Souls*, trans. and intr. by Ellen L. Babinsky, preface by Robert L. Lerner. New York: Paulist Press (The Classics of Western Spirituality).
- Colledge, Edmund et al. 1999. *Porette, Margaret. The Mirror of Simple Souls translated from the French with an introductory interpretive essay by Edmund Colledge, J. C. Marler, and Judith Grant; and a foreword by Kent Emery, Jr.* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press (Notre Dame Texts in Medieval Culture 6).
- Gnädinger, Louise 2017. *Porete, Margareta: Der Spiegel der einfachen Seelen*. Hrsg. und übers. von Louise Gnädinger. Mit einem Vorwort von Gotthart Fuchs. Kvelaer: Verlagsgemeinschaft topos plus.

Secondary Sources:

- Adamson, Peter 17|12|2016. After Virtue: Marguerite Porete. *The History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps* 267. Podcast Audio. URL: <https://historyofphilosophy.net/marguerite-porete> [25|05|2020].
- Förg, Melanie & Annika v. Lüpke 2019. ‚In göttlichem Licht‘. Die selbstbewusste Lehrtätigkeit Marguerite Poretes am Beispiel philosophischer Argumentationsfiguren in Kapitel 118 des „Spiegels der einfachen Seelen“, in Annika v. Lüpke, Tabea Strohschneider & Oliver Bach (eds.): *Limina: Natur – Politik. Verhandlungen von Grenz- und Schwellenphänomenen in der Vormoderne*, 133–147. Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter.
- Kobusch, Theo 2011. *Die Philosophie des Hoch- und Spätmittelalters*. München: C.H. Beck.
- Terry, Wendy R. & Robert A. Stauffer 2017. *A Companion to Marguerite Porete and The Mirror of Simple Souls*. Leiden/Boston: Brill (Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition, 77). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004338562_002 [restricted access, 25|05|2020].

Keywords:

Free Will, Love, (Human) Nature, Marguerite (Margaret(a) Porete (Porette, Porete) of Valenciennes), Mysticism, Reason, Soul, Virtue