



Henry of Ghent and the Power of Inspiration. A Chapter in Neoplatonism

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Abstract

In the Middle Ages it was only natural to believe in a celestial, absolute, eternal, non-material world beyond our everyday experiences. Yet for many medievals, theologians and philosophers alike, the existence of such a transcendent reality posed a problem, for how can human beings, who after all belong to the world down here, ever get in touch with that splendid reality high above? While conceding that it is possible to have some sort of knowledge of the divine realm, the thirteenth-century theologian Henry of Ghent (1217(?)-1293) warns us that rational thinking is of limited use here. Instead he suggests another, more direct approach. Like his great predecessor Plato, Henry of Ghent seems to be aware of the, albeit limited, value of artistic inspiration as a means to connect with eternity. As I hope to show, some of his accounts on this elusive subject bring to mind the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and are surprisingly similar to the views of the psychologist Carl Gustav Jung.

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