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IN-BETWEEN MIND, SPIRIT, AND BEING:
A CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF GERDA WALTHER'S
PHENOMENOLOGY OF MYSTICISM WITH
PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO CORRESPONDENCES TO
POST-MATERIALIST NOTIONS OF REALITY

PATRICIA FEISE-MAHNKOPP

PhD in Philosophy, Professor of Phenomenology.

Alanus University of Arts and Social Sciences, Institute of Philosophical Education and Aesthetics.

53347 Alfter / Bonn, Germany

E-mail: patricia.feise@alanus.edu

In her main work, Walther exposes the *unio mystica* as meta-transcendental constitution of (fundamental) spiritual being (the bracketing indicates that this demonstration can be read in a metaphysical, i.e., strong, as well as in a secular, i.e., weak, version). While reflecting her approach theoretically and methodologically by drawing on Husserl, Landmann, Stein, just as on Pfänder and Conrad-Martius, Walther proposes a genuine approach that pushes the transcendental idealistic paradigm further. Its crucial claim is (imperfect) perceptibility and experientiality of (fundamental) spiritual being (labeled “God” by Walther). It is based on a substantially and ontologically differentiating—though integrative—notion of the *conditio humana*: entanglement of *ego-center* (both belonging to the transcendental realm and transgressing it meta-transcendentally), *self* (belonging to psychophysical being), and soul-spiritual implications of personal *basic essence* (belonging to spiritual being) with its “metaphysical-real core” (belonging to fundamental spiritual being). By the help of *mystical vision*, (fundamental) spiritual being is not only (though imperfectly) perceived and experienced; rather, according to Walther, human ego-consciousness also communicates with God as a spiritual person. However, the latter cannot be supported by Walther’s analysis. In other words, a critical distinction must be made between the—phenomenologically demonstrable—philosophical content of Walther’s investigation and its theologically motivated readings. Accordingly, the present article can appreciate the philosophical significance of her *Phenomenology of Mysticism* without thereby being committed to its theological interpretations. Walther’s main work, in summary, is a substantial—if not consistently concise—contribution to the philosophy of mind/spirit and being, which, moreover, is able to act as a bridge between philosophi-

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cal phenomenology and theology. Additionally, in the weak reading, Walther's integrative concept of mind/spirit and being is connectable to postmaterialist notions of reality.

Keywords: Walther, early phenomenological movement, mystical experience, mind/spirit, being, anthropology, theological turn, post-materialism.

МЕЖДУ РАЗУМОМ, ДУХОМ И БЫТИЕМ: КРИТИЧЕСКАЯ ОЦЕНКА «ФЕНОМЕНОЛОГИИ МИСТИЦИЗМА» ГЕРДЫ ВАЛЬТЕР С ОСОБЫМ АКЦЕНТОМ НА СООТВЕТСТВИЕ ПОСТ-МАТЕРИАЛИСТИЧЕСКОМУ ПОНЯТИЮ РЕАЛЬНОСТИ

ПАТРИЦИЯ ФАЙЗЕ-МАНКОП

Доктор философии, профессор феноменологии.

Аланский университет искусств и социальных наук, институт философского образования и эстетики.
53347 Альфтер, Бонн, Германия.

E-mail: patricia.feise@alanus.edu

В своем главном труде Г. Вальтер раскрывает *unio mystica* в качестве мета-трансцендентальной конституции (фундаментального) духовного бытия (заключение в скобки указывает на то, что эта демонстрация может быть прочитана как в метафизической, т. е. сильной, так и в секулярной, т. е. слабой версиях). Осмысляя свою позицию через теоретическую и методологическую опору на Гуссерля, Ландамана, Штайн и Конрад-Мартиус, Вальтер предлагает своеобразный подход, который продвигает трансцендентально-идеалистическую парадигму дальше. Его решающий тезис состоит в (несовершенной) восприимчивости и доступности в опыте (фундаментального) духовного бытия (которое Вальтер называет «Богом»). Он основан на субстанциальности и онтологическом различии — пусть и интегративном — понятия *conditio humana*: спутанность *ego-центра* (как принадлежность к трансцендентальной сфере, так и мета-трансцендентальная трансгрессия), *самость* (принадлежность психо-физическому бытию) и душевно-духовные импликации *основной сущности* (принадлежность к духовному бытию) с его “метафизически-реальным средоточием” (принадлежность фундаментальному духовному бытию). За счет *мистического видения* (фундаментальное) духовное бытие является не только (пусть и несовершенно) воспринятым и испытанным; но, скорее, согласно Вальтер, человеческое *ego-сознание* также общается с Богом как духовной личностью. Впрочем, последнее не может быть подтверждено анализом, осуществленным Вальтер. Иными словами, должно быть проведено критическое — способное быть продемонстрированным феноменологически — различие философского содержания исследования Вальтер и его теологически мотивированного прочтения. Таким образом, настоящая статья может оценивать философскую значимость ее «Феноменологии мистицизма», не прибегая к ее теологическим интерпретациям. Обобщая, можно сказать, что главный труд Вальтер является существенным — если и не последовательно сокращенным — вкладом в философию разума/духа и бытия, который, кроме того, способен служить мостом между философской феноменологией и теологией. Кроме того, в слабой версии прочтения интегративное понятие разума/духа, используемое Вальтер, может служить связью с пост-материалистическими понятиями реальности.

Ключевые слова: Вальтер, раннее феноменологическое движение, мистический опыт, разум/дух, бытие, антропология, теологический поворот, пост-материализм.

This paper sheds light on Walther's *Phänomenologie der Mystik* (Walther, 1923c)¹. In doing so, the work of an original, yet understudied, female thinker, engaged in the early phenomenological movement, is being illuminated.

Walther's main work deals with the question whether mystical experiences are what they claim to be: "a real, 'bodily' experience of God" („wirkliches, ‚leibhaftiges‘ Erleben Gottes“). For the clarification of this question, she examines experiences which, according to their inner meaning or *content* („Gehalt“), claim the *givenness* of God („den Anspruch erheben, Gott zu wirklicher Gegebenheit zu bringen“) (Walther, 1976, 23, my italics). That means, as Walther's wording indicates: to transfer the—Husserlian—concept of *noetic-noematic* analyses upon the mystical experience. Connected to this is the assumption that experience holds both an epistemological and an ontological dimension².

In addition to Husserl's philosophical phenomenology (Husserl, 2009; 2014) and her own work in the field of intersubjective philosophy of consciousness (Walther, 1923a), Walther's theoretical parameters are especially based on Pfänder's phenomenological anthropology (Pfänder, 1913; 1916; 1933). Furthermore, there is an orientation towards meta-transcendental philosophical considerations of Landmann (Landmann, 1923), the ontological phenomenology of Conrad-Martius (Conrad-Martius, 1916; 1921; 1923), and Stein's phenomenological philosophy of mind/spirit (Stein, 2003; 2005; 2007).

On the one hand, as we will see, Walther's approach is grounded in the notion of a mental-spiritual constitution of personhood disclosing *ego-center* („Ich-Zentrum“)s meta-transcendental intentionality and a soul-spiritual character proper to the *basic essence* („Grundwesen“) of the person with relation to *divine essence* (that is, fundamental spiritual being); on the other hand, it is obliged to eidetic and [meta-] transcendental reduction of the mystical experience, exhibiting the constitution of fundamental spiritual being by meta-transcendental consciousness. With this genuine approach, Walther pushes the Husserlian transcendental-idealistic paradigm further³. More precisely, she extends this on the noetic side (analysis of the "givenness")

¹ Cited here in its 3rd, revised German edition 1976; henceforth referred to—in the interest of better readability—as *Phenomenology of Mysticism*, abbreviated as *Phenomenology*. Since this work and other cited writings of Walther have not been translated into English—with one exception, that is, the introduction and first chapter of her *Phenomenology* (cf. Parker, 2018b)—, the author let the English editor Amy Parker provide a translation of all quotations.

² Walther's terminology and theoretical-methodological parameters are explained in detail below.

³ Cf. explanations in the context of the following presentation of the theoretical-methodological parameters of Walther's *Phenomenology*.

through a meta-transcendental component and on the noematic side (analysis of the “inner content”) through a spiritual component.

In doing so, Walther (Walther, 1976, 22) exposes the mystical experience as imperfect perception/experience of “real presence of God,” that is—as I would like to critically emphasize in bracketing the theological interpretation of her investigation results—as imperfect perception/experience of (fundamental) spiritual being.

The condition of this possibility is the *mystical vision*, which in perceptive terms resembles (without being identical with) “transference,” a specific mode of intersubjective perception that Walther exhibits in connection with telepathic experiences.

In the following, the theoretical-methodological connections briefly sketched in the introduction will be highlighted in more detail and—just like Walther’s central finding—subjected to a critical appraisal. In doing so, it is necessary to distinguish between the phenomenologically demonstrable philosophical content of Walther’s investigation and its theologically motivated interpretation. Moreover, it becomes apparent that the onto-epistemological yield of Walther’s *Phenomenology* can be read in a strong, i.e., metaphysical, and a weak, i.e., secular, version.

What emerges as a result is that her work—despite partial inconsistencies—is to be regarded as a substantial contribution to the philosophy of mind/spirit and being. Moreover, in the weak reading, it proves to be connectable to post-materialist notions of reality.

Specifically, I will proceed as follows: after giving some information on Walther’s profile as a phenomenologist and on the origin of her main work, I will describe the phenomenal character of the *mystical experience* according to her and highlight its transformative character. Subsequently, I will outline her theoretical-methodological paradigm by focusing primarily on its onto-epistemological implications. In doing so, Walther’s concept of “transference” will be illuminated, too. Furthermore, Walther’s anthropological-theological notion, that is her view of the relationship between human and Divine personhood, will be briefly sketched. Finally, I will reconstruct her phenomenological understanding of the *unio mystica* and formulate a structural model of *mystical vision*’s perceptive process. After resuming such main findings, I will discuss potentials and limitations of her approach (in theory and method) by differentiating between the philosophical and theological meaning of her work. I will conclude by stressing the connectivity of Walther’s integrative notion of mind/spirit and being to postmaterialist notions of reality.

1. WALTHER'S PROFILE

Gerda Walther (1897–1977), a former student of Alexander Pfänder (1870–1941) and Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), was a prominent member of the early phenomenological movement. To name but a few of her merits: Walther achieved her PhD *summa cum laude* with a thesis on social phenomenology under Pfänder (Walther, 1923a) and contributed an extensive subject index to Husserl's *Ideas I* (Walther, 1923b). Moreover, she gave the opening lecture for the inaugural meeting of *Freiburger phänomenologische Gesellschaft* in winter semester 1918/19, entitled „Zur Problematik von Husserls reinem Ich“ (which has unfortunately been lost). She also maintained an intellectual exchange with Edith Stein (1891–1942) and Hedwig Conrad-Martius (1888–1966) (Parker, 2018a).

Walther's (Walther, 1923a, 1923c) early work is dedicated to social and religious phenomenology. Then, while working in psychiatric contexts, her interest shifted to psychopathological implications (e.g., Walther, 1927). Finally, she turned to parapsychological implications of consciousness (e.g., Walther, 1955a, 1955b).

Her contribution to philosophical phenomenology has so far not been sufficiently appreciated either in a historical or in a systematic perspective. Besides gender implications—like other women philosophers of her generation, Walther was denied an institutionalized work in the context of filling professorships or comparable positions—this could also reflect the focus of her late work. In other words, it is very likely that Walther's previous writings have also fallen into discredit due to the rather dubious reputation that parapsychological research—rightly or wrongly—enjoys (Walach, 2019, 57).

The fact that Walther's contribution to phenomenology is as substantial as it is multifaceted is indicated by initial overviews (Calcagno, 2018). How exactly this contribution is structured has yet to be proven by in-depth Walther research. The present article is intended as a contribution to this.

2. THE ORIGIN OF WALTHER'S MAIN WORK

As Walther pens in her autobiography (Walther, 1960), *Phenomenology of Mysticism* (which she considered to be her main work) emerged from personal transformations. Growing up in a Marxist-atheistic home, Walther (1960, 63, 86) felt a vivid religious inclination from childhood on but suppressed it in order to conform to the atheistic ideology of her parental home.

A significant change took place when, as a student, following a lecture on the philosophy of religion, she was listening to Pfänder's explanations of the (Husserlian)

need of *bracketing* (instead of simply denying) the question of divine being within the *epoché*. Consequently, according to Walther, the pursuit of both epistemological and ontological implications of the “problem of God” was legitimated in proper phenomenological investigations⁴.

Walther (1960, 190) was also deeply impressed by Pfänder’s remark that by God we might understand the “last, deepest ground” („Wurzel- oder Wesensgrund“) of the “basic essence” („Grundwesen“) of an individual psyche; that is, as its fundamental spiritual being („geistig-göttlicher Seinsgrund“: (Walther, 1960, 226). As a result, Walther (Walther, 1960, 190) became interested in phenomenological approaches to the question of the Divine (which she, as we shall see, understands not only as fundamental but also as personal spiritual being).

A second, more profound, change took place in the winter of 1918 when Walther experienced an exceptional psychic experience riding on a train back from a visit with her dying father. As she (Walther, 1960, 222) recalls, this experience was preceded by psychophysical exhaustion caused by personal sorrows and fear.

3. PHENOMENAL CHARACTER OF THE MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

Initially, Walther felt—both psychophysically and mentally—alienated from herself, other subjects, and objects in the world: “Everything that surrounded me became inwardly strangely distant and indifferent” (Walther, 1960, 222); “Mechanically I drove to the train station [...]. It was as if I wasn’t actually doing all this myself, but an automaton [...].” (Walther, 1960, 223)⁵. Speaking in (Husserlian) terms, Walther lost contact to herself as empirical ego („Empirisches Ich“ (Husserl, 2009, 365)).

⁴ If the *epoché*, i.e. the bracketing of the naive “belief” in the real existence of the world, has the purpose to enable the change from the “natural” to the “phenomenological” attitude—not to negate the existence of the world, but to expose the essential preconditions of this world reference in noetic-noematic analyses—, then it can be formulated analogously to the “problem of God” that the bracketing of the naive “belief” in the existence of God (that is, in that of a fundamental spiritual being) should not exclude the purpose of exposing, if necessary, the essential preconditions of this “supra”-world reference in noetic-noematic analyses (cf. following detailed exposition of the theoretical-methodological parameters of Walther’s *Phenomenology*). In Walther’s autobiography, this connection reads as follows: “Perhaps the materialists who denied a God had merely not sought him in the appropriate attitude?” (Walther, 1960, 190).

⁵ The traits of depersonalization (i.e., not feeling connected to one’s own body) and derealization (i.e., perceiving the environment, including other persons, as unreal) that can be detected in this state of consciousness are considered in psychopathological contexts (among others) as indicators of dissociative disorders (for the concept of dissociation, see (Şar, 2014). However, this does not mean that Walther’s experience is a phenomenon to be classified as pathogenic (with regard to further

In this mental state, as Walther accounts further, she knew with “uncanny clarity”: “When I arrive at Freiburg, I will either be dead or mentally ill—or I will have found something entirely new, unknown, which gives a different meaning to my entire life” (Walther, 1960, 223). Subsequently, she sank into an “abyss,” now being only aware of herself: “Of course, this consciousness actually consisted only of the fact that I felt myself sinking and sinking [...] as if I were falling through empty, infinite, starless space” (Walther, 1960, 224). A state of consciousness that Walther will characterize as “pure (ego) consciousness” in the course of her phenomenological investigation of this experience (Walther, 1976, 140).

After allowing herself to slip into this abyss, Walther noticed “something” coming from a vast distance. The nearer it came, the more secure she felt. After a while, the author noticed just “love and goodness surrounding her”—an impression that lasted until she left the train and increased in terms of perceiving “pure light” by her mind’s eye as she got home.

Walther (Walther, 1960, 225) concludes by stating that she found herself essentially transformed, adding that she knew for sure that the “something” which “received” her did not emanate from her individual psyche (in terms of Pfänder’s “*basic essence*”) but from a fundamentally “different world” (in terms of its “last, deepest ground,” that is as *divine spiritual reason for being*) (Walther, 1960, 226).

We will come back to these connections from a phenomenological point of view below.

4. TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT

Subsequently, the former atheist Walther (Walther, 1960, 226, 474–475) found her calling to serve divine being personally and professionally, i.e., she dedicated her professional life to research of mysticism (later: extraordinary experiences, too) and turned to Catholic Church (she was baptized in 1944). Her description meets characterizations of other experiences understood as mystical (see, e.g., Teresa d’Ávila, 2005; Buber, 1909).

Comparable transformative effects can be found in the life and work of other members of the early phenomenological movement—a fact that bewildered Husserl (Husserl, 1968, 22), as we know from one of his letters to Roman Ingarden (1893–1970). Adolf Reinach (1883–1917) and Edith Stein did also turn to religious philo-

correspondences to, but also deviations from, psychopathological states of consciousness and the mystical experience, cf. (Feise-Mahnkopp, 2020).

sophical subjects after personal “awakening” experiences, and converted to Christian churches (Beckmann, 2003, 45–46).

If one considers this circumstance together with the fact that the philosophical work of Conrad-Martius and Max Scheler (1874–1924), two other protagonists of the early phenomenological movement, is characterized in part by religious-philosophical questions, one must ask whether the theological turn (Janicaud, 2014) recently stated in (especially French-language) phenomenology would not be more aptly described as a return.

5. METHODOICAL SET OF INSTRUMENTS

The starting point of *Phenomenology* is the examination of the claim of mystical experience to be a real, “bodily” experience of God (i.e., an experience that Walther calls, in the light of personal experience, an experience from a “*fundamentally different world*,” cf. the above quotation). Consequently, as a philosopher, she wanted to analyze that—personal—experience by the help of phenomenology, that is rational tools promising universality (Walther, 1976, 21).

Walther’s descriptions of her own experience, classified as mystical, serve as material for analysis⁶. These are subjected to an analysis of essence, i.e., eidetic reduction⁷: “In our investigation we want to adhere as intimately as possible to this mystical experience and [...] emphasize what is essential in this experience” (Walther, 1976, 21 ff.).

Walther, however, not only takes an analytical look at her own experiences, but also compares what she recognizes as essential to them with accounts of the experiences of other mystics, so that (at least partially) invariants become visible⁸.

At the same time, she distinguishes the mystical experience from “other givennesses that are apparently similar on the outside, but different in essence from it” (Walther, 1976, 22). More specifically, Walther makes comparisons with supersensory experiences as well as experiences from the psychopathological context⁹.

⁶ In this way, she fulfills Husserl’s requirement of basing phenomenological investigations descriptively on first-personal experiences (Husserl, 2009, 382 ff.).

⁷ Thus, she fulfills Husserl’s more far-reaching demand to transform empirical-psychological phenomena into “universality of essence” (Husserl, 2014, 14 ff.). Husserl characterizes the epistemological perspective associated with this as “eidetical science,” not as “factual science” (the latter is reserved for the positivistically attuned natural sciences) (Husserl, 2014, 9 ff.).

⁸ The inclusion of an intersubjectively comparative point of view, with the help of which essential invariants can be identified, corresponds to Husserl’s basic stance (cf. Zahavi, 2017, 15).

⁹ The methodological approach of Walther is not as clear as it reads in this presentation; sometimes there are leaps within the individual levels of analysis, or results from later steps of analysis are mentioned in advance (cf. corresponding remarks within the critical appraisal below).

Transcendental reductions follow¹⁰, which are suitable to reveal the “givenness” of the mystical experience, i.e., its transcendental constitution (*noesis* in Husserl’s diction)—an undertaking which cannot be carried out without at the same time revealing its “inner content,” i.e., its transcendent objects or references (*noemata* in Husserl’s diction)¹¹. “So, we want to examine those experiences [...] in which, according to their *inner content*, a direct expression, revelation or appearance of God comes to *givenness*” (Walther, 1976, 23, my italics).

However, since Walther encounters implications that need to be considered (i.e., a spiritual “ground”¹² [„Quellgrund“] of mystical experience’s typical *noema* and a meta-transcendental character of its typical *noesis*), reductions are more aptly termed *meta-transcendental reductions*.

In advance, Walther conducts “regional-ontological” analyses of the *conditio humana* (in the sense of Husserl (Husserl, 1952)) or constitutional analyses of human personhood¹³. For this purpose, Walther draws on multiple everyday experiences, but also aesthetic and ethical experiences as material for analysis, or contrasts them with religious or mystical experiences¹⁴.

Three crucial notions provide Walther not only with the basic conceptual instruments for her investigation of the mystical experience, but also with the basis for her conception of mind/spirit and being: firstly, the identification of an *ego-center* (belonging to the reality of consciousness), which cannot only intentionally refer to itself as well as to nature/world, but can also open itself in super-conscious intentionality towards the spiritual/divine (ground of) being; secondly, the identification of a *self* (belonging to the psycho-physical being); thirdly, the identification of a soul-spiritual-

¹⁰ Walther herself does not use this term.

¹¹ In this way, Walther fulfills Husserl’s claim to philosophical phenomenology: to be not only a theory of the essence of real phenomena, but also—and especially—of transcendently reduced phenomena, i.e., phenomena freed from all real attachments (Ströker, 2009, XVIII). To be able to carry out the transcendental reduction requires the *epoché*, the “bracketing” of the “entire world posited in the natural attitude, [...] actually found from the outset of experience” (Husserl, 2014, 56). The intention of this methodological step is not to negate the reference to the world, but to be able to analyze it as a purely “transcendental world phenomenon.” Regarding *Phenomenology*, Walther takes *epoché* into account by initially placing the claim of mystical experience to be a real experience of God under reserve (Walther explicitly invokes the idea of bracketing, albeit in the context of telepathic experiences, on p. 63), but dissolves it in the light of her investigative findings.

¹² In this respect, Walther continues Husserl’s figure of thought that consciousness is the “source” for any form of being (Husserl, 2003, 70) to the effect that (fundamental) spirit is to be considered not only as the “source ground” for any form of being, but also for the reality of consciousness.

¹³ Even these do not consistently take place in the desirable systematic manner.

¹⁴ Walther understands the latter as a pure form of religious experience (Walther, 1976, 33).

ly accentuated *basic essence* (belonging to spiritual being), whose “metaphysical-real core” connects the human personality with the spiritual/divine ground of being¹⁵.

6. THEORETICAL SET OF INSTRUMENTS I:
PHENOMENOLOGY AS ONTO-EPISTEMOLOGY IN
ACCORDANCE WITH HUSSERL AND BEYOND

The reference to Husserl’s transcendental-idealist paradigm is fundamental to Walther’s phenomenological understanding in theory and practice.

A characteristic feature of this view is the assumption that everything that exists is “constituted” in consciousness. A conception which, however, does not mean that being is generated by consciousness activity. Rather, the “crux” of Husserl’s view lies in the correlation of the two: consciousness and being independent of consciousness (cf. Zahavi, 2017, 27). Thereby, not only is being constituted by consciousness, but the former is also present in the latter as “actuality in person” (Husserl, 2014, 42, 43); that in turn means that perception is characterized by both activity (*noetic* implications) and passivity (*noematic* implications).

In this respect, Husserl is closer to ontological realism than is commonly assumed (cf. Zahavi, 2017, 170). A fact of which Walther, who classifies Husserl—against the background of the contemporary realism-idealism debate—as both a transcendental idealist and a realist (Walther, 1960, 215), is fully aware¹⁶. I. e., like Husserl (Husserl, 2009, 361–363), Walther grasps “experience” („Erlebnis“) epistemologically first. In doing so, she understands perception both as active and passive, that is, as interplay of “givennesses” and “inner content,” of *noetic* and *noematic* implications (see, e.g., Walther, 1976, 49). Or, to put it differently, like Husserl (Husserl, 2014, 172–181), as relationship of intentionality (*noesis*) and its correlates—various subjects being originally either immanent or transcendent to consciousness (but, as constituted *noemata*, nothing but immanent to consciousness: (Ströker, 2009, XXVI)).

Given that the latter are the transcendently constituted manifestation of objects/ contexts that exist outside of consciousness, an ontological level is always inherent in experiences as well. Because even if the *noema* is not fully identical with the transcendent-

¹⁵ I. e., Walther assumes different levels of substance and being, which become effective in the *conditio humana*.

¹⁶ This is an assessment that finds confirmation in Husserl’s self-characterization: „Kein gewöhnlicher ‘Realist’ ist je so realistisch und so concret gewesen als ich, der phänomenologische ‘Idealist’ [...]“ / “No ordinary ‘realist’ has ever been so realistic and so concrete as I, the phenomenological ‘idealist’ [...]” Husserl formulated in a letter to Émile Baudin (as cited in Zahavi, 2017, 170, translated by P.F.-M.).

ent object, it is not a simulation or the like. In other words: even if the external objects transcendent to consciousness are “transformed” into *noemata* immanent to consciousness, they do not lose their real presence in consciousness (Husserl, 2014, 43); experience is not only characterized by epistemological implications, but, as in a disentanglement puzzle (note *P.F.-M.*), also by ontological implications (cf. Zahavi, 2017, 57 ff.).

Now, when Walther formulates that she wants to investigate the interplay of “givenness” and “inner content” in mystical experience in order to determine whether “a real, ‘bodily’ experience of God” can be exhibited in the sense of an “actuality in person” (Walther, 1976, 22), she not only transfers the (Husserlian) notion of an onto-epistemological double character of (ordinary) experience to mystical experience, but also makes a significant change of focus. More precisely, she directs her focus not to the transcendental constitution of objects/contexts from the realm of psychophysical being and/or the reality of consciousness itself, but to the meta-transcendental constitution of objects/contexts from the realm of spiritual being and/or the spiritual ground of being itself (the latter is also referred to by Walther as “God’s Spirit” [„Gott-Geist“])¹⁷.

When Walther later writes, with regard to one aspect of her results of investigation (i.e. imperfect perception/experience of the spiritual ground of being in mystical experience), that “[...] something can very well be given bodily without therefore also being given completely and ‘all-sidedly’” (Walther, 1976, 232), then she transfers Husserl’s concept of “adumbration” („Abschattung“), i.e. the insight that perception of natural and mundane being is necessarily imperfect (Husserl, 2014, 71–73)¹⁸, to the mystical context (we will come back to the category error associated with it)¹⁹.

Moreover, like Husserl (Husserl, 2014, 11–14), Walther is obliged to *eidetical* perception, that is essential cognition. Its condition of possibility is to leave the natural attitude and enter the phenomenological attitude (Husserl, 2014, 48–56). In contrast to “factual science” and its “‘empirical’ universality,” “eidetical science,” that is “essential cognition,” is abstract and leads to “universality of essence” (Husserl, 2014, 6).

As (rational) knowledge, it is not detached from reality; this connection becomes apparent if one considers Husserl’s speech of the “intuition affording something in an original way” (Husserl, 2014, 34). I. e., it is not of ideal character, but is fed by the “actuality in person” already mentioned several times above. In case there is no

¹⁷ A circumstance through which Walther goes beyond the limits of philosophical phenomenology set by Husserl, rightly or wrongly (Husserl, 2014, 106–107).

¹⁸ Due to spatial conditions, that is implication of perspective, the subject (of the natural attitude) continuously misses in perceiving the total presence of being.

¹⁹ Walther clarifies the—imperfectly bodily—perception/experience of God (i.e., a spiritual phenomenon) with the perception/experience of the moon (i.e., a physical phenomenon).

agreement between the two—in the sense of an “adequately giving intuition” (Husserl, 2014, 273)—it is not possible to speak of knowledge with Husserl, but merely of what is assumed or deluded. Husserl also speaks of noetic-noematic congruence and, in this context, cites the expression “*certainty of belief*,” which he also calls “original doxa” („Urdoxa“) (Husserl, 2014, 208). Walther, too, speaks of “certainty of belief” in the experiential context of the *unio mystica* (Walther, 1976, 179) (the question to what extent this speech can be compared with Husserl’s understanding will concern us later in connection with Walther’s phenomenological analysis).

Unlike Husserl, who deprives the term “eidos” borrowed from Plato of its original (metaphysical) meaning of being the fundamental reason for being²⁰, and locates it exclusively within the possibilities and limits of transcendental consciousness/reason (Husserl, 2014, 106–107), Walther (Walther, 1976, 122) reasserts the Platonic meaning. I. e., Walther does not only refer to the eidetic dimension in an onto-epistemological way, but also acknowledges its fundamental, that is, metaphysical status.

Moreover, in her analysis of the mystical experience, she claims both (though incomplete) perceptibility of that essence and its existence as *fundamental* spiritual being (Walther, 1976, 26, 33–34)²¹. The condition of the possibility is the “mystical vision,” i.e., the meta-transcendental constitution of the spiritual ground of being (or spiritual being, if one is not willing to follow Walther’s strong, i.e., metaphysical, reading).

7. PHENOMENOLOGY AS ONTO-EPISTEMOLOGY IN ENGAGEMENT WITH LANDMANN, CONRAD-MARTIUS, AND STEIN

Besides the work of her teachers, Husserl and Pfänder, as well as her own dissertation, Walther names writings of Landmann, Conrad-Martius, and Stein as key references.

Like Landmann (Landmann, 1923, 79), Walther shares the insight (inspired by Husserl) that transcendence (i.e., orientation toward something exterior to consciousness) is characteristic of consciousness activity. More precisely, she agrees with Landmann’s thought (Landmann, 1923, 249) that this orientation is not to be limited to psychophysical transcendental objects/mental contexts. It could also be directed to spiritually transcendent objects/mental-spiritual contexts.

The parallel to Conrad-Martius’ real ontology (Conrad-Martius, 1923) is, among other things, that Walther does not make a dualistic distinction between es-

²⁰ The most fundamental one is the idea of the “Good” (Plato, 2012, 321).

²¹ The reasons for the only partial or imperfect realization/experience of spiritual reality will be discussed in more detail later.

sential being and psychophysical being; like Conrad-Martius, she rather assumes a juxtaposition of both, understood as transcendence in immanence²². In other words, the former is not removed from the latter; rather, the former is present in the latter without being reducible to it²³.

Further parallels exist to Conrad-Martius' assumption (Conrad-Martius, 1957) of a not only hyletic (the substance of the material nature; in our diction: of the psychophysical being) but also pneumatic substance (the substance of the spiritual nature; in our diction: of the spiritual being or of the spiritual ground of being, i.e., spirit itself).

Correspondences to Stein's phenomenological philosophy of mind/spirit and being exist, among other things, in that Walther not only articulates onto-epistemological considerations similar to those made by Stein in *Potenz und Akt* (Stein, 2004), but also puts them into (analytical) action. Stein distinguishes between three levels of being: an immanent one that is immediately accessible to consciousness (inner world), a transcendent one that shows itself in the inner world and points beyond it (outer world), and a third one, absolutely transcendent (superworld) (cf. Beckmann, 2003, 184). Even though the latter, as a fundamental ground of being, is radically distinct from the former two, Stein does not want to exclude that "there may be an existential manifestation of this pure being in immanence" (Stein, 2004, 17)²⁴.

Analogously, the research-guiding question that Walther pursues in her *Phenomenology* can also be expressed as follows: are manifestations of existence of this pure (spiritual) being demonstrable in consciousness?

8. EXCURSUS: PERCEIVING GOD?

Walther traces the perceptibility of divine being back to ancient Greek notions. In concrete, she distinguishes—in analogy to the Platonic-Aristotelian separation between dianoetical and noetical modes of perception and cognition (Oehler, 1985)—rationalization/critical reflection from transrational intuition/mental vision, blending this distinction with the Platonic notion that only the latter succeeds in envisioning essence and existence of the fundamental reason for being ("idea of the Good" for

²² Conrad-Martius developed a complex terminology in order to grasp the relationships that have been simplified or expressed in our diction for reasons of space. See Miron (2014) for a conceptual explication of Walther's real ontology and Hart (Hart, 2020) for an understanding of Conrad-Martius' terminology in the context of her work as a whole.

²³ A figure of thought that is also asserted Christologically (cf. Conrad-Martius, 1965, 196–222).

²⁴ See Beckmann-Zöller and Gerl-Falkovitz (Beckmann-Zöller & Gerl-Falkovitz, 2015) for an overview of central topics, concepts, and larger contexts of thought in Stein's work.

Plato, divine being/“God’s spirit” for Walther). Walther’s (1976, 27, 33, 44) notion of perception/knowledge follows the Platonic notion and includes both rational and transrational capacities of the mind.

Additionally, Walther (1976, 28, 44, 122) blends that notion with a Plotinic reading, i.e., she distinguishes (human) mind from (divine) spirit considering the latter as primordial source which generated the first in terms of a differing emanation²⁵. More precisely, Walther explains the—imperfect—perceptibility of divine being by human beings paradoxically both in terms of a kinship and a fundamental otherness of human mind and divine spirit—comparable to Erich Przywara’s (1889–1972) idea of “*analogia entis*” (Przywara, 1927; 1932), that is, human being’s participation in divine being/God without being God/the Divine²⁶.

The fact that the “mental givenness of mysticism” (Walther, 1976, 27) does not allow for an adequate, i.e., fully comprehensive experience/knowledge of God (Walther, 1976, 34) can thus be justified with Walther not only (meta-) transcendently, but also emanationistically (Walther, 1976, 44, 122). In doing so, Walther is also in line with the principle of *via negativa*: to grasp the incomprehensible essence and existence of the Divine by the help of negations, paradoxes and/or approximations.

9. THEORETICAL SET OF INSTRUMENTS II: ANTHROPOLOGY/CONSTITUTION OF PERSONHOOD

Walther’s (Walther, 1976, 100–130) regional-ontological analysis of the *conditio humana*, i.e., her spiritual philosophical analysis of the constitution of human personhood, reveals three components in human beings that can be distinguished from each other substantially and ontologically: mental *ego-center* („Ich-Zentrum“), psychophysical *self* or *embedding of the ego* („Selbst“/ „Einbettung des Ichs“), and bodily-soul-spiritual *basic essence* („Grundwesen“) with its “metaphysical real core” („metaphysisch-realer Kern“) (Walther, 1976, 49, 97, 122).

Ego-center serves—to use a modern metaphor instead of Walther’s metaphor of the oil lamp²⁷—as “cockpit” of a (personal) human being. It is intentional and self-

²⁵ A comparable point of view can be found with Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) (Otto, 1924, 130–35), who speaks of the “numinous” as true a priori; just as it can be compared with Bernhard Welte’s (Welte, 1965) fundamental theological reflections on the meta-categoriality of the “Holy.”

²⁶ Przywara, with whom she was personally acquainted, encouraged Walther (Walther, 1976, 18) to publish the second edition of *Phenomenology*.

²⁷ In my opinion, the symbol of the oil lamp chosen by Walther (Walther, 1976, 47) does not consistently prove to be concise for the views she wants to illustrate with it.

aware. Additionally, it provides the faculty for rationalization (Walther, 1927, 58), just as it provides “power of concentration” and commands “attention.” Moreover, it is capable of acts of free will („freie Willensselbstmacht“ (Walther, 1927, 39)). Given this, *ego-center* is “the germinal starting point of the *spirit*” („der erste keimhafte Ansatzpunkt des Geistes“ (Walther, 1927, 39))²⁸. Moreover, *ego-center* is able to direct itself to spiritual being (both in its own *basic essence* and in the basic essences of others) as well as to the spiritual/divine ground of being: “The ego could just as well use its freedom in another direction, e.g., by allowing the impulses of its *basic essence* (or also divine influxes) to enter its inner being” (Walther, 1976, 40).

Self or *embedment of the ego* can be grasped as the “software” of human personhood, that is as archive of egoistical and non-egoistical psychophysical “data,” which remain unconscious until they are actualized (made conscious) by *ego-center*:

According to this, there is an embedment [the subconscious] behind the conscious, living, experiencing, ‘actualizing’ I-center, into which this ego is immersed. Out of this embedment there are incessant streams of experiences, some of which are experienced, ‘actualized,’ [...] by entering into the ego and being lived through by it. (Walther, 1976, 76)

These data stem from different layers or “sources”: “These experiential stimuli now emerge from different layers of the embedment, possibly flowing into the embedment from certain ‘sources’ from which they originate” (Walther, 1976, 76).

As in the ancient Greek notion of the human soul, Walther differentiates between bodily (or “aetheric”), psychic²⁹, and spiritual components of *basic essence*. The first (understood as a vital force) is shared with other living beings. The second is, at least to a certain extent, shared with animals. Only the third is (in addition to *ego-center*’s meta-transcendental intentionality) unique to human beings: “So here human beings experience themselves as spiritual beings, as owners of a spiritual sphere of light within themselves, which in itself points beyond itself to a spiritual original source [...]” (Walther, 1976, 122). Substantially and ontologically, it is familiar, but not identical with mind: “In particular, the spiritual basic essence shines out most purely when man turns to the *divine essence* and comes into contact with it. It is then

²⁸ Walther’s understanding of *ego-center* as “germinal starting point of the spirit,” which entails an unconditional freedom, resembles Spinoza’s (Spinoza, 2006a, 51–52; Spinoza, 2006b, 23–27) notion of (Divine) rationality as “free cause” and its transcending function within the immanence of “natura naturans” (God as self-causing activity of nature, self-causing activity as God). Significantly, this also provides a connection to Conrad-Martius, who speaks of Spinoza’s thought as influential on her thinking: it struck her like “a bolt of lightning” (as cited in Hart, 2020, 1).

²⁹ Not in terms of the modern sense of the word, but in the ancient sense of a living soul (*Seele* or *seelisch* in German).

often difficult to distinguish what is the influx of the divine (the reflection of the Holy Spirit in man) and what is man's own spiritual basic essence" (Walther, 1976, 125). As "metaphysical-real core of personality," this dimension of basic essence provides essential impulses for self-actualization (Walther, 1976, 46, 49)³⁰.

All three constituents—this is particularly evident in Walther's considerations of the human *basic essence* (Walther, 1976, 100 ff.)—are not only given in entanglement (thus anticipating Merleau-Ponty's considerations on *chiasm* (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, 172 ff.), but also effectively interact with each other (i.e., the bodily or corporeal dimension changes in interaction with mental-spiritual components and *vice versa*).

Among the three constituents, the *basic essence*, which through its "metaphysically real core" stands in essentially closest relationship with the spiritual ground of being/*divine essence* (without being identical with it), is the most essential or existential part. This also turns *human beings*, even if in conscious interaction with *ego-center*, into (spiritual) persons³¹. In contrast to Husserl, who determines the *pure (transcendental) ego* as *a priori*, in whose dependence man places himself as a mental person (and to which the psychophysical components of his nature are subordinated), Walther thus identifies *spirit* as *a priori*³², to which not only the psychophysical self, but also the mental *ego-center* as well as the bodily-soul-spiritual *basic essence* are subordinated.

The mental *ego-center* mediates between the psychophysical (i.e., transient) constituent (*self*) and the *bodily-soul-spiritual* (i.e., partly transient, partly imperishable) constituent (*basic essence*). As "meta-mind" it also acts as a condition of the possibility for recognizability of the spiritual (ground of) being.

With this notion, which partly reveals correspondences to soul-accentuated conceptual models of Conrad-Martius and Stein³³, Walther goes beyond the Husserlian concept of *pure ego* and takes Husserl's observation of the "peculiarity" of the ego seriously, by reflecting on its "sui generis—not constituted—transcendence" as "transcendence in immanence" of consciousness (Husserl, 2014, 105).

³⁰ According to the original Aristotelian figure of thought, Walther (Walther, 1976, 95), like Pfänder (Pfänder, 1913; 1916; 1948), Conrad-Martius (Conrad-Martius, 1921, 1957), and Stein (Stein, 2004; Stein, 2005), assumes that personal development is oriented towards the actualization of (individual) potentiality (as truly essential being). As Walther (Walther, 1976, 135, 241) stresses in recourse to Pfänder, such actualization does not happen automatically; it depends on *ego-center's* will.

³¹ Since every person is constituted by the spiritual ground of being, the reality of social communities is constituted in this way at the same time (Walther, 1923a).

³² Cf. also Note 25.

³³ Cf. (Gschwendner, 2018).

10. CONSEQUENCES FOR PERCEPTION AND COGNITION

Consequences for perception/cognition are connected with the outlined *conditio humana*.

That is, in accordance to Walther, the trifold nature of human beings provides grounds for different modes of perception:

Only when we push ourselves with our consciousness into our outer senses, we are able to experience the outer body world and the worlds built upon it, only when we are internally 'involved' in our body, we have an awareness of its inner bodily processes [...], only when we dive into our inner psychic area, we are able to experience the specifically psychic. [...] And only when we dive into the spiritual area of our inner being, into our basic spiritual being, we are able to experience the spiritual. (Walther, 1976, 45)

Moreover, it can be added in anticipation of Walther's investigation results: if the consciousness (as it is the case in the *unio mystica*) opens itself for (fundamental) spiritual being, this can be recognized (even if in an imperfect way). In other words, Walther distinguishes between different modes of perception and their sources (physical-sensory, inner-psychic, and supersensory-spiritual or metaphysical). In phenomenological diction: we are dealing with noetic-noematic interrelations of different kinds.

Within that interplay, Walther isolates, apart from diverse intentional implications (both with active and passive imprint), the attention and turning away of *ego-center* in the stream of experience ("shifts in attention"; Husserl (Husserl, 2014, 182) calls them "attentional changes") as well as the perceptive mode of "transference" that plays a crucial role for perceptive patterns of the *unio mystica*.

11. "TRANSFERENCE": PERCEPTIBILITY OF OTHER SUBJECTS' EXPERIENCES

In phenomenological reductions of "telepathic" experiences³⁴, Walther demonstrates that one cannot only directly, *a fronte*, be aware of other subjects' experiences (i.e., of their emotional and cognitive states of mind), but also indirectly, *a tergo* (Walther, 1976, 51, 54 ff.).

The first mode, labelled as "empathy" ("Einfühlung") by Stein (Stein, 1917), is actively intended (i.e., based upon deliberate conscious acts) and requires the same physical locality and sensual perceptibility of the persons being involved. The latter,

³⁴ These are "experiences of foreign subjects in one's own interior" (Walther, 1976, 74). However, these are not only "asserted" by Walther from a first-personal perspective, but also "confirmed," as it were, by intersubjective reassurance.

labelled as “transference” („Übertragung“) by Walther (Walther, 1976, 63), is happening involuntarily, i.e., is based upon passive intentionality, and requires neither the same physical locality nor sensual perceptibility of the persons being involved.

To put it technically, the first mode requires (on side of a person A) *ego-center's* directed (active) intentionality, and is based upon sensual perception (of a person B by A). The latter, instead, is based upon undirected (passive) intentionality (that is initially unconscious receptivity) (on side of A) and is rooted in extrasensory perception (of B by A) (Walther, 1976, 76).

In the first case, neither the sensual perception of B nor the mental representation of his/her thoughts or feelings on side of A permeates the latter's *self/embedment of ego*. In the second, extrasensory perception of B's thoughts and/or feelings must have permeated A's *self/embedment of ego* before his/her *ego-center* can actualize them (Walther, 1976, 77).

As Walther (Walther, 1976, 74) explains further, other subjects' experiences („Erlebnisse fremder Subjekte im eigenen Inneren“) differ phenomenally both from one's own self-reflexively conscious sensations, feelings, and thoughts, and from “empathy” with other persons' sensations, feelings, and thoughts.

Walther (Walther, 1976, 56, 62) stresses a kinship between the perceptive mode of “transference” and the perceptive mode of the *mystical experience*: in both cases, undirected (passive) intentionality (receptivity) on extrasensory grounds is crucial.

Let us now turn to Walther's actual analysis of the mystical experience—in the light of her theoretical-methodological parameters unfolded so far. To be able to show the onto-epistemological connections culminating in the *unio mystica*, we first have to be aware of Walther's—exact—description.

12. DESCRIBING THE UNIO MYSTICA

Empirical ego, which has now, thrown back to itself, stripped of all personal feelings, thoughts, and motivations, turned into *ego-center*, is sinking deeper and deeper into the abyss, being only aware of its miserableness and desire for reaching “something,” knowing that no human will may force this “something” to come. Walther describes the ongoing process as follows (quoted deliberately in length):

Thus, the Ego is there, calls and waits. Behind it (externally, forwards) lies the world, behind it all existence and behind it (internally) is also the individual basic essence in which its inner psychic boundary lies; before it, only that deepest, dark abyss gapes and it calls into it—and waits. [...] in utmost doubt, [...] longing. [...]. Here it suddenly senses from the darkness of the abyss surrounding it, not from the direction of the world

that it has left and also not from the direction of the individual basic essence left behind, but rather “behind” and “beneath” at the same time, yet also “beyond” and “above” an everything coming like a sea of light and warmth. [...] at first only by way of a suggestion [...]. (Walther, 1976, 143–144)

And proceeds:

It continues to come closer as though from an unmeasurable “distance” until it arrives at the Ego at the same time, and now it suffuses the Ego and envelops it from all sides so that it appears sunk in a sea of endless warm and rich spiritual love which engulfs and flows through it in untiring abundance, while it is simultaneously surrounded by light and penetrated from an endless mild, pure spiritual sea of light. It is as though these waves now also flow into the “soul,” the “heart,” the “spirit,” the self of the Ego and from there past the abyss which also concluded it from itself, beyond in the Ego-center so that it now rests peacefully and contentedly in this sea of light and love, safe for all eternity. It devotes itself entirely to “the abyss,” it allows itself to be completely fulfilled and suffused by endless love and gratitude: because “It” came and captured it [...] (Walther, 1976, 143–144)

Walther concludes as follows:

The Ego rests long and blissfully surrendered in this sea and is expanded by it as if to the infinity of the universe. Then it very slowly turns its gaze back again, to where it came from. [...] Now it ‘sees’ and feels its own basic essence again [...], enters again spiritually into its own ‘heart’ and its own ‘head’ and its own body [...].

And she stresses:

It is as if a ray of light from a distant star (the sea of light and love, *note P.F.-M.*) still penetrates, which constantly holds and flows around the Ego itself and its basic essence. [...] When it enters its basic essence, however, it now sees itself as through that other light, sees and feels it with the ‘eye’ and the ‘heart’ of God—and only now does it bear the full sight of itself. (Walther, 1976, 146–47)

Walther (Walther, 1976, 147) completes: “The possibility is now also open to it (*ego-center*, *note P.F.-M.*) to look out of the ‘eye’ and the ‘heart’ of God at all other creatures.”

13. (META-) NOETIC AND NOEMATIC IMPLICATIONS

As Walther explains, *empirical ego* transforms into *ego-center* after its complete detachment from personal thought, feelings, and motivations, that is, after the deactualization of any *noemata* linked with the psychophysical and mental realm as well as the realm of its own spiritual being (*basic essence*). But longing to be rescued by a fundamental Other (“something”), it is not only pure self-reflexive (transcendental) consciousness, but also (via hope and longing) meta-transcendentally directed consciousness.

Walther describes the very moment when “It” “arrives,” that is, when “It” is being actualized by *ego-center* in the *mystical vision*, (meta-) noetically as “mild” and “peaceful,” and (meta-) noematically as “pure spiritual light” coming from “behind” and “beyond” itself (that is, not only as an essential spiritual being but also as fundamental spiritual being). Just as in the mode of “transference,” the noema of the mystical experience appears unintendedly (though desired) in *ego-center*’s meta-transcendentally open (receptive) mind.

The ever-increasing intensity of that experience is described by Walther (meta-) noetically as “filled with endless love and gratitude,” as “blissful” and “infinitely expanding,” and (meta-) noematically as “eternal love and light” (that is, both as familiar with and different from mental-spiritual experiences of a human being that are left behind in the *unio mystica*).

Reflecting on her findings, Walther does not claim strong evidence of (fundamental) spiritual being (which would be justifiable in the light of her demonstrations), but strong evidence of *divine* spiritual being (Walther, 1976, 179): “Thus, on the basis of the givenness of the mystical experiences and the revelation of Himself that God gives us in them, it is *proven* beyond all doubt (and not only intellectually-conclusively proven) that God is [...]”.

However, the identification of mystical experience’s typical *noema* (that is, a spiritual ground of being) with *divine* spirit does not appear to be justified in the light of Walther’s demonstration (as a theologically informed interpretation, this reading shall therefore be disregarded for the time being).

However, Walther’s certainty of belief in the constitution of a spiritual ground of being (*noema* of mystical experience) by meta-transcendental consciousness (*noesis* of mystical experience) could well be interpreted in the sense of Husserl’s *certainty of belief/Urdoxa (original doxa)*, i.e., as noetic-noematic congruence (Husserl, 2014, 272). Even if in the modified variant that mystical experience would have to be defined as “unity of transrational positing with what essentially motivates it” (analogous to Husserl’s definition of evidence as “unity of rational positing with what essentially motivates it” (Husserl, 2014, 272)). However, this is opposed by Walther’s (Walther, 1976, 142–153) assertion of a substantial-ontological difference between consciousness and spirit.

I have already noted above that this circumstance is not necessarily to be interpreted metaphysically, but can also be understood secularly³⁵; whether one understands

³⁵ From the point of view of the representatives of a concept of God immanent to consciousness, it could be conceived, among other things, as an “identical self-revelation of self-affirmative (transcendental) life,” i.e., as “God before all intuition” (Kühn, 2003, 7).

Walther's demonstration, i.e. meta-transcendental constitution of a spiritual being/ground of being, in the strong or in the weak reading, stands and falls with the credibility one is willing to give to her claim that *ego-center* grasps the *noema* of mystical experience not only in substantial, but also and especially in ontological respect as a fundamentally different level of being³⁶. In any case, the mystical experience is not to be understood as incomplete experience/perception of "real presence of God," as Walther claims, but as incomplete experience/perception of (fundamental) spiritual being.

Walther's investigation also makes visible the fact that mystical vision cannot be forced or actively intended (even if it can be intentionally prepared by means of *ego-center's* alignment with the supramundane); rather, what is necessary is a passive-receptive moment or revelation of spiritual (ground of) being (in the description referred to as "It").

Additionally, as Walther's description indicates, even if *ego-center* is blissfully engulfed by that "sea of light and love," while finding itself infinitely expanded, it doesn't lose its self-awareness as individual *ego-center*. That means that there is an "expansion into the infinite" of *ego-center*, i.e., a dissolution of boundaries, but no fusion of *ego-center* and "It," i.e., the spiritual (ground of) being.

Before we turn to Walther's theologically motivated interpretation of the latter circumstance, a structural-phenomenological scheme shall be formulated, which expresses the genuine implications of the *unio mystica* according to Walther—understood as a process of perception *and* experience.

14. STRUCTURAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL SCHEME

To transfer the dynamics of perception into a structural scheme, we must state that *ego-center*, self-aware and distracted from its attachment to both an "inner" and "outer" (psychophysical and mental world), gives up all directed intentionality, switching into an undirected receiving mode (hoping, but not knowing that a saving "something" will come).

"It" reveals itself to *ego-center* in the mystical vision. *Ego-center* experiences it as a loving and radiant, spiritual being (though essentially familiar, too), fundamentally different from any other (ordinary and non-ordinary) experience.

Ontologically speaking, we must notice that the data to be actualized by *ego-center* do not flow from the psychophysical or mental realm. Nor do they flow from spiritual being (understood as *basic essence*). Instead, they flow from (fundamental)

³⁶ In this respect, a thorough comparison between Walther's *Phenomenology* and the phenomenological understanding of Henry (Henry, 1963) or Marion (Marion, 1989) seems a worthwhile endeavor.

spiritual being (understood as *divine essence*) which *ego-center* perceives (by the help of mystical vision, that is transrational eidetic perception) as both familiar with and alien to itself.

Pinpointing both necessary and sufficient conditions within the unfolding perceptive process culminating in the *unio mystica*, we must state as follows. Necessary conditions are: (1) *empirical ego's* detachment from any *noemata* linked to egoistical and non-egoistical data from the natural and mundane world, (2) self-reflexivity of *ego-center*, (3) meta-transcendental intentionality of *ego-center*. Sufficient conditions are: (1) *revelation* of spiritual (ground of) being, (2) its meta-transcendental *noesis*.

The sufficient conditions must not be regarded as an automatic result of fulfillment of the necessary conditions. On the contrary, as Walther's analysis demonstrates, the revelation of an essentially spiritual (and fundamental) being is not under *ego-center's* willing command. Instead, it is a blessing (that is, a gift which may also not be given), as Walther (Walther, 1976, 145) articulates in accordance with the mystical tradition³⁷.

Even if one is not willing to follow Walther's strong reading, i.e., demonstration of a spiritual ground of being in the noetic-noematic interplay of mystical experience, the structure- or process-oriented content of the schema remains.

15. SUSTAINABLE TRANSFORMATIVE EFFECTS

Considering Walther's description of the "aftermath" of the mystical experience (cited above), there are two crucial insights: firstly, a lasting connection with the (spiritual) "sea of love and lights" motivates the *ego* (once resettled in its empirical body, psyche, and mind) to constantly look at other creatures differently (i.e., in a loving, unifying and caring way); secondly, transformed by the mystical experience, the *ego* is capable of total vision of itself (Walther, 1976, 147).

The first insight points to a lasting transforming effect of the mystical experience, which is not only expressed in a changed view of the world or of being—both a light source and loving source of being and the loving connection of all being in the face of this source were experienced—but also and especially in an ethical dimension:

³⁷ Given the fact that the focus of my remarks is on the philosophical-phenomenological foundations of Walther's main work, I have deliberately refrained from making explicit its rich references to the mystical tradition (in the Christian, but also in the intercultural context). It may suffice to point out that Walther, in addition to Plotinian references, refers in particular to Meister Eckhart, Teresa of Avila, and, mediated by his engagement with Stein's *Science of the Cross* (Stein, 2003), to John of the Cross.

the transformed personal consciousness is filled with the unconditional wish to work in the world in the sense of what is experienced³⁸.

The second insight points to fundamental epistemological transformations. More precisely, the otherwise ineluctable re-flexive character of transcendental acts (carried out by a conscious ego) is broken: the ego, transformed as a result of *unio mystica*, is able to envision itself—without re-flexive breaks and delays—instantly and completely. This effect could be explained with Walther by the fact that through the encounter with the spiritual (ground of) being the spiritual side of *basic essence* is “awakened” in such a lasting way that *ego* can become aware of its own spiritual light in the future with the help of the perceptive mode which is connected with the mystical vision (thus, as it were, experiencing “mystical experiences in miniature,” note *P.F.-M.*) (Walther, 1976, 96)³⁹.

16. COMMUNICATING WITH THE DIVINE

As Walther points out, the self-referential awareness of *ego-center* is not nihilated by the experience of a fundamentally spiritual essence and existence within the *unio mystica*. In fact, it is maintained despite its detachment from *self* and *basic essence* and because of its experience of *communio* (not unification) with a fundamental (divine) spirit.

In other words, there is no identification or amalgamation of the “subject” (experiencing ego) with the “object” (partially experienced spiritual essence/existence) in the *unio mystica* (Walther, 1976, 220, 223). The reason for this is, as Walther (Walther, 1976, 187) argues, that in the mystical experience an encounter between two “personhoods,” human and Divine, takes place⁴⁰.

17. DIVINE PERSONHOOD

Despite the use of the neutral pronoun “it,” Walther does not explain the mystical experience as an experience of an impersonal being or force—as the aforementioned characterizations such as “sea of love and lights” indicate—, but as an experience

³⁸ This effect is confirmed by numerous self-reports and biographies of other personalities known as mystics (exemplary in (Stein, 2003); it is also described prototypically by (Plato, 1985)).

³⁹ In this respect, there is correspondence with epistemological implications of mystical experience, as argued by Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) in antithesis to the Thomist doctrine which transfers the comprehensive vision of ultimate truths (i.e., also the total self-knowledge of the souls created by God) into the hereafter (Aquinas, 1917a, question 92).

⁴⁰ Of course, this circumstance can also be explained with reference to a concept of God immanent to consciousness, cf. note 35.

of communicating with a personal entity. It goes without saying that Walther does not naively draw on anthropomorphism here.

Instead, she conceptualizes *Divine personhood* in accordance with classical authors like St. Thomas of Aquinas (1225–1274) (Aquinas, 1917b, question 29), by stressing not only its spiritual essence, but also its personal existence: “Hence it follows [...] that in mystical experiences God not only reveals Himself as a spiritual, super-spiritual, luminous force of light and radiant love, but also proves Himself to be a knowing and willing person [...]” (Walther, 1976, 179).

18. TRINITARISTICAL THOUGHT

Given this, equivalents between Walther’s notion of *Divine personhood* and Christian theological thought on the trifold personality of (the one and only) Divine being (Aquinas, 1917b) become evident.

In both cases, Divine being is simultaneously understood as primal spiritual (that is, creative and loving) force—“Divine essence” in Walther, “Holy Spirit” in Christian thought—and as (comprehensively knowing and freely willing) mental person—“Divine personhood” in Walther, “God” in Christian thought—. More precisely: as “pure relationality” (Johnson, 2017, 234) (that is, divine communication with human being) in Walther, and “Son” (Jesus Christ) as mediator between the divine and human realm in Christian thought.

19. METHODOLOGICAL CRITIQUE

Not only Walther’s reading of the central finding of her noetic-noematic analysis of mystical experience (i.e., the meta-transcendental constitution of a spiritual [ground of] being as “*God’s spirit*”), but also her trinitarianistically motivated reading of the *unio mystica* cannot be held phenomenologically.

I.e., Walther gives this out as a supposedly compelling insight (Walther, 1976, 179), although it is not. More precisely, there is perception/experience of infinite spiritual love and light, and this matches—some—essential/existential characteristics of the Triune, but there is no indication of a knowing and willing personal being to be found within the (meta-) noetic-noematic character of the mystical experience. That is, the phenomenal character of the mystical experience rather points to an *impersonal* spiritual being (as expressions such as “sea of love and light” indicate).

Given this, Walther’s reading of the Divine as a (spiritual) *personal* being is not grounded in the (meta-) noetic-noematic implications of the mystical experience; it

is deduced from exterior (theological) knowledge both on the Triune and on revelation. This assessment can also be maintained if one took into account Walther's initial statement that she would not only use the proper *unio mystica*—that is, the core of the mystical experience—as a reference for analysis, but also reports of divine inputs and/or the experience of the sacrament of Communion in the Catholic rite (Walther, 1976, 23). Neither of these two forms of experience is subjected to a systematic phenomenological analysis in even an approximately comparable way as the *unio mystica*.

This statement does not mean that Walther could not be right with her Trinitarian interpretation of (fundamental) spiritual being. It only means that it is not phenomenologically grounded (that is, it is not demonstrated by her, despite claims to the contrary). Only Walther's realization that in the *unio mystica* man—reduced to his *ego-center*—imperfectly perceives/experiences (fundamental) spiritual being is founded in such a sense. Without phenomenological demonstration, Walther's reading of that being as divine (in terms of a personal God) appears to be the result of a reversal of the *imago-dei* arguments; in other words, it appears to be a conclusion from the phenomenologically (at least partly shown) human Trinity to divine Trinity (and not vice versa).

That is, Walther's (Walther, 1976, 21) notion of the Divine as personhood exceeds—as interpretation gained on deductive, not inductive grounds—the philosophical method and endeavor, and shall therefore be refused. Nevertheless, it may be acknowledged theologically (which is especially true for Walther's (Walther, 1976, 224–230) phenomenologically informed Christological thought).

20. APPRECIATING WALTHER'S APPROACH

Walther exposes the mystical experience as a primordial phenomenon; more precisely, as a meta-transcendental-spiritual phenomenon that does not occur in this form in any other context of experience.

In an ontological-epistemological perspective, Walther's noetic-noematic analyses reveal the *unio mystica* as meta-transcendental constitution of spiritual (ground of) being that transcends the absoluteness of transcendental consciousness.

In this respect, Walther continues where Husserl stopped. In *Ideas I*, Husserl notes that one can reasonably think of a transcending God⁴¹ only in terms of an “absolute’ in a totally different sense from the absolute of the consciousness” (Husserl,

⁴¹ Husserl's talk of God should be understood, as in Walther, as a placeholder for the spiritual ground of being.

2014, 107)⁴². But he did not track the consequences of this thought further (for instance, he does not ask how far the absoluteness of the Divine—in our diction: the absoluteness of spiritual being—would modify the absolute consciousness) (cf. Ströker, 1995; Ales Bello, 2009, 26). Given this, Walther's approach is a viable step towards the philosophical solution of "the problem of God" (Husserl, quoted from (Dupré, 1968–1969, 201)).

According to the strong, i.e., metaphysical reading, which follows from the onto-epistemological implications of Walther's demonstration, spiritual being can be set as *a priori* on which both psychophysical being and the reality of transcendental consciousness depend.

According to the weak reading, i.e., while negating the metaphysical implications of Walther's demonstration (or while rejecting it as epistemologically unconvincing), the absoluteness of the reality of consciousness would remain, but would have to be extended by a meta-transcendental component. In analogy, the noetic-noematic alternations in the *unio mystica* would not be read as meta-transcendental constitution of the spiritual *ground* of being, but as meta-transcendental constitution of a spiritual reality (provided that the spiritual component could only be connected with consciousness) or of a spiritual being (provided that the spiritual component could also be regarded as a constitutive element of all being).

Without making a decision between the weak and the strong reading (both readings work, even if Walther herself considers only the strong one as justified), the substrate of Walther's *Phenomenology* can be summarized from a philosophical point of view as follows: with its phenomenological investigation of mystical experience, which introduces a meta-transcendental and a spiritual component into epistemology and ontology, it challenges dualistic, especially mentalistic-materialistic paradigms.

The same applies to Walther's conception of man or her view of the spiritual-personal constitution of man (and her reference to extended modes of perception/cognition): by asserting a multidimensional connection of the psychophysical-mental-spiritual, Walther articulates a substantial counterproposal to the Cartesian paradigm.

This is connectable to current discourses, among others the psychological one, in which spirituality succeeds as a "forgotten dimension" (Hefti, 2010). Connections can also be made to postsecular concepts that stress transrational, i.e., spiritual implications of knowledge (see, e.g., (Habermas, 2007; Knapp, 2006)).

⁴² According to Husserl, (transcendental) consciousness does not need the being; it is self-grounding, i.e., absolute. The latter, the being, on the other hand, is accidental and relative (Husserl, 2003, 111).

Walther's insights into the perceptual processes of the *unio mystica*, which are oriented toward the perceptual mode of "transference," are also of veritable value from a structural-phenomenological point of view (which can be used, among other things, in the psychotherapeutic context) (Feise-Mahnkopp, 2020).

Furthermore, Walther's phenomenological approach recommends itself as an appropriate link between philosophy and theology (at least, as I would like to stress, as long as the latter is grounded in the first, not vice versa, as it is the case in Walther's Trinitarian reading of the Divine).

At the same time, there are weaknesses in Walther's *Phenomenology* that become visible in the course of critical reflection.

21. CRITICAL REFLECTION

First of all, inadequacies in terminology and definitions can be identified. This is especially true for the German term „*Geist*“, which Walther uses without consistently indicating when she refers to its meaning as (meta-) mind, spirit, reason, or alike. That is particularly regrettable since the distinction between (human) mind and (divine) spirit plays a crucial role both for Walther's analysis of the mystical experience and her onto-epistemological (and metaphysical) reflection, in the same way as the distinction is essential for Walther's philosophical and theological anthropology. In this respect, the introduction—and systematic use—of a terminology making the difference between mind and spirit much clearer would have been expedient.

Moreover, Walther's explanations sometimes lack explicit systematic coherence (coherence is given implicitly, but it is laborious for the reader to reconstruct it; the stringency in thought and method presented here is the result of my reconstruction). For instance, the gradual continuum which is marked by Walther's notion of *ego-center* (embracing both rational and transrational capacities) should have been clarified more explicitly. Also the definition of *ego-center* as "germinal starting point of spirit" and its perception of (fundamental) spiritual being in the *unio mystica* are not sufficiently illuminated. Furthermore, Walther does not follow up on her (promising) hint that the contemplation of one's own spiritual *basic essence* is able to prepare the ability of *ego-center* to perceive/cognize in the mystical experience in a favorable way (Walther, 1976, 97).

Moreover, her (emanationist) assumption of a similarity and at the same time fundamental difference between human mind and divine spirit could have benefited from a systematic treatment, obviously with explicit (not only implicit) consideration of Przywara's philosophy of *analogia entis*.

The same applies for Walther's (meta-) noetical and -noematical analyses of the mystical experience: systematic reflections both on its conditions of use and its limitations would have been fruitful.

Additionally, some meta-terminological remarks on the relationship between the perception/cognition of (fundamental) spiritual being (which Walther labels as divine being) and its verbal representations would have been desirable. This is especially true for Walther's (Walther, 1976, 26) introductory remarks on the imagery of language used by other mystics to describe their experiences and her own seemingly literal understanding of fundamental spiritual being as "sea of love and light," which the philosopher leaves unnoticed and uncommented. The absence of an examination in this regard is even more striking because Walther (Walther, 1976, 188–189) makes the reader theoretically aware of the mutual influence of revelation and receiving/transmitting consciousness (which is subject to multiple limitations in epistemological, personal, but also socio-cultural terms) but does not self-critically include it in her own investigation.

Walther's significant reference to Husserl's terms is also partially contradictory. Even if her analysis—which fluctuates between actual experience/knowledge of (fundamentally) spiritual being and the imperfection of this experience/knowledge—is convincing in several aspects, Walther's use of Husserl's term "shadowing" makes one suspicious. For good reason Husserl had reserved this term only for the perception of objects from the natural and worldly plane of being. By invoking it in the context of mystical experience, Walther seems to be sitting on a categorical error without being aware of this fact.

At the same time her anthropology, based on regional ontology and her constitutional analysis of man as a mental-spiritual person, could have benefited from a more systematic implementation (and contextualization by means of comparable model conceptions, especially those oriented towards self-realization in the Aristotelian sense)⁴³.

Above all, Walther's reflection on her findings confronts the reader with a far more complex context than it is indicated in her references. This concerns especially the evidence-based implications of the mystical experience. Here, a theory-based explication (i.e., a targeted discussion of Husserl's concept of evidence, in contrast to that used by Walther, including the question of possible critical review potential) would have been appropriate.

⁴³ Walther repeatedly refers to Pfänder, Conrad-Martius, and Stein in her endnotes, but these references often appear loose or not systematically clustered.

The same applies to the epistemologically transformative effect of mystical experience. Walther neglects to develop into an own theory of knowledge her phenomenologically highly “explosive” observation that after the mystical experience the *ego* is capable of a lastingly changed attitude of perception/knowledge, which also contains a God-like perspective on itself.

22. SUMMARY APPRAISAL

Summa summarum, despite the abovementioned points of criticism and *monita*, Walther’s main work is to be regarded as an innovative and substantial contribution to the philosophy of mind/spirit and being. Since the abovementioned points of criticism do not represent a fundamental critique, they can—and should—be used for a critical further thinking of Walther’s theory and methodology of a phenomenology of mysticism.

Last but not least, the weak reading of Walther’s demonstration can help to add a spiritual component to the predominantly mentalistic-materialistic paradigms of contemporary consciousness research (Walach, 2019, 10).

Walther’s integrative notion of mind/spirit and being recommends itself as a productive paradigm that can serve the dialogue between empirical consciousness research and philosophical phenomenology for the purpose of mutual elucidation and/or correction of their paradigms/states of knowledge, which has recently also been classified as worthwhile by Zahavi (Zahavi, 2017, 137 ff.)⁴⁴.

This connection may be briefly outlined in conclusion.

23. CONNECTIONS TO POSTMATERIALIST NOTIONS OF REALITY

By pointing to a *tertium datur* between the Cartesian mind-body-split — two separate substances, material (“*res extensa*”) and mental (“*res cogitans*”) (Descartes, 1976)—, Walther’s approach challenges both monistic—materialist or mentalist—and dualistic—materialist-mentalist—epistemologies and ontologies. Thereby, she takes a

⁴⁴ Zahavi’s hint that insights of philosophical phenomenology are particularly suited to subject often unreflected meta-theoretical and methodological foundations of empirical research on consciousness to a critical revision, and that, conversely, philosophical phenomenology can also benefit from the critical inclusion of concrete findings from empirical research with regard to its epistemological and methodological foundations/new epistemological formation, also applies here. That means that Walther’s phenomenology (which has the potential for a paradigm shift) can on the one hand have a stimulating effect on empirical research on consciousness; on the other hand, the latter can also have a confirming/corrective effect on the relationships demonstrated/reflected by Walther (this perhaps to a special degree for Walther’s insights into the perceptive structures of mystical experience).

step further than to set consciousness as absolute in the sense of transcendental idealism, or to regard consciousness and being as correlatively connected with each other. In fact, Walther maintains an integrative notion of mind/spirit and being: material, mental and spiritual components not only coexist side by side, they are also able to affect each other. Walther makes this circumstance clear especially in relation to the human condition: mental-spiritual implications influence the psychophysical/bodily realm (even if not in a causal manner) and *vice versa* (Walther, 1976, 128 ff.).

Given this, Walther's observations match postmaterialist notions of mutual affections between (spiritually expanded) mind and matter (Walach, 2019, 73–75). In other words, they fit in with the view, currently negotiated within an integrative consciousness research (i.e., a research which is both neuroscientifically and phenomenologically informed), that matter and enhanced mind exist in entanglement (Atmanspacher, 2019).

From a theoretical point of view, these approaches are based on a transfer of the quantum-physical principle of “nonlocality” to other systems, including the system consciousness (“Generalised Model of Nonlocality”; Walach, 2019, 65).

Additionally, there are intersections with findings of current research.

24. IMPLICATIONS OF WALTHER'S PHENOMENOLOGY IN THE LIGHT OF CURRENT RESEARCH

Walther's notion of “transference” (in terms of passive intentionality of other subjects' feelings and thoughts) matches, on the one hand, with social psychology's and memetics' findings on social contagion (Marsden, 1998); on the other hand, it is at odds with its (materialist social/cultural evolutionary) theoretical framework.

Theoretically, it fits better with the results of anomalous cognition studies, which focus on non-local perceptions (for instance, meta-analyses on experimental telepathy research (Storm et al., 2017; Storm, Tressoldi & Di Risio, 2010), which attest significant effect strength in both dream telepathy and Ganzfeld experiments⁴⁵).

In turn, Walther's notion of an intertwinement of body, psyche, and mind/spirit, that is, her notion of an affectability of the first by the latter, is supported by findings of psychological and psychosomatic research on mindfulness and well-being (see, e.g., Wallace & Shapiro, 2006; Khoury et al., 2015).

⁴⁵ The term describes an experimental setting that is characterized by sensory deprivation of a “receiver” who tries to match an unknown target (for example an image) through “free-response”- methods (Retrieved from <https://www.spektrum.de/lexikon/psychologie/ganzfeld-experimente/5498>, page called on August 28th, 2021).

Simultaneously, Walther's model of personhood and self is mirrored by concepts of transpersonal psychology and related approaches (Grof, 2008). Walther's trifold scheme—*ego-center*, *self*, and *basic essence*—matches particularly Edward Yager's (Yager, 2011) model of conscious, un- and superconscious components of consciousness.

But first and foremost, Walther's finding of (fundamental) spiritual being, which is perceivable/experienceable by human beings, is mirrored by research on near death experiences (NDE) (Rivas, Dirven & Smith, 2016; van Lommel, 2013). In the area of religious consciousness research, similarities can also be found (e.g., Alston, 1993).

Interestingly enough, this is also the case in a field that was cultivated by Walther in her middle phase of work: that of psychopathology. The passages in Walther's *Phenomenology* that strive to identify interfaces and deviations to religious or only seemingly religious experience in the context of psychopathology (in conjunction with her other writings on the phenomenology of exceptional experience, especially the 1927 essay *Zur innenpsychischen Struktur der Schizophrenie*) offer productive connecting factors for further thinking on the ground of the current state of research (cf. Feise-Mahnkopp, 2020).

25. OUTLOOK

In view of the nexus outlined in this article, it is not only necessary to further investigate in depth Walther's contribution to philosophical phenomenology, but also to critically examine and further develop the inadequacies that have become partially apparent despite all the productivity of Walther's approach. This includes in a special way the exploration of the possibility of a systematic formulation of a meta-transcendental philosophy, that is, a philosophy of spiritual being⁴⁶.

But also the function of the *Phenomenology of Mysticism* as a philosophical basis for theological reflections would have to be examined more closely or to be put into a larger context. Simultaneously, Walther's theological interpretations, especially her Christological and Trinitarian interpretations, would have to be presented more precisely or discussed in a systematic context, but then out of a decidedly theological interest. Moreover, in this context, her main work would have to be examined more closely as an early testimony of the *theological turn* (cf. Janicaud, 2014) becoming effective in philosophical phenomenology or contextualized in comparable work contexts (Beckmann, 2003).

⁴⁶ A project to which I hope to contribute with my habilitation, *Bewusst/Sein und Überbewusst/Sein. Phänomenologische Betrachtungen im Anschluss an Gerda Walther und Edith Stein unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des „Gottesproblems“ bei Edmund Husserl* (expected completion in 2023).

Finally, as already briefly indicated, a comparison of the *Phenomenology* (which emphasizes the metaphysical aspect) with the view of representatives of a concept of God immanent to consciousness (Henry, Marion, et al.) could contribute illuminating things in the context of a philosophical-phenomenological understanding of mysticism.

Even a critical revision of Walther's conception of man, i.e., a clearer separation of what should be considered from a philosophical-anthropological and from a theological-anthropological point of view, should not be lost sight of either. In addition, the intersubjective grounding of Walther's phenomenological understanding (not only in connection with the mystical experience, but also in connection with socio-philosophical questions, which Walther pursues in her dissertation on community ontology) deserves deeper, systematic, attention.

Last but not least, the engagement with Walther's *Phenomenology* could result in productive impulses not only for philosophical phenomenology, but also for empirical research on consciousness. Obviously, this is only true if Walther's integrative understanding of mind/spirit and being proves to be viable in further work/research. However, there would be only a chance for this if empirical research were willing, in the sense of *epoché*, to bracket out unquestioned assumptions about its own parameters (e.g., their mentalistic or materialistic character) and, in the light of its results, either to bracket them again or to replace them by more adequate ones.

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