

Gerda Walther and the necessity of personhood for mystical experience

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- 1 The history of western philosophy is marked by a series of enduring concepts that continue to have profound impact, both good and bad, on human social and political life, for example, ideas about democracy, justice, equality, and psyche. One of the most contentious concepts at work today is that of the human person. From human rights struggles, to politics, the law, and even to medicine, one sees various aspects of personhood being developed and deployed to meet serious challenges. Roberto Esposito, for example, notes how the legal concept of personhood contributes to the idea of personhood being intimately connected with property and ownership: one is defined and recognised legally as a person in the *Roman Digest* by the things and people one owns. Esposito also claims that German Idealism and phenomenology, in particular, have contributed to the metaphysicalisation and, therefore, abstraction of the person from concrete, material historical circumstances and situations. He specifically cites the work of Edith Stein as a flagrant example of this kind of abstraction, which inevitably helps create an ephemeral, fleeting and non-binding sense of personhood that cannot resist growing biopolitical governmentalisation that seeks to control the biology of mass populations.¹ Though Esposito may exaggerate the negative impact of phenomenological thinking about the person, he is right to highlight the significant contribution phenomenology has made to our understanding of personhood.

1 Esposito, *Termini della Politica*, 184–185.

Gerda Walther, Edith Stein, and Hedwig Conrad-Martius, three 2
foundational figures in the early phenomenological movement, devoted much attention to the question of personhood, developing robust accounts of the essence of the lived experience of personhood. Their studies bring forward aspects of personhood that are not empirically or historically graspable by the natural or social sciences. Here, I would like to explore the relation between personhood and mystical experience. Specifically, I investigate Gerda Walther's provocative claim that human personhood is a necessary condition for us to experience a personal and spiritual God; in other words, human personhood serves as a condition for the possibility of mystical experience and of grasping the essence of the divine. Drawing on the work of her beloved teacher Alexander Pfänder, Walther argues that the human person is defined by its fundamental essence, which consists of the unified working together of the lived body, psyche, and spirit. Our personhood makes possible the grasping of and union with the divine person in intense forms of mystical experience. Communication between the divine and the human is made possible by a shared, albeit distinct, personal constitution of their respective forms of being or subjectivity. Walther writes, "Only those who conceive, experience and contemplate God as a person, can possibly commune, understood in the highest sense, with God, for the deepest sense of communion can only occur between persons."² Mystical experience is possible, here, in a person-to-person encounter.

But what happens when the unity of the human fundamental es- 3
sence is incomplete or broken? Is mystical experience still possible? Edith Stein and Hedwig Conrad-Martius explore the possibility of human soullessness, or not having a complete psyche. If Stein and Conrad-Martius are correct, then Walther's person-to-person account of mystical experience is significantly compromised when it comes to the idea of a personal identificatory unity. But perhaps the

2 "NUN DENJENIGEN, die Gott als Person fassen, erleben und schauen, ist aber auch eine Gemeinschaft *mit* Gott im höheren Sinne möglich, den *nur zwischen Personen kann es ja Gemeinschaften im tiefsten Sinne geben.*" Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 182. All translations mine unless otherwise specified.

brokenness or incompleteness of personhood could be understood as a lack or absence that might be restored by the gifts or grace of divine personhood. We explore how Gerda Walther's own experiences of absence and lack are filled through the presence of a divine person. We also draw on Simone Weil's idea of the impersonal to flesh out how mystical experience is still possible when human personhood breaks down and is rendered incapable of a full and unifying person-to-person encounter that Walther establishes as central for mystical experience.

Gerda Walther and the Person as Fundamental Essence

- 4 In *Phenomenology of Mysticism*, Walther focuses her phenomenological gaze on the essence of mystical experience, generally understood as a religious encounter with a divine being/reality.³ Her study does not examine accounts of human experience with specific divinities that are offered by various religious traditions—for example, Islam or Roman Catholicism. Rather, Walther wishes to identify the conditions that make mystical experience possible, which include a real outside Other or divinity and its encounter with a human being. The encounter is experienced largely from within the life of a human being and is phenomenologically graspable as an *Urphänomen* [originary experience] much like a tone, color, or value.⁴ Walther spends a large part of her work on mysticism uncovering the essence of a human being who has the capacity for a religious encounter with the divine. The very structure of the human being, understood as person, makes mystical experience possible.
- 5 What, then, is the human person, such that it is capable of mystical experience? All human persons are human beings, but what makes them uniquely personal is the way they live the unity of the various constituent parts of their being as well as their respective

3 Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 22–23.

4 Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 21.

personalities. The fundamental essence [*Grundwesen*] of the human being is described by Walther as a lived unity of body, psyche, and spirit.⁵ The way an individual lives and navigates the sense or meaning of these parts that form a whole yields a unique sense of personhood, which is ultimately marked by the uniqueness of a personality that comes to its full expression in the sphere of spirit, in which not only human reason, willing, and motivation come to actualise and express themselves but also what Walther calls an “inner voice.” Let us turn to a brief description of the parts of the whole that is a person.

Turning to reports of mystical experience, including some of her own, Walther claims that all mystical experience is localized within human bodies. The lived body is described by the philosopher as a living, sensate organism that is animated by psyche and displays embryonic signs of the life of spirit,⁶ for example, *kalokagathia* or the transfiguration of the body by the good and the beautiful of spirit.⁷ Her description of the person notes the intimate connection between body, psyche, and spirit. Though the body remains distinct, it does not function separately from psyche and spirit. All three aspects are interwoven into one another, confirming the existence of a fundamental unity that marks the essence of the human person. Walther also remarks that the two dominant philosophical views of the body, either as the prison of the soul and spirit or the brain as

5 “Ehe wir nun näher untersuchen, wie die verschiedenen Erlebnisse aus den Grundwesen hervorgehen, müssen wir aber noch drei Seiten desselben unterschieden: “Geist”, “Seele” und “leibliche Lebenskraft”. Wir können als Einheit dieser drei Seiten fassen, oder aber nur al seine von ihnen, zum Beispiel nur als “Geist”—dann müssen wir von ihm Seele und Lebenskraft mit ihrem jeweiligen Wesensmittelpunkt unterschieden, oder nur als “Seele”, dann müssen wir Geist und leibliche Lebenskraft von ihm trennen, ebenso, wenn wir es nur also Lebenskraft fassen, Seele und Geist von ihr unterscheiden.” Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 94.

6 Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 100–103.

7 Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 102. In classical Greek writing and thinking, the term has been associated with upright “gentlemanly” behaviour, usually attributed to aristocratic, military men. It also has been used in ethics to describe excellent or virtuous conduct.

generating epiphenomena like the lived experience of the body as well as the experience of psyche and spirit,⁸ must be rejected, for the former position does not give full recognition to the real lived experience of being embodied and how crucial it is for the life of psyche and spirit, especially in terms of expression and gesture, and the latter view is materially reductive and does not acknowledge the distinct lives of spirit and psyche, in particular, the force of the will, which Walther stresses as fundamental for the constitution of human personhood, and more so than reason or intellect. This is the case, because it is the will that ultimately has the power to decide what consciousness can and/or cannot focus while also initiating or not certain acts or position-takings. Reason and intellect seem to follow what the will first initiates and chooses. Walther describes the flow of psyche and spirit through the body as a kind of canalisation.⁹ The unique lived experience of the body is described as a living the flow of the life force within one's being; one feels the energy of a life force flowing within and animating one's physical being.¹⁰

- 7 Psyche or soul is identified as a distinct realm of human being in which one experiences feelings and affects like love, hate, desire, etc. The content of the experience of one's own psyche flows in a particular fashion: not from top to bottom, but from the bottom up or from the back forward, all directed to an I-centre.¹¹ One lives this experience of psychic flow, Walther says, as if it were a flow from the "heart," from the depth of one's being.¹² Psyche is described as the source of feeling:

This is best investigated in lived experiences of telepathy in which non-essential but supplementary elements are lacking. In

8 Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 100–101.

9 Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 104.

10 Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 107–108.

11 Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 111–112.

12 Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 112.

these cases, an aversion, sympathy, or any other feeling of the heart (including, wonder, surprise, etc.) comes to be lived as stemming from one who transmits the experience. Likewise, a current of love is perceived by the receiver as coming from the transmitter within the region of “heart.” Often, the receiver responds in a similar manner with an analogous personal experience in which his or her I-centre is immediately immersed. Both experiences of the transmitter and sender live...simultaneously one’s own and the other’s experience of love, pain, etc. up to the point they do not merge and the I of the receiver lives contemporaneously the love of the other and his or her own in that intimate region of the heart out of which sentiments arise.¹³

The “interior region”¹⁴ of the heart is vital for mystical experience, 8
and one finds reference to it in various cultural and historical traditions, from Christianity to yoga.¹⁵ The sentiment of the heart can be experienced as distinct from the cause or object of a certain emotion. One can experience an emotion or feeling in and of itself, says Walther, and this can only be grasped internally through the life of psyche.

Citing Simmel,¹⁶ Walther notes that psyche also gives another 9
unique experience of itself, namely, a “feeling of oneself.”¹⁷ Walther claims that the feeling of a self undergoing emotional experiences or feelings marks the interiority of psyche. One experiences this auto-affection as having its own coloratura, depending on what is being felt. For example, intense feelings of joy accentuate the feeling of oneself as undergoing and being affected by joy, and pleasurable so. Likewise, painful or emotionally distressing experiences diminish

13 Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 112.

14 Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 112.

15 Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 113.

16 Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 116.; Walther cites [note 98] “*Das individuelle Gesetz*,” in *Logos*, vol. 4, 153.

17 Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 116.

the feeling of oneself: the self is suffused with pain or distress, and the self is not felt as strongly. Walther notes that psyche will express itself in and through the body, and this coloratura of the self may be observed in others. We can see and understand the emotions or feelings of others: we can see the heart of another¹⁸ by the intensities of the emotions expressed by the other to us. It is the manifestation of the inner life of psyche that grants us access into the psychic life of another. In her earlier text on the social ontology of communities, Walther notes that empathy is the key that allows us to grasp the psychic life of others.¹⁹ In the *Phenomenology of Mysticism*, Walther concentrates on telepathy and not on empathy.²⁰

- 10 Spirit is identified by Walther as the most unique aspect of our human personhood, and it is seen as vital for the very possibility of an encounter with the divine in mystical experience. It is deeply interconnected with body and psyche, but it also possesses uniquely distinguishing features that come to expression in a distinct personality. How does Walther phenomenologically justify the existence of spirit as a unique realm of interiority? If the body is lived as a site of sensation marked by sexuality and the flow of life power, and if psyche is lived as a site of deep feeling and a sense of the self—a reflexive self-awareness—spirit comes to manifest itself in the experience of an inner voice, a voice that guides the human being: one sees the depth of the heart and one seeks truth. In spirit, the inner voice guides one to carry out meaningful actions. Walther cites and comments on the work of Justinus Kerner's book *Die Seherin von Prevorst*, adding her own remarks in brackets:

“...When I am in a state of clairvoyant sleep-awareness, I think with the spirit alone from *the well of my heart*... The spirit can see across, but not the soul, and in this earthly life we now live,

18 Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 117.

19 Walther, *Ein Beitrag zur Ontologie der sozialen Gemeinschaften*, 86–87.

20 Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 82–85.

humans are not allowed to look across (GW: into the beyond, the realm of the *Wesensgrund*).” ... “The interior life lies dormant principally in persons who dwell, so to speak, in the brain (GW: the intellect), who rarely allow themselves to be moved by feelings and the interior voice. To heed these two things is to follow the true guide of human beings’ lives.... In a conscious state of drowsiness, the interior human being emerges, and with its gaze it is able to penetrate the exterior world, which occurs *neither in dreaming nor in sleep*. In many respects, drowsiness is the *clearest state of awareness* because here the interior, *spiritual* human being lives unfettered and free from the body! Hence, in states of drowsiness the interior human being or the state of spiritual awareness emerges. These states occur only in moments in which the sleeping person can lose him- or herself in oneself or exit from oneself. Here, the spirit is completely free and can separate itself from the I (GW: here, the seat of ordinary life?) and the body; it can go where it wills, much like a ray of light... Whereas psyche (GW: here, the I-centre?) is primarily lodged in the brain, spirit (GW: here, the fundamental essence of the being of psyche?) has its seat in the well of the heart...”²¹

The life of spirit can be experienced in states of mind in which one exists between consciousness and sleep. In such states, one experi- 11

21 Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 113–114. I am very grateful to the anonymous reviewer who added the following suggested note: “Justinus Andreas Christian Kerner (1786-1862), born in Ludwigsburg, later lived in Weinsberg; poet (neo-Romantic, member of the Swabian School), physician and medical writer (the first to describe the symptoms of botulism, which was originally called “Kerner’s Disease”). Kerner was also interested in spiritual matters and the paranormal. Frederika Hauße was born in 1801 (d. 1829) in the small village of Prevorst (in Swabia); in 1826 she visited Kerner in Weinsberg (a city to which he’d been assigned in 1818 as chief medical officer). Hauße suffered from somnambulism and trances, which Kerner described in his book (popular among late nineteenth-century spiritualist groups), *Die Seherin von Prevorst, Eröffnungen über das innere Leben des Menschen und über das Hineinragen einer Geisterwelt in die unsere* (*The Seeress of Prevorst, Revelations Concerning the Inner Life of Man and the Penetration of a Spirit World into Ours*.”

ences the inner voice that is not purely the expression of body or psyche. Here, one experiences the free movement of the inner voice and “the inner human being” [*innere Mensch*] emerges. In such states, the inner voice dominates and guides the human being. One of the more powerful aspects of Walther’s phenomenology is that she turns to forms of consciousness other than remembering, imagining, presentifying, etc. in order to draw out under-investigated aspects of our being. The exploration of in-between states of consciousness provides her with the manifestation of unique content, which she identifies as belonging to the life of spirit. Walther, in many of her works, mines unique states of mind to uncover knowledge about who and what we are. She explores telepathic, unconscious, pathological (e.g., schizophrenia), mystical, ecstatic, and paranormal states, to name the more important ones. Like Stein, Walther does view the heart as a unique realm of interiority, but, unlike Stein, Walther sees the heart as being largely spiritual as well as psychic. Stein preserves the two traditional understandings of soul as psyche and the divine, immortal soul.

- 12 In the aforementioned interior region of spirit, one finds the highest I, which is distinct from the I-centre. Walther announces a different form of I-experience than the orientational I of the I-centre.²² Here, we find a spiritual love, judging, and valuing that arise in the life of spirit. She is very clear, however, to note that, unlike Stein’s and Husserl’s views on the matter, the aforementioned acts are not identical with acts of the intellect. The intellect and its capacity for reason can guide an individual, and its work can be seen in the life of higher animals,²³ but Walther also ascribes to spirit a capacity distinct from intellect. Again, she turns to a unique mental state to make her case. She gives the example of a person who is tormented by an irresolvable problem. Reasoning gives multiple possible solutions, but it cannot arrive at a definitive solution. It can

22 Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 138.

23 Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 119.

bring no clarity to the problem or crisis. All remains dark and obscure, Walther says.²⁴ All of a sudden, from within one's interiority, one experiences an illumination, a solution to the problem, which comes spontaneously from nowhere. Walther also describes the experience of receiving the solution as coming from elsewhere, from behind, above, etc. Light is the metaphor she chooses to describe the reception of the solution. The I-centre is displaced, and it is not the source of the solution. A solution to the crisis appears, but it is not of my own doing or origin. Walther does not deny that such I-based solutions are possible. But there are also situations in which one feels that something from the outside brings some kind of illumination and understanding: one feels as if a ray of light surrounds and lifts one out of distress, ultimately bringing ease, clarity, and comfort.²⁵ In spirit, one lives fully as oneself, in oneself as an individual: here one finds a spiritual light that burns within the human being.²⁶ Walther is very clear that the spiritual realm of the human being is not simply a personal space: it is also a world.²⁷ The individual spirit is part of a broader spiritual world, which need not be human and, therefore, not rooted in psyche (with the heart) and body. What could this mean? Citing philosophers like Avicenna and Averroes, Walther conceives of the realm of spirit as a kind of agent intellect.²⁸ In the life of spirit, one can plug into and be activated by a larger form of active intellect that supersedes human knowing, which many philosophers have described as the divine intellect.

Soullessness and the Breakdown of Personal Unity

If we assume that Walther's analysis is correct and that persons can 13
be understood as the living through of a unity of a whole of parts

²⁴ Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 120.

²⁵ Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 120.

²⁶ Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 122.

²⁷ Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 122.

²⁸ Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 123.

marked by a personality and directed by an inner voice—all of which are fundamental for the person-to-person encounter with the divine in mystical experience—what happens if one of the constituent parts or layers of human personhood is missing or remains unactualized? Does one still remain a person? How does mystical experience become possible? If we turn to Gerda Walther's teacher, Edith Stein, we find here a fruitful discussion of broken or undeveloped personhood, understood as the diminishment or absence of one of the three constituent parts or layers of personhood.

14 Drawing from the work of Hedwig Conrad-Martius on soulless or psyche-less beings, Edith Stein discusses this possibility in relation to human persons, ultimately defending both the possibility of being soulless while preserving personal union and individuation. What is the psyche for Stein? In *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*, the psyche or soul is understood as a layer of the human person. It is described as depth and is a seat of affect, emotion, sensation, drives, impulses, and largely moves in an action-reaction or cause and effect fashion. The I-experience of the soul is distinguished from the pure I of phenomenological experience. Lived experiences of psyche, for example, an emotion, are accompanied by a sense of mineness that bespeaks a psychic I-experience. Stein remarks:

We take the soul to be a substantial unity which, entirely analogous to the physical thing, is made up of categorical elements and the sequence of categories. Its elements appear as individual instances of these categories, and the soul forms a parallel to the sequence of experiential categories. Among these categorical elements there are some that point beyond the isolated soul to connections with other psychic as well as physical unities, to impressions which the soul makes and suffers. "Causality" and "changeability" are also among the psychic categories.

This substantial unity is "my" soul when the experiences in which it is apparent are "my" experiences or acts in which my

pure “I” lives. The peculiar structure of psychic unity depends on the peculiar content of the stream of experience; and, conversely, (as we must say after the soul has been constituted for us) the content of the stream of experience depends on the structure of the soul. Were there streams of consciousness alike in content, there would also be souls of the same kind or instances of ideally-the-same soul. However, we do not have the complete psychic phenomenon (nor the psychic individual) when we examine it in isolation.²⁹

Then pure I lives in the soul, it can experience and grasp the essence 15 of the soul, but it is not reducible to it. Furthermore, the I of psyche is described as having depths too, echoing the idea of the soul as depth.³⁰ For example, sensory stimuli can produce certain lingering feelings in an individual. Psyche is thoroughly intertwined with the lived body and has deep connections with spirit. Psyche helps the body recognise that it is undergoing certain sense (five senses) and sensory (for example, pleasure, ease, dis-ease, and pain) experiences. By contrast, in motivating acts, certain affective states or emotions may cause one to become aware that one has a freedom to respond willingly to possibilities initially announced through an emotional experience.³¹ For example, I suddenly feel anger, but my anger also makes me aware that I can choose how to respond to a certain person’s words or deeds. My actions could be motivated by a rational stance I take towards that person after deliberation and after the initial feeling of anger. Psyche is also where one feels the strength or weakness of the life force. Furthermore, psyche is an important constitutive layer of human personhood. It serves as an important bridge between the lived bodily and spiritual layers of human personhood. The life of psyche is carried or born by the I of psyche.

29 Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*, 37–38.

30 Stein, *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*, 95.

31 Stein, *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*, 95–96.

One can have first-person experiences of one's own psyche as well as that of others through empathy and other forms of intersubjective experience, for example, the socialities of society and/or community.

- 16 Given the foregoing brief description of psyche, what would it mean to be soulless? Stein distinguishes being full of soul from lacking soul. She writes:

This switching off of your soul is an arbitrary one. Its counterpart is a pervasive rigidity of your soul against all endeavors, a running dry of its life. The ego descends into its depths, it holes up there. Yet the ego meets up with a gaping void in there. The ego gets the feeling that it's missing its soul, that it's only a shadow of itself detached from its ownmost being. (This kind of "soullessness" is plainly to be distinguished from that of somebody not yet awakened to soul life who imagines that the entire abundance that life has to offer is already his or hers.) The situation at first seems to be completely incomprehensible. You ask yourself: What exactly is missing and what have I got on hand? Because the soul that you lost, you still have right there in its total distinctiveness – maybe you just don't remember that you used to possess something.³²

- 17 Though the soulless remains an individual, the quality of the inner life suffers from a deficit of soul. The depth that marks the being of the soul may never come to exist, or it may be eliminated or diminished. How?

- 18 Stein identifies five possibilities.³³ First, the soul may never have been awakened. Second, one may find oneself moved from the depths to the periphery of the soul, and she even suggests that one may choose or be forced to stay in a "crowded periphery." Third, one may find oneself lost and in the middle of an ego of psyche dwelling

32 Stein, *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*, 234.

33 Stein, *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*, 234–240.

in nothing, a kind of nihilism of sorts. Fourth, there may be some emotional cause, for example, feeling embittered may cut oneself off from experiencing the depths of the soul. Finally, a blow of fate or a trauma can cause the being of the soul to not appear, disappear, or be experienced in a very diminished form. One may be conscious or not of feeling soulless. Stein's discussion of being soulless raises a dilemma for her phenomenology. On one hand, her phenomenology and phenomenological philosophy, from beginning to end, maintain the tri-partite structure of the human person as a union of body, soul, and spirit. In the aforementioned discussion, Stein ponders the possibility that this personal structure may be broken or incomplete. The implication for the concept of personhood is clear: scholars who maintain that the Steinian (and Waltherian) person is an essential and, therefore, necessary human structure that belongs to all human beings will have to account for the possibility of soulless individuals who somehow remain persons though they may be soulless.

In Stein's discussion of soullessness, two important distinctions 19 are made. The soul is not identical with the ego or I of psyche, and the ego, though diminished, does not completely disappear, nor is it displaced in communal fusion—a possibility that certainly arises in Gerda Walther's view of intense inner joining (*Vereinigung*). But in the experience of soullessness, the I is aware that something or a part of itself is missing or lacking. It is this lack that could be read as a kind of I-splitting: the I is split between a fuller and lesser experience of itself. Stein notes that in soulful experience, what the I lives can be more intensely present, vibrant, and fulfilling. Without the soul, the I experiences itself and life with diminished intensity and force.

In order to illuminate the matter, we've got to make clear for ourselves what is meant by this: to live from out of your soul. It means that life in action not only reflects the qualities of your soul, but also *pours out* your soul and is *its* life.... Your soul itself

is a source of life. If your soul is awake, then these new powers are flowing to the mental life, and it's as if the world rises up brand new in front of the individual experiencing [this]. If the individual isn't living out of the depths, out of his soul, then these powers for his life get lost. And now it can also happen that your soul, without getting switched off, stops generating life. The source hidden in your soul can sputter out. The world still comes crashing in upon it, but your soul cannot "light up" inside. It has no "response" anymore. The susceptibility for values breaks down, although they can still be recognized. The "static qualities" also seem to have vanished: kindness no longer radiates in positive sentiments and kindly actions, and the interior seems emptied of everything that used to fill it, everything in which the individuality, itself ineffable, used to articulate itself. Such a breach in the life of a person can occur if a "stroke of fate" uses up all the powers of her soul. A person can also gradually shrivel up through constant excessive expenditure of power, and she's got to have new powers supplied to her from an extraneous source so that she rouses again to new life.³⁴

- 20 Stein notes that the experience of soullessness results in the inability of the personal core or personality, understood as a centre, to actualise itself, to impress itself on the life of the person: the personality core may be present, but it lies unrealized and stagnant. Likewise, the soul itself cannot grow from within, as it remains largely influenceable from the outside, but not from within.

Generally, where your soul is disconnected from the actuality of living, what's missing from behavior and from the visible being of the individual is the individual flair or, as we also say, the "personal touch." If the behavior itself survives in its personal style and, viewed superficially, retains its distinctiveness, still that dis-

34 Stein, *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*, 235

tinctiveness bears the stamp of artificiality. The individual's life becomes driven by sensory powers and perhaps by volition, or even carried along by the powers of someone else's soul. The individual's living isn't coming out of the centre of his or her own being, and therefore it is lacking the originality and authenticity of "core-valent" living. We can think to ourselves of individuals who are altogether missing their own centre of their being, and together with it a genuine personality and (qualitative) individuality. With the *human being*, in all instances of "soulless" behavior you'll be permitted only to say that he didn't find or temporarily "lost himself," for as long as his individuality is unrecognizable (insofar as the limit case of an "absolutely" soulless behavior can be conceived as realized at all and it isn't merely a question of more or less). In principle he has such a centre, which can burst forth at any time.

On the other hand, you've got to say that soul and individuality (or personal distinctiveness anyway) cohere only with soul essence.³⁵

Stein's phenomenology described the essence of personhood as a 21
lived unity of body, psyche, and spirit as well as one being marked by a personality. The pure I, which is understood as a unique aspect of consciousness and the core of phenomenological inquiry, is described as absolute and unconditioned. The pure I, on Stein's account, can grasp the essence of the soul and the specific type of I-experience that dwells within it as well as what it would mean to be soulless. The pure I also grasps what it is to be a person. Following Husserl, Stein shows that the pure I can split to capture the different acts and content it experiences and examines. The pure I remains impervious, so it seems, to the aforementioned vicissitudes of the life of the soul and its I-experiences. As the soul struggles with its own awareness of its soullessness, as described by Stein above, the I of psyche too becomes aware of an inner tension between varying

35 Stein, *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*, 235–236.

layers of the person that struggles but fails to actualise themselves. The I of psyche is deeply affected by the conflict and failures to actualise itself, especially in its relations to body and spirit. If the foregoing phenomenological possibility exists, what are the implications for Walther's account of mystical union between divine and human persons?

Personhood and Mystical Experience

- 22 Why does Walther claim that personhood is essential for the possibility of mystical experience? As far as I can understand, there are two fundamental reasons. First, it is only by grasping and living both the various aspects of our personhood and their working together, which results in a deeper self-understanding, that one can fully understand what it is to have an interior world as well as an external, transcendent world, what is properly my own and what is truly other or external, what is not mine. The lived experience of each layer of the fundamental essence allows for a growth of self-understanding of what and how we are as human persons which, in turn, allows us to individuate ourselves with and against an independently existing outside reality called world. For example, the more we know our body and the more we grasp its interactions with psyche, for example, the effects of emotions and their expression in and through their working together and what it means to live this working through of these aspects together, helps us to understand and live what we are as human beings, insofar as we understand the layers of body and psyche constitutive of human being itself. We understand that the joy I feel in my trembling body is my own and not someone else's, and this is achieved in acts of empathy. I understand too when the other experiences joy and how it works and defines us as persons, though I may never have the same identical experience as the other. We are constituted as embodied affective beings marked by unique and personalised emotive or affective experiences. For Walther, a deepening self-understanding of the unified layers of our

personhood, our fundamental essence, helps develop a greater sense of our own unique personal individuation, which, in turn, further individuates us as unique, in and against others and the world. If mystical experience is a genuine experience, and not a matter of self-projection in feeling, imagination, reason or fantasy, a clear-cut distinction has to exist between what is properly me and what is other, namely, God.

Second, Waltherian personhood also makes possible the shared 23
encounter and understanding between personal beings, human and divine. That both God and human are marked by a similitude of personhood, especially as they both have spiritual being, makes possible a relation of shared similitude while preserving the uniqueness of God and humans as distinct beings. In other words, the union of God and human beings, that which they share and which makes possible the union of mystical experience, is their similar personhood marked by spirituality. The similitude of a constitutive personhood makes possible an encounter and union of two radically different beings, one infinite and the other finite, one eternal and the other temporal. The similitude of a shared structure of personhood facilitates not only a common understanding but also an intersubjective co-penetration. Our structures as person permit access of one to the other and vice versa.

But if humans experience a break or absence in the union of 24
their personhood described above as Steinian soullessness, how can we negotiate the similitude and transcendence necessary for mystical experience? For it seems, on the one hand, that the human person may lapse into a kind of melancholy solipsism and, on the other hand, the divine may not be able to enter, as we are incapable of encountering it: the divine becomes too foreign, too strange, not enough like us, so much so that we are unable to recognise it as a person. Towards the end of *Phenomenology of Mysticism*, Walther advances her argument by moving her phenomenological description from an ontic framework to a relational one. One cannot understand the relation between humans and God simply in terms of

modes or aspects of being, for example, similitude and transcendence, but the relation is also marked by communication and communion. Though God may be bodiless and psycheless, and though humans may be soulless, what they do share and continue to share is spirit. Human persons are not and cannot be spiritless, a position that is also defended by both Conrad-Martius and Stein. Walther adamantly defends this point. Conrad-Martius ponders the possibility of spiritlessness, and Stein, who initially thought spiritlessness was a possibility in humans, rejects this possibility in her later works.

- 25 It is a shared spirituality that facilitates the possibility of relationality and, therefore, communication and communion. The divine can enter the interior life of a human person only if that person freely consents to allow God to enter. It is this freedom of consent that makes the encounter possible. In mystical experience, God is described as giving to the person, whereas the human person is largely seen as abandoning, surrendering themselves to God. It is in this dynamic of giving and abandoning that mystical union is possible, a union in which the human is taken up in the life of the divine, transformed by the divine. God gives of Itself to enhance the life of the mystic: God shares its life with the mystic and vice versa. God and human enter into a deep, ardent, and illuminating love relationship, though they are different beings. The relation between lovers is described by Walther as a mystical union. And unlike the fusional possibility of identity discussed in her earlier work on community, mystical union in Walther's later work preserves the possibilities of simultaneous union and the awareness of the distinction between God and humans. It is in the love relationship that perhaps the soulless could be made soulful, as God can restore and even create a new layer of psyche that had been damaged or not present *ab initio*.

- 26 The personal God of Walther is classically described as being both omnipotent and omniscient. It is our shared spirituality, in the end, that makes the communal relationship and communication between

God and human possible and essential for mystical experience. Before closing, I would like to ponder another conceptual model of God, a non-omnipotent one in which God becomes impersonal in order to give humans personhood. I only raise the challenge here, knowing full well that this counterclaim would require another paper. In Simone Weil's concept of the impersonal, for example, God jettisons Its very personhood to create possibilities of being for other beings.³⁶ This idea of a renunciant impersonalism can serve as an ethical model for humans, whereby we renounce ourselves for the good of the other, we de-create ourselves that the other may live or thrive. A question here arises: if we accept Weil's idea about the impersonal, what are its implications for the possibility of Waltherian mystical experience? Weil challenges the idea of similitude and transcendence. Weil introduces mystical experience of absence, renunciation, emptiness, whereas Walther privileges an account of fullness, love, and ardour.³⁷ The difference between Weil and Walther is significant, because it bespeaks a certain form of affectivity that marks the human person's relation with the divine person(s) or God. In a sense, Weil wishes to strip away human affect, perhaps even human personhood, clearing the way for the entry of God, whereas Walther presents a person open to receiving God and enjoying the feelings and affects that come with such an encounter. Walther's idea of mystical union is not necessarily one of privation or lack; rather, it centres on fullness and joy, love and ardour. For Walther, the divine person can make full what is broken or diminished or never actualised through spirit, which in itself is not fully personal, understood in the human sense. In the end, for Walther, though one may not be capable of fully living one's personhood, especially in body or psyche, the irreducible constituent part of spirit, in the fundamental

36 Weil, *Waiting for God*, 178–180.

37 Parts of this article draw from my previous work, especially Calcagno, "The Constitutive Roles of the Heart and Heartlessness for Personhood in Edith Stein and Gerda Walther"; and Calcagno, "Rethinking Challenges to Concepts of Personhood: Roberto Esposito and Edith Stein."

human essence, can still facilitate the mystical union between God and human beings.³⁸

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