

<https://doi.org/10.21638/2226-5260-2021-10-2-355-359>

INTRODUCTION

WOMEN PHENOMENOLOGISTS: HEDWIG CONRAD-MARTIUS, EDITH STEIN, AND GERDA WALTHER

I do think that in normal times a lot of good female thinking
is wasted because it simply doesn't get heard.

(Mary Midgley, *Owl of Minerva: A Memoir*,
Routledge 2005, 123)

The resurgence of interest in early phenomenology and the history of the phenomenological movement has brought to light the fact that several women took part in it and contributed to its development. Though their names are often unknown in the context of academic and international studies, there is no doubt that at least three women phenomenologists have received increasing attention in the last years: Hedwig Conrad-Martius (1888–1966), Edith Stein (1891–1942), and Gerda Walther (1897–1977).

These philosophers share several common traits. Firstly, they were among the first women in Germany to study at grammar school (*Gymnasium*) and then at university, and to write a dissertation. Moreover, the three belonged to the first generation of phenomenologists active during, and immediately after, Edmund Husserl's time. Stein and Conrad-Martius studied with Husserl and Adolf Reinach in Göttingen; in 1916 Stein followed Husserl to Freiburg and defended her dissertation under his supervision. Also, Walther took courses with Husserl in Freiburg and studied with Alexander Pfänder, one of the main proponents of the phenomenological tradition in Munich. However, all three phenomenologists encountered a fundamental barrier in the difficulty to find a university where they could write a *Habilitation*, an essential condition when applying for academic positions.

The three thinkers related to the concept of phenomenology of the so-called “Munich and Göttingen circles,” i.e., two groups of young disciples from the University of Munich and Göttingen (since 1907, around Edmund Husserl), who were

motivated by the wish to respond to Husserl's appeal "go back to the 'things themselves,'" which he first articulated in his *Logical Investigations* (1900–1901). Inspired by Husserl's struggle against psychologism and relativism, the members of both circles were convinced that objects and their modes of knowing were established upon the lawfulness of essence, which is independent from the thinking subject and consciousness in general.

Moreover, Conrad-Martius, Stein, and Walther have a personal and original way of developing phenomenology in common, regarding both the conception of phenomenological method and the field of objects this method addresses. Stein devoted herself to the theoretical project of connecting Husserl's rigorous description and Thomas Aquinas' metaphysics, with particular regard to the structure of the human person; Conrad-Martius established a relationship between ontology of real being and science, by elaborating an original philosophy of nature; Walther dedicated herself to diverse subjects, such as ontology of social communities, phenomenology of mysticism, mental illness, and parapsychology. Such philosophies have received increasing attention over the last few years, particularly in connection with the role of metaphysics in phenomenological inquiry, human soul depth, man's natural origin, and religious experience.

The aim of this issue of *Horizon. Studies in Phenomenology* is to present in-depth studies that shed new light on these thinkers' contribution to broaden the field of phenomenological research, from both an historical and a systematic point of view. More generally, the ambition of the volume is to promote research on women phenomenologists, whose theoretical relevance was often obscured or dismissed due to social-gender grounds. However, focusing on this subject does not entail imposing gender barriers as analysis criteria and thereby limiting a narrow field of research that stresses the differences between men's and women's phenomenological contributions. Instead, the studies included in this volume aim at extending the customary network of phenomenological studies, within which the thinking of women was very often neglected. Furthermore, since the latter introduced original topics in the field of philosophy, inquiry into their thinking enables the reconstructing not only of the phenomenological movement but also of new chapters of the history of philosophy in general.

The special issue begins with Irene Breuer's article „Conrad-Martius: Sein, Wesen, Existenz. In Auseinandersetzung mit der Ontologie und Metaphysik Aristoteles', Thomas von Aquinas und Husserls“. The author compares Conrad-Martius' conception of Being and existence with the ontologies of Aristotle, Aquinas and Husserl, while delving into the problems of both hypostatization and origin of Being; in this regard, the notion of *analogia essendi* plays a central role. By doing so, she shows how

Conrad-Martius accepts the positing of a sphere of original and given facts that are self-grounded and self-sustained, and how her research traces the origin of these back to a “transphysical” realm, thus revealing the grounds for the Husserlian sphere of primal facts. Hence, as Breuer claims, Conrad-Martius’ and Husserl’s investigations encounter and complement each other at the point where the real bursts into reality and becomes available to consciousness.

Simona Bertolini in her article — „Zwei Phasen in der Entwicklung der Untersuchung Hedwig Conrad-Martius‘ zum Sein des Menschen und der Lebewesen“ — asserts that Conrad-Martius’ investigation on human being and living things does not remain unchanged over the decades. In particular, she distinguishes between two phases through which Conrad-Martius’ anthropology and biological ontology develop. In the first phase, at the beginning of the twenties (precisely in the work *Meta-physical Dialogues*), the philosopher explains the essential differences between plants, animals, and humans with reference to a vital origin preceding the constitution of reality; to describe it Conrad-Martius employs terms such as “abyss” and “under-earthly realm.” In the second phase, exemplified by some writings published in the forties and the fifties, the reference to such a dimension disappears and the eidetic variety within the living world, including human specificity, is exclusively traced back to finalistic substantiation of essences in natural beings.

Anna Jani’s article „Die seelischen Akte in der Anthropologie. Edith Steins phänomenologische Einsicht“ concerns Edith Stein’s philosophy and aims at proving that spiritual acts play a decisive role in the methodological constitution of phenomenology and have a crucial function in the theoretical structuring of the phenomenological description of the person. Firstly, Jani examines the implications for anthropology that arise from Edith Stein’s phenomenology; secondly, she underlines the metaphysical presuppositions of anthropology in Stein’s thinking. In both stages, the investigation engages with Husserlian insights that Stein takes on board and creatively introduces into her own work; this engagement with Husserl emerges in the way Stein structures anthropology and describes the person as a psychophysical individual. At this point, as Jani points out, the question arises regarding how the description of the spiritual acts can contribute to the foundation of anthropology as a philosophical-theological science.

In his article, “Core of the Essence and Core of the Person: Jean Hering and a Hidden Source of Edith Stein’s Early Ontology,” Daniele De Santis argues that Jean Hering can be considered the source from which Edith Stein first borrowed the concepts of “core” and “core of the person.” In particular, De Santis maintains that the background of Stein’s decision is represented by the original version of Hering’s book-

let *Bemerkungen über das Wesen, die Wesenheit und die Idee* (1921), namely, the *Appendix* to his still unpublished dissertation on Lotze. Furthermore, the author does not fail to stress both analogies and differences: whereas Hering introduces the concept of “core” merely to discriminate between different types of essences within the framework of a general attempt to determine the structure of individual essences, Stein takes it to characterize always and exclusively the structure of the person and its mode of being, thus paving the way for her future personalistic ontology.

Timothy Burns, in his study “Phenomenology without Egology: Edith Stein as an Original Phenomenological Thinker,” examines Edith Stein’s relationship to phenomenology while considering three related questions: (1) What did Stein conceive phenomenology to be? (2) How should we understand Husserl’s influence on Stein? (3) Was Stein an original phenomenological thinker? Burns argues that Stein conceives phenomenology as an epistemological critique that aims at clarifying the essential foundations of knowledge, and that the primary influence Husserl exerts on her philosophy is based on the development of phenomenology as described in *Logical Investigations*. Furthermore, the article offers an understanding of how Stein conceived her differences with Husserl on the issue of idealism in order to argue that her phenomenological descriptions in *On the Problem of Empathy* and *Sentient Causality* offer us a novel phenomenological account of the human being that begins with the ego but escapes being a mere *egology*.

In “The Challenges I-Splitting or *Ichspaltung* for the Phenomenology of Edith Stein and Gerda Walther,” Antonio Calcagno reads Edith Stein and Gerda Walther with reference to the problem of *I-splitting*, by wondering how one and the same I can perform different acts while preserving its disinterested autonomy and identity. Calcagno stresses that both philosophers introduce a form of *I-splitting* inasmuch as they describe lived experiences in which the unity of the individual, personal I is challenged or negated through intense forms of sociality and intersubjectivity achieved in community and telepathy as well as ruptures in the constitutive unity of persons through soullessness. The author argues that these phenomena challenge not only the unity of I experience but also phenomenology’s claim of the capacity of a pure and absolute ego to grasp philosophically and scientifically the objective sense of its investigations.

Patricia Feise-Mahnkopp’s article (“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”) concerns Gerda Walther’s *Phenomenology of Mysticism*, in which the philosopher, on the basis of a complex notion of human being, exposes the *unio mystica* as meta-transcendental

constitution of fundamental spiritual being by proposing a genuine approach that pushes the transcendental idealistic paradigm further. The article aims at examining the implications of this approach. On the one hand, the author specifies that a critical distinction must be made between the — phenomenologically demonstrable — philosophical content of Walther's investigation and its theologically motivated readings. On the other hand, the article aims at highlighting the philosophical significance of Walther's work, that is, its contribution to the philosophy of mind/spirit and being, and its relation to postmaterialist notions of reality.

In his text, "On Filozofówna's Criticism of Blaustein's Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience," Witold Płotka expands the thematic field of the issue and focuses on the Polish thinker Irena Filozofówna, a yet another woman in the context of phenomenology. In particular, the author analyzes and discusses the 1931–32 debate held by Irena Filozofówna and Leopold Blaustein on the structure of aesthetic experience and the methodological background for describing psychic life. In this regard, the article presents arguments, concepts, and methodologies of the two opposing positions, after having outlined biographical sketches of both philosophers. Moreover, Filozofówna's criticism of Blaustein's approach (based on the claim that he confuses presentations with judgments) as well as Blaustein's replies are considered.

Finally, Joachim Feldes guides the reader through the letters Alexandre Koyré wrote to Hedwig Conrad-Martius from 1911 to 1933 („Ein Samovar für die Phänomenologie: Briefe von Alexandre Koyré an Hedwig Conrad-Martius aus der Zeit bis 1933“), which prove the existence of a personal and philosophical relationship between the two philosophers — a relationship that begun in the context of the "Göttingen circle" and also involved Theodor Conrad (Conrad-Martius' husband since 1912). By following the content of Koyré's letters, Feldes reconstructs the development of this relationship over the years, thus providing a significant example of dialogue which took shape between the members of the phenomenological movement.

As editors of this Special Issue of *Horizon. Studies in Phenomenology*, we are grateful to the editorial board of the journal and to all authors who have worked hard to carry out this project. Special thanks go to Natalia Artemenko, the editor-in-chief of *Horizon*, who has actively supported our work and the idea of publishing a special issue devoted to "Women Phenomenologists." Last but not least, we are sincerely thankful to Beate Beckmann-Zöllner and Joachim Feldes for their generous help with the language of the German articles.

Ronny MIRON, Simona BERTOLINI