The principal theme of this Afterword to the three great themes of research into Eckhart that have been discussed above—the life and work of Meister Eckhart, Eckhart as “master of reading” (lector) and “master of life,” and Eckhart and his influence—is closely connected to the history of Eckhart research. After the publication of the papal bull of John XXII in 1329, little was heard of Eckhart; it was only in the period of German romanticism that there occurred something like a rediscovery of the great medieval theologian and preacher. After Franz Pfeiffer published an edition of Eckhart’s sermons in 1857, in addition to numerous other mystical texts from the Middle Ages, Germanists and theologians, above all those who belonged to the Protestant confession, began an intensive investigation of Eckhartian mysticism. This situation changed abruptly in 1886, when Heinrich Denifle published Latin sermons by Eckhart, since understandably, in view of their academic training, it was primarily Catholic theologians who regarded themselves as competent in this field. On the one hand, there was the mystic of the Germanists and the Protestant theologians—on the other, the philosopher of the Catholic theologians and the historians of philosophy. For many years, accordingly, there was an Eckhart divided into two: a German and a Latin Eckhart, with scarcely any link between them in the scholarly literature. Gradually, however, non-Catholic thinkers also began the task of interpreting the Eckhartian philosophy. Similarly, philosophers and historians of philosophy of the most varied provenance, including not a few Japanese scholars, studied the German sermons of the Eckhart who was understood as a mystic. In the great Stuttgart edition of the German and Latin works, which began in 1934, parallel passages in the edition of the texts in the other language are signaled again and again, with the result that the difference between the mystical and the philosophical Eckhart becomes ever less significant. This is our contemporary situation, in which I should like to comment on the problem of mysticism and philosophy in Meister Eckhart, looking both back—and ahead.
The proponents of an Eckhartian mysticism generally appealed to the numerous forms of the teaching about “the birth of God in the soul.” Since the age of romanticism, “mysticism” has been understood in general to mean a state of consciousness or of thought in which (to employ religious language) the separation between God and the soul is abolished, or (to express this in non-religious language) the separation between the ego and the universe is overcome. This, however, means that mysticism entails a mental or spiritual experience of unity, since everything that is present in the soul or in the ego occurs in such a way that it is known. It goes without saying that the assertion that one has had such an experience contradicts everyday consciousness, and hence also naive piety. Indeed, ultimately it also contradicts “orthodox” understandings of religion and therefore often provokes suspicion and opposition. This was inevitably the case with the mysticism of the birth of God in the soul.

But what is the origin of such mysticism, and how could it ever hope for acknowledgement on the part of the orthodox forms of Christian theology? Its background is the Christian theological doctrine of the Trinity in God, hinted at in the New Testament and subsequently more and more elaborated. The core of this Trinitarian doctrine is the teaching about the processions within the Godhead, with which the attempt was made to unite the doctrine of the three persons in God with the doctrine of the unity of God. This teaching affirms that God the Father, the first of the three divine persons, knows his own self. In this self-knowledge, he begets or gives birth to the Son as the second divine person. In that the Son loves the Father, the third person in God, the Holy Spirit, comes into existence. This procession within the Godhead is continued in the soul of the human being, so that the birth of God takes place in the human soul, too. This is why Eckhart can say in the sermon *Omne datum optimum*: “The Father gives birth to his Son in the eternal act of knowing, and the Father gives birth to his Son in the soul exactly as he does in his own nature, and he gives birth to him in such a way that he becomes the soul’s own.”

He writes perhaps even more boldly and uncompromisingly about the birth of the Son in the sermon *In hoc apparuit*: “As truly as the Father in his simple nature gives birth to his Son in a natural manner, so truly does he give birth to him in the innermost realm of the spirit, and this is

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1 DW I, 72, 8–10.