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### **Edith Stein's Anthropology: the Degrees of the Spirit**

The question concerning the grades of spirit<sup>1</sup> must be understood in a two-fold manner: first, in a subjective sense and, second, in an ontological sense. Similarly, it can be understood with reference to the being of humans in order to understand whether spirit exists and what the natures of the gradations of the life of the spirit are. Also, one can understand the question in terms of a plurality of spiritual realities, which includes the life of the spirit itself. Edith Stein makes these two aspects evident and it is opportune, given this context, to follow her analysis, which moves from the first aspect to the second. This will permit us to analyze how human beings are structured in their complexity and how we can localize them within the context of reality that surrounds and transcends them. In fact, it is clear that every investigation begins because human beings ask themselves questions about the meaning of things. It is necessary, then, to pose theoretically the problem concerning the way one is to proceed, that is, ought one to move from the analysis of the subject and in what sense? As is well known, this is a privileged way in modern thought, which tries to establish whether the goal of an investigation is the subject itself or whether the subject is only a point of departure for a more ample inquiry.

#### ***The Human Subject as the Initial Point of Philosophizing***

Stein writes: “The first fact given is the most simple and it is that which we are most immediately certain, namely, our being. It is the nucleus that forms the examination of the doubt of Augustine, Descartes and Husserl. *Cogito ergo sum* is not an inference, but a simple certainty: cogito, sum. Thinking, feeling, willing, or whatever I may be spiritually experiencing, I *am* and I am conscious of this being. This certainty of being precedes all other types of knowing. This does not mean that all other types of knowing, as is the case with a fundamental principle, must be derived from it as a logical consequence. It is neither to be understood as a measure against which all other types of knowing are to be compared nor as the initial point that does not allow us to retrocede to a more original awareness. The certainty of being is an non-reflexive certainty that precedes all rational types of knowing (STEIN, 1998).”

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<sup>1</sup> Sometimes, in various translations and traditions, spirit (*Geist oder geistlich*) may be translated as mind.

Philosophical inquiry has always been characterized by the search for “the starting point”, the port from which one departs to explore the sea of reality. In above-cited passage Edith Stein declares herself to be in tune with those philosophers that have begun their investigations from the first certainty, namely, that of existence proper. They did this not to absolutize their investigations by closing themselves off in them, but did so because they were pushed by the knowledge that philosophy, being an operation of the human being that seeks to orient oneself in the world, begins with the subject and must consider in the first place the capacities that allow one to carry out such an operation. Stein refers to Augustine, Descartes and Husserl, and hence, she names not only modern thinkers but also a philosopher and theologian who starts a mode of thinking that will characterize ten centuries of Western culture, namely, the Mediaeval culture. In fact, Augustine commences his philosophical search by investigating himself.

It is not possible within the scope of this paper to examine the differences between the above-mentioned philosophers and Edith Stein’s views vis-à-vis these philosophers’ respective positions. The important thing is to note that the anthropological theme was foundational from the very start of Edith Stein’s philosophical project. Specifically, one thinks about her choice to work on the problem of empathy, that is, that particular reciprocal mode of gathering together human beings. This choice was actualized in the work carried out in her doctoral dissertation (STEIN, 1989). Concerning the above-mentioned philosophers, Stein’s path, in a chronological sense, was regressive. She was formed under the instruction of Husserl, who, from the start as a student of Franz Brentano, explored human subjectivity by first interesting himself in the psychological dimension and then by trying to individuate a “a new territory of being”, as he defines it, represented by the knowledge of the operations we accomplish within consciousness, including cognitive, volitional and affective acts. These are to be understood as lived-experiences (*Erlebnisse*) that permit us to have the keys, allowing us to enter into ourselves and simultaneously go out of ourselves.

One cannot speak of Edith Stein without referring to Edmund Husserl, the teacher who remains always present in her work even until the end, even when she encounters mediaeval thought: Husserl and Augustine, as was seen in the passage cited but also Husserl and Thomas Aquinas, as we shall in what follows. The book from which the above-cited passage was taken is, in fact, dedicated to the study of Aristotle’s concepts of potency and act, but understood through Thomas Aquinas’ use of them. Is it possible to bring together thinkers so seemingly different and far away from one another? Isn’t this eclecticism? Not at all. The novelty of Stein’s theoretical approach consists in the fact that she goes to the depths of each thinker’s

thought, not only to seek agreements between them that are traceable but also and, more importantly, she looks for any clarifications that their works can give concerning the nature of reality and which works can render it more comprehensible.

In proceeding in such a way she discovers that many of the analyses that Husserl and Thomas carried out can be used to understand human being in order to bring to light its complexity, enabling one to proceed to a description of the inner-worldly. Here, one must consistently take into account the significance of Augustine. In 1931, after translating Thomas' *Quaestiones de veritate*, Stein's plan becomes formalized, namely, her "attempt to go from scholastic thought to phenomenology and vice-versa", as expressed in a letter to her friend and godmother Hedwig Conrad-Martius.

### **The Force of the Spirit**

In order to treat the question of spirit I would like to first examine Stein's *Potency and Act* as it represents the final destination point of her theoretical investigations. They will be made more specific in *Finite and Eternal Being* (STEIN, 2002), given that more support is provided as well as the fact the themes are deepened and amplified. In every case, the examination of the spiritual dimension returns to Stein's strictly phenomenological period and is already documented in her doctoral dissertation dedicated to the topic of empathy.

One could say that Husserl merits being credited with bringing to the fore, especially with his reflections on the ever-growing field of psychology, not only the theme of the psyche but also, and more importantly, that of the spirit as developed in his second volume of *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, which was transcribed by Stein. She always remained faithful to the conclusions reached in this work, accepting the tripartite division of human beings into body, psyche and spirit, and opposing the reductive analyses of the then prevalent materialistic or psychologistic positivism.

This tripartite division is not new in Western thought. It can even be found in Saint Paul, and who knows if Husserl's reading of Pauline texts did not influence him in his conversion to the Lutheran Church at the age of 28. What is new in both Husserl and Stein is the method or the way in which they went about justifying this tripartite division.

It was mentioned previously that the discovery of the conscious dimension of lived-experiences characterizes Husserlian phenomenology. They present themselves to us as “phenomena” that are difficult to individuate because they are so “present” that they escape us in their transparency. Perceiving, remembering, imagining, our emotional lives and sentiments, all of these are constitutive of our modes of being such that we take them for granted without stopping to ponder the fact that these lived-experiences are messages that stem from the complexity of our human structure. Sensations derive from our perceptions and these sensations lead to our corporeity just as our emotional responses tell us that we are constituted by a psychic dimension that is qualitatively different than that of our bodily one. But, when we execute intellectual or willed acts we cannot assimilate or confuse them with the preceding ones. These intellectual acts speak forth a life of the spirit.

Already in her early *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities* we find Edith Stein, with great skill, dedicated to leading us back from our lived-acts, of which we are conscious, to the larger realities that underlie them. Here, consciousness does not always indicate a reflective stance, but more an implicit knowledge of living these acts. These lived-experiences, examined in their essential structure, constitute a pure sphere that is structurally present in all human beings, namely, the sphere of the pure I and its lived-experiences. But, the concrete I that lives its vital states, that is animated by the life-force, and which is characterized by the psyche, transcends lived-experiences in the sense that it is other from the lived-experiences. Stein writes: “We shall designate this real ego, its properties and states, as the *sentient*. We now see that consciousness and sentience are distinguished from one another in their basic essences: consciousness as realm of “conscious” pure experiencing, and sentience as a sector of transcendent reality manifesting itself in experiences and experiential content” (STEIN, 2000, pp. 23-24).

And all of this is not only valid for the psyche alone as the I is also spiritual. In fact, a spiritual life-force is present in us. We enter into the domain that Stein defines as the “domain of the spirit” thanks to the recognition of the presence of acts that we knowingly execute with motivated acts executed by the I, which executes a certain act insofar as it does not execute another. This does not refer to “that which happens” or a pure spontaneity as is the case in psychic life. The domain of the spirit is the domain of free acts characterized by a *fiat*, which implies both a decision and the taking of a certain position. One enters into the sphere of willing and acting, a sphere that is far removed from any determinism—a sphere where one can “act” or “let go”, and this is where ethical life and moral choice are engaged.

Thus far, the analysis given has distinguished for methodological reasons the psychic dimension from the spiritual one. But, it should be remarked that Stein always underlines the profound unity of the human being as is seen in her treatment of being embodied despite the very stratified description of the body's various constitutive elements. A small passage may help us to understand this relation. "The life of sentience appears to us, in our investigations, as a result of the co-operation of powers of various kinds. We distinguish a sensory lifepower, which converts itself into the reception of sensory data (into different capacities for the reception of sensory data, that is) as well as into sensory impulses and their activities. Besides that, sensory lifepower serves for the conservation of mental lifepower, from which the mental activities are fed. But mental lifepower doesn't represent a mere conversion of sensory lifepower; rather, it harbors within itself a new power source which, nevertheless, can attain deployment only with the assistance of sensory lifepower and at its expense...Before, the psyche seemed to be embedded in material nature and rooting within it; but now we're seeing the psyche fitted into the mental world, (...). It appears that with this we are lead to distinct power sources from which the mindpower of an individual psyche receives its substance: to "objective mind" (the world of values that we took under consideration at the start of our investigations, if we may call it that), and to "subjective mind," that is, to the mindpower of other individuals and to the divine mind" (STEIN, 2000, pp. 115-116).

### ***The Life of the Spirit: Phenomenological and Scholastic***

With this background knowledge of sentient life and spiritual life, distinctions that our author never renounces, she turns, after her conversion to Roman Catholicism, to the study of the works of St. Thomas Aquinas and to a wider reading of other major figures in mediaeval philosophy. This does not mean that Stein simply followed an authority, rather she closely examined, as previously mentioned, the possibilities offered by past thinkers, including Greek thinkers like Plato and Aristotle, in order to penetrate more deeply questions of anthropology, cosmology and theology with the hope of discovering the ultimate meaning of reality.

Stein feels that she was fortunate to have been formed in Phenomenology because she became used to researching the essence of what it is to be human by examining lived-experiences and the essential recognition of bodily, psychic and spiritual reality. The struggle between phenomenology and positivism properly consisted in the search for the "fact" of an essence and by simply limiting oneself to the facts in their sheer existence. This type of formation permitted her to move,

without trauma, from one type of philosophy to another. Moreover, both of these philosophies constituted for her a further clarification of many themes, and more importantly, the theme of philosophical anthropology.

Since I am proposing to examine the significance of the spirit, I will focus on Chapter Five of *Potency and Act*. Here, Stein moves from phenomenology to scholastic thinking and vice versa. Interestingly, there exists the possibility of an accord between the two perspectives, as demonstrated by previously mentioned comments that refer to her phenomenological analyses. On every page, in every assertion, one can observe a confluence between the two positions, but it should be remarked that Stein herself elaborates each position in her own unique way.

The beginning of her treatment reads: “That which is subjectively a spiritual being lets itself be characterized above all by the polarity between subject and object that we call intentionality” (STEIN, 1998, p. 85). This phenomenological definition, which also leads one back to scholastic thought, is deepened through an investigation of the spiritual life that is also a life of intentionality.

Intentionality for Modern thought is an “act” and Stein adds that she, drawing from Husserl, understood it to be so in her earlier writings, but she also adds that she discovered in the scholastic use of the word a triple meaning: “act” as the intrinsic principle of form, “act of being”, and “act of *active being*”, that is actuality and activity. Modern thinking has emphasized activity, thereby giving to actuality a secondary place. This is the case because Modernity has fixed its attention primarily on finite, temporally limited spirits. Stein believes that the field of inquiry must be amplified to include other spirits, including pure spirits, the angels, and the Holy Spirit. The trajectory sketched already in *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities* is further explicated with the help of Thomas. More precisely, in order to understand the human spirit it is necessary to proceed with a closer examination of the other modalities of the spirit. Here, one decisively enters an ontological domain. In any case, it is possible to examine even finite being in itself in order to uncover its metaphysical structure.

The bearer of the spiritual life is the subject. Stein understands it as *upostasis* rather than *upokeimenon*. In this way, she understands the subject as the one from whom spiritual life extends and she understands the *ipostasi*, i.e., substance, as that which stays by itself; it is independent. And, this is the deep sense of the term “person”. In bringing Husserl and Thomas together our author examines an agreement-disagreement. They both speak of being as spiritual and as persons, but while

Husserl achieves this result by investigating the essence of spiritual acts and by not engaging the question of substance, Thomas considers the questions of spiritual “substance”. Stein admits that in order to understand the depths of human being it is necessary to recognize that the person is a spiritual substance.

On the basis of this definition Stein proceeds to compare the divine person, angels and human beings. Naturally, analogy allows one to establish a commonality between God and finite beings. “Personality as independence in the unlimited sense of *aseitas* is possessed only by God. But, there exists an authentic analogy between the infinite person and created spiritual subjects that authorizes one to speak of them as having personalities “( STEIN, 1998, p. 89).

On the basis of this continuing analogical thinking it is possible to proceed with a description of the spiritual life with its essential characteristics and its ontological development. Clearly, with regard to human being, the analysis of the human subject allows one to individuate grades of spirit by examining potency and act.

The potency of the soul, which is examined first, is the intellect. It indicates an essential peculiarity of the spirit: “...it is *transparent being* (or manifest to itself) and *open* (to *being thrown over* to another in an intelligible manner.) In God they are both infinite. This is why God’s intellect is knowledge that is eternally actual, perfect in itself and omniscient. Finite spirits are not everything they are in an actuality that is enduringly actuated. Their being is attributed to them, and this is why their being-transparent and their being-open is limited. Their mode of being designates in the first place a *grade* of actuality of their being, and, therefore, their being-to-know. It also designates an area in which they generally can direct themselves knowingly and in which they can direct their actuality to the maximum grade possible” ( STEIN, 1998, p. 107).

The condition of being-illuminated and being-open is not, however, a continuous condition for human beings. There are latent states, for example, sleep, that do not violate the continuity of spiritual being. And, this does not constitute an interruption of the spiritual life, but marks a return to a state of potentiality that one also finds in children, but with an essential difference that characterizes the development of the human being. Here, one sees the stirring of something new “...that cannot be recovered from something that just happened. In such a way, one must be able to say that spiritual existence does not necessarily begin only at the quick moment in which it becomes verifiable. The beginning of

verifiability leads back to a change in the same being, to a passage to a superior type of spirituality, to intellectuality, to an increase of actuality of life and knowledge and contemporaneously to an enlargement of the extension of our being-open” (STEIN, 1998, p. 109).

The passage from potency to act also results in the passage to knowledge as “habit”. This notion, taken by Thomas but also used by Husserl (HUSSERL, 1989, p. 289), indicates the realization of an act. To understand more deeply that which happens in one’s interior Stein recuperates another notion, and this time it is Husserlian, that maintains that from the subjective perspective, that is, from the noetic side, habit is a superior grade of spiritual being. From the noematic side, that is, from the perspective of the process itself, every actualization of knowledge constitutes a spiritual object that remains in my spiritual world, respecting the meaning Husserl understood as belonging to the relation between the lived-experience, for example, perception as “noesis”, and the content of the lived-experience, the perceived object as “noema” (HUSSERL, 1989, p. 285). Stein declares that she does not wish to use the expression “lived-experience” in this context because “...this word was used in such an obscure and manifold way that one has the fear of misunderstanding it” (STEIN, 1998, p. 103). In any case, she employs the content of the Husserlian analysis and further clarifications relative to noesis-noema, and she demonstrates that it is possible to dig deeper with respect to the Thomistic position concerning the operations executed by the subject. She does this by using the phenomenological method, which has the great advantage of showing with great acuity the meaning of acts proper to the subject. She also asserts that Thomas, from the perspective of the “nature” of the subject, demonstrates the validity of the metaphysical structure. In such a manner the advantages of the two positions are united while not negating the differences between them. Also, there exists the possibility of establishing a relation between the two possibilities, which move on two different plains, but not in a conflicting way.

Husserl himself implicitly used the concepts of potency and act, and Stein makes implicit use of them while leading them back to their philosophical sources. For example, the theme of recollection, studied and described by Husserl as a presentification that is produced spontaneously or voluntarily, is described as possible because of the passage from the potential for forming habits to actuality. Even those phenomena of consciousness that Husserl so finely examined from the noetic perspective, including memory, recollection, association, reproduction, are all lead back to a passing from potency to act. Furthermore, Husserl explains gaps in consciousness, which can put into crisis the continuity of spiritual life and yield a space for a materialist description of the human being, through an analysis of the flow of lived-experience. Inner time-



consciousness allows one to understand the fact that consciousness of a living-duration remains valid even if there are spans of consciousness that are not filled.

And it is precisely this fact that makes possible a reawakening of the content of consciousness, freely undertaken, which brings us to the second grade of the spirit, that is, the will. Intellect and will constitute the two essential attributes of subjective spirit. There is a circularity between them that the *intellectus agens* attests to, which Husserl even speaks about in the second volume of the *Ideas* (HUSSERL, 1989, p. 285). It is understood as the potency towards that type of “doing/making”, towards that directed movement to knowledge. And because every doing/making implies the will, the active intellect is either a volitional potency or an intellectual one. Moreover, the intellect is not only an *agens*, but it is also *possibilis*, which is to be understood as the potency towards the knowledge of objects that is held towards its objects until it reaches its final end of knowing. The volitional element is, then, intrinsic to the intellect and this permits one to say that the act of knowledge is creative and re-creative, productive of an objective spirit that characterizes a world independent of the subject or subjects and which is maintained and supported by them. This justifies the presence of spiritual objects in the human world. But, its products are based on a spiritual sense already present in things that “speak to us”, and in such a way, push us to intervene, thereby producing new realities endowed with meaning. According to Stein, spirit pervades all of reality insofar as all of reality, even material reality, is characterized by a meaning.

Human doing/making, which is the concrete and continual condition that characterizes us, does not only refer to an external world but refers to us as well as other spiritual subjects. Husserl’s and Stein’s positions are often deemed to be intellectualist because they seem to give importance to theorizing. In reality, however, they recognize the operative dimension of the human being as circulating between active theorizing and practice without absolutizing either of these two moments.

If the intellect and the will are the characteristic potencies of the spirit, they do not live by themselves alone, but exercise themselves upon other interior realities. The territory of the soul, taken in a holistic sense, is very ample. Not only do the intellect and the will live in it, but the mind also lives there. Employing a spatial image, we started from the act in the description of this territory, but this description is not complete; it is necessary to dig deeper. As an excellent phenomenologist, Stein does not forget the peculiar realm she investigated in her *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*, namely, that of the psyche. In fact, she observes that contact with the external world does not happen

immediately at the intellectual level; and, we can add that it happens, in the first place, at the perceptual level—an interior reaction is produced characterized as psychic, that of pleasure and displeasure, followed by a certain attraction or repulsion, of assent or refusal. In human beings such comportment is expressed successively in the greatest degree in the spiritual sentiments of love and hate. We are always accompanied by an affective tonality that we are always conscious of, and such tonalities are not of an intellectual order. Here, one cannot speak of an explicit self-consciousness, but rather of a feeling that accompanies us in every moment of our waking lives.

From this initial contact and from this first sensing, our volitional comportment and our intentional doing/making are born in our encounter with things and human subjects. This is what Stein defines as “mind.”

Every person manifests inclinations, dispositions, diverse reactions, and each person expresses oneself differently. If it were possible to reconstruct a map of the human being’s complex interiority and to distinguish the operations and acts that characterize the spiritual sphere and the mind in their essentiality, it would be difficult to say which lived-experiences are activated by single subjects as subjectivity is truly something that is unique and non-repeatable. One asks where such non-repeatability derives.

Husserl maintained that the person was a unified being. This was the case even when he described human beings as complex and stratified. He insisted on the theme of individuality such that “haecceitas” was a form that allows “absolute individuation to penetrate the personal I”. Also, he maintained, “that originary and absolute individuation resides in the I itself” (HUSSERL, 1989, p. 315). Stein attributed such individuation to the personality-core (*Kern*), and already examined it in her early work, *On the Problem of Empathy* and *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*. In these works she clearly distinguishes the personality core from the life of the spirit as “...something new and particular not already included in it” (STEIN, 2000, p. 95).

In *Potency and Act* the question of the core is taken up again with respect to the complexity of the human being. Stein distinguishes that which is found to be at the periphery and that which is to be delineated in one’s profundity. Digging profoundly allows one to discover the core, which tells us what the person is. The person, thanks to the core, is “like a centre located in the world in order to receive it in the intellect’s form or in a mode such that it is struck by it, or in such a way that by conquering it, penetrates it” (STEIN, 1998, p. 132). The core distinguishes itself by its simplicity—it is not

composed of parts—it is a potential with respect to the actualization of the spiritual life in which it ought externalize itself in an adequate way in order to fulfill its act. Certainly, it can remain obscure, but even in this case it has its actuality because it is always active and real, even if it is not perfectly realized.

Since the core is the distinctive element of the human being and since it actualizes itself fully in the spiritual life, one can hypothesize that, while such an actualization is constantly threatened in the earthly life, in the *status termini* the core of human persons is able to realize itself “as an actuality that is constantly and massively achievable of those things that are there in themselves, in such a way that nothing is more obscure and unconscious behind the actual spiritual life and in such a way that the alternating between potential and actuality is not suppressed for the core of the person and the core itself is freed from temporality and placed in eternity” (STEIN, 1998, p. 140).

#### *Ethicality and Sanctity*

Given this background, we move now to an analysis of the otherworldly dimension, and we open a series of consideration that will permit us to comprehend the relationship between time and eternity. This argument in particular revolves around the connection that can one can establish between ethicality and sanctity. It is useful to follow the arguments concerning the core because one finds in them the key to understanding human destiny. The arguments, and this is peculiar to Stein, deal with a rigorous philosophical reflection on truth whose ultimate background is of religious revelatory character. This philosophical reflection, however, does not only serve to clarify such truths, thereby completing an operation that could be defined as theological in scope, but it also serves to demonstrate the intrinsic reasonableness of the process that renders them valid even under a rational aspect without performing qualitative leaps, which sometimes impede the establishing a connection between different realms.

Here, we speak of different sources that illumine the same reality; I mean by this that the philosophical search and revealed reality encounter one another without difficulty in the clarification of the constitution of what it is to be human. In such a way, what I would define as “religious” philosophy comes to some kind of completion; it comprises in its path of rigorous research elements that arise from another source, but with respect to them an intrinsic connection and not merely a juxtaposition shows itself.

The core of the person, according to Stein, “prescribes” that which it ought to be; its freedom is, however, a salvo. In fact, to “become oneself” can be realized or interrupted; nothing is determined. “The possibility exists that the core, in its development, never comes to manifest itself purely” (STEIN, 1998, p. 144). And yet every person feels as if he or she ought to exist, but he or she may not always realize his or her own possibilities because of a series of inhibitions; Stein even calls these “privations”. Stein gives an example by recalling the difference between diffidence and not always being trusting. What distinguishes these two comportments is that former consists of believing that someone is capable of any sort of evil without any real basis for this assertion, whereas the latter could be determined by prudence that is born from the knowledge of human limits. Human beings have aspects that are both positive and negative. The core is always positive.

Stein writes: “With the core of the person (...) we must clearly understand something positive. If, during her earthly existence, the person overcomes her inhibitions through her freedoms and capacities, actualizing her core as much as she is capable, disappearing into the *status termini* or into an otherworldly purification, then all that is inhibited, lacking and the uncontaminated core will access eternity” (STEIN, 1998, p. 145).

Here, we have a process of purification in which inhibitions are eliminated and a way of being is produced that is superior to all that was actualized in the earthly life. In terms of salvation, either one is saved entirely or one is lost. If one says that there is more or less beatitude, this does not mean that only one part of the core enters eternity. It simply is unitary and the doctrine of purification confirms this. Its simplicity, however, is always relative because we can distinguish its essence from its existence, which can never be said of God. Moreover, its unity will be full only in the *status termini*.

Notwithstanding external changes of infancy and old age, notwithstanding even radical transformations, the core maintains its permanence. Every single human being knows that she exists as herself despite the changes of the body. Additionally, this permanence must not simply be considered as memory, which is also important, but as a more profound ontological permanence from which one recognizes how deeply one lives in profundity in one self when one focuses on the core as it is given at the moment of birth; it cannot develop, understood in a transformational sense, even if the human being is able to mature fully within the course of one’s life. In this way, one understands why one must enter heaven as a child.

The connection between the ethical moment and the question of salvation is deepened further by our author through a reflection on the theme of guilt and forgiveness. She decisively tackles the theme of sin, connecting it ontologically to non-

being. In the case of mortal sin, one willfully opposes absolute being, consequently resulting in an emptying of the person. This is the case because the spiritual being of the person causes this to happen. At the same time, however, one must note the impossibility of producing by oneself an annihilation because this can only happen through the intervention of the absolute being. Hence, spiritual being survives even in sin. The negation present in sin is, therefore, never a total negation of being because it also contains in itself the affirmation of one's own being and this always permits one the possibility of conversion. Absolute negation is purely diabolical insofar as it is definitive and cannot be renounced. For human beings, however, there is always the core of the person that exercises its activity and that can have a positive influence. With sin negation has entered human being: if one believes in God, one will suffer anxiety because of this negation; if one does not believe in God, the negation will enter human being as the negation of the absolute being. Stein delineates atheism with much precision as the "flight" into the theoretical negation of the existence of God that leads to an anguish before nothingness. What, therefore, constitutes possible conversion? It consists in a theoretical clarification that suppresses the negation of the absolute being and in an affirmation of being itself that also includes affectivity. In the distancing a "directing oneself towards" is substituted, and, therefore, an increase in being, an elevation to a higher grade of being that is called Grace. "The negation of the negation in the free directing-oneself-towards and elevation of being, taken together, cede to exculpation" (STEIN, 1998, p. 150).

In the case of venial sin, an internal contrast between believing in God and the transgression that is resolved presents itself. But, this only happens through an openness and by correcting oneself. That which is at play in the distinction between venial sin and mortal sin is the affective and intellectual comportment vis-à-vis God, which also determines one's condition in the *status termini*. Here, one can also find reparation for practical errors and the elimination of internal conflict.

The state of sanctity, even if our author does not use this term, and that of damnation are acutely described. As always, she focuses great attention on that which is positive: the possibility of conversion, the liberation from sin, repentance. If all this is realized, then it becomes possible for the human being to access the state of "being born of the spirit", that is, to live life in Grace. This state is obtained by having an open disposition and acceptance but also by simply not comporting oneself in a defensive manner. I believe that with this expression Stein is referring to her experience of conversion and to her own call that was not willed or sought; it was as if she underwent or bore this experience, but to which she was never radically opposed. For this reason, I do not believe that one can speak of Stein as an atheist in her younger years. Certainly, one

can describe it as distancing from God and the religious dimension, but not a knowing hostility or one that was knowingly practiced.

We have seen until now how the spiritual dimension was involved in the moral life and that of religion: intellect, will, openness and being disposed towards the absolute being. There can even be an ethics without religion, but it really is a strong characteristic of the spirit, namely, that of openness towards others and towards the Other, that strictly correlates the ethical and spiritual dimensions. If the religious openness is lacking, if it becomes interrupted by the flight, the human spirit must make an appeal to its own forces and there is always the risk of it being spoiled, finding itself in a state of emptiness, impotence and nothingness.

The great theme that Stein concentrates on all levels is that of force, the force of sensation, spiritual force, all present as constitutive of the human being. But given the weakness of finite human beings, a further force is necessary, namely, Grace. A state of sanctity is attainable through it.

#### *Spirit and Body Toward Sanctity*

Up until now, the bodily dimension appeared to be excluded from our reflections as if our investigations could be undertaken purely at the psycho-spiritual level. But, the connection between the body and the psyche is profound and Stein has never underestimated corporeity. In fact, she has always maintained that it was constitutive of human being. She admits that there is a possible sort of “independence” of the life of the soul that actualizes itself in ascesis, but the ascesis cannot be an end in itself; it is only through the help of grace that it can become a pathway to salvation. Here, one must recognize that one does not eliminate radically the life of the body, but those aspects of corporeity that are negative because they disturb the life of the soul. It must be noted that the living body is bearer of positive values that can be exalted, including beauty and health. One need not sacrifice all of these, for in the work of redemption “one need not deny the idea that even here grace makes use of totally different ways.” (STEIN, 1962, p. 178)

It is at this point that our author confronts the question of ecstasis by initiating her investigation of mystical experience. For now, she observes that this involves the triumph of the light of the spirit, which seizes even the body through a total rapture.

This is an effect of grace, which moves from the internal to the external, yielding its fruits even if the soul is opposed. In every case, as was said already, one must be deeply disposed because God deeply respects human freedom.

Stein hypothesizes that not only can the living body be illuminated by the life of the soul but also sanctity moves directly from the living body and from there reaches the soul because it is possible that grace also saves the living body and therefore could justify the thaumaturgic function of the body. It is for this reason that the saint is also a thaumaturge. In fact, the saint takes care to transform into his image everything that he comes into contact and it is in this sense that one can speak of miracles. This is the case because corrupt substances are lead back to their original constitutions through the effect of grace. “There is no law by which when each time that a holy body touches another body that the latter must be transformed. But in every case where there is similar contact one can verify the effects”(STEIN, 1962, p. 180). All this can happen because “[a] holy living body does not oppress the soul. It is the prepared abode that makes possible for them a life that is holy and free” (STEIN, 1962, p. 180).

Following this line of argument concerning the body, the function of the sacraments, which are capable of producing sanctity, could be justified. In particular, the Eucharist, upon which Stein often meditates (STEIN, 1994, pp. 196-200), has a salvific value insofar as it is the nourishment that can save the living body. “S/he who receives in oneself the Body of the Lord will see her or his own living body sanctified.” (STEIN, 1962, p. 180). The significance of the sacrament, however, is not to produce a miraculous healing, rather it serves to place the living body in its proper place, to establish the psycho-physical equilibrium of the human being as the spiritual datum is visible through the body. This is the profound reason why the Word became flesh. The whole human being is involved; the spirit does not operate without being connected with the psyche and the body.

If the sacrament of the Eucharist can be employed to understand the functioning of the body, the sacrament of penance and reconciliation operates above all on the psychic level. “The word of the Lord that absolves one of sin is capable of allowing a force that acts against psychic pressures to penetrate the soul.” (STEIN, 1994, p. 184).

*The Night of the Spirit: The Mystical Path*

Ethicality, sanctity and mysticism constitute three moments that possess their own characteristics even if they can be connected with the function of salvation. Mysticism reveals its peculiarity in exceptional conditions of contact with the divine in the course of one's earthly existence. In fact, it entails the "presence" of God in the soul. This can enable us to ask what role the spirit plays in relation to this union.

On the pathway toward mystical experience there exists a double attitude of the spirit: passivity and activity cross into one another, freedom and trust are racing with another in order to get ahead, and such moments, which seem so opposed to one another, are finally synthesized in an extraordinary way.

Commenting on the works of Saint Teresa of Avila and Saint John of the Cross our author retraces the journeys of their souls. It was already indicated that the spirit, with its peculiar force, is that which characterizes the human being in its specific activities. On a preliminary note, it must be remarked that a difference exists between religious experience and mystical experience. And, the difference lies in the contact that establishes itself with the divine.

One can observe that in lived-religiosity it is precisely the openness of the spirit that consents to the contact with the divine, a contact that is sought and willed, and, therefore, the fruit of human freedom. Stein always points out the importance of divine action through grace that is enlarged gradually. This concerns an encounter between the human being and God, a mutual exchange, in which the divine always occupies a fundamental place. The human being responds to the divine call with an act of faith.

The term "faith" can mean many things. It can indicate various modalities of trust like certainty, conviction about a certain state of affairs, and, therefore, a purely human knowledge. In the case of religious experience, faith "distinguishes itself ...from conviction and its modifications by the fact that its correlate is not a state of affairs, but is a primary object and, consequently, it itself is not a founded act." This is so because it does not resolve itself in a theoretical act "...but that



which I understand penetrates me; while I understand it, it seizes me in my personal centre and holds me to itself” (STEIN, 1994, p. 188).

The grasping of the centre or the core is such that the more it is seized the more I become attached to and understand it. The act of faith is also an act of understanding, love and action, and because of this it requires both trust and collaboration. Stein explains all of this with reference her description of Saint John’s chosen path.

There is a first stage in which the spirit enriches itself through its contact with God and conforms its own will to the divine will. But one can go beyond this, and this is where one begins to delineate the mystical experience. A central point is reached where the soul is subtracted from every spiritual exercise and immersed in obscurity and emptiness. It is as if there were a battle between the human spirit, with all of its capacity, and a determined abandoning of faith that takes place in an arid, nauseating and afflictive place. This is the pure spiritual Cross. The soul is despoiled of everything; it seems to be overwhelmed and is unable to react. But even here one sees a small fragment of autonomy. “If one accepts it [and Stein is referring here to the Cross], then one can experience a gentle yoke and a light burden” (STEIN, 2002a, p. 121). It is “the death by the Cross in the living body, in the senses and in the spirit”, as Saint John says, that leads us finally to a union with God. Here, faith terminates its function; mystical contemplation is communicated to the soul. There is no longer an “accepting” or a “turning away.” But, by being touched by God, by experiencing God, this contact becomes that union which the image of mystical matrimony tries to convey. As Saint Teresa contends, it truly is an experience: If touching and experiencing indicate a passivity of the soul, the powers of the soul as indicated by Augustine, including intellect, will and memory, even if they are not active, are always, in part, aware of what is happening and to such a degree that they can refer to what is happening, as is often the case with those who have lived through such experiences.

As a cognitive part of the human being, the spirit truly receives the presence of God and the God who is both triune and one, as Saint Teresa remarks. The spirit is present in the most profound recesses of human being, in the personal core and with the encounter with the three divine persons. In the seventh chamber: “This happens within an intellectual vision in which the three persons bow to the spirit. For a miracle of knowledge that is granted to it, the soul sees with the most absolute certainty that the three persons are one essence, one power, a unique wisdom and one sole divinity” (STEIN, 1962a, p. 58).

The spirit knows, the soul sees. And it is precisely Saint Teresa who proposes the distinction between the soul and its and its powers, among which one finds those of the spirit. And it is from her experience that the confirmation of the stratification and complexity of the human being come. As a phenomenologist, Edith Stein lets herself be lead and she also goes to verify. If the soul is rooted in the core from which it draws its nourishment, then it is in the profoundest point, in the core that encounters God directly. The image of the castle with its series of chambers that lead to the interior part, as proposed by the holy Mother, yield to us the structure of the human being in a plastic and synthetic way.

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