

Globethics Repository



The Study of the Soul between Psychology and Phenomenology at Edith Stein

This page was generated automatically upon download from the Globethics Repository. More information on Globethics see <https://www.globethics.net>. Data and content policy of Globethics Repository see <https://repository.globethics.net/pages/policy>.

Item Type	Article
Authors	Bello, Angela Ales
Publisher	AXIS Foundation, University “Al.I.Cuza” Iassy
Rights	With permission of the license/copyright holder
Download date	2026-07-12 11:23:15
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/172275

Angela ALES BELLO*

The Study of the Soul between Psychology and Phenomenology at Edith Stein

Abstract. In the study of the soul between psychology and phenomenology in Edith Stein works it becomes clearer that it is only phenomenology that really comes to grips with the question of psychic causality by correlating the two moments and it is therefore only phenomenology that can respond to Hume's objections while yet remaining on his selfsame terrain. It is very important to distinguish between psychology and phenomenology and also to clarify the relationship between psyche and consciousness; there is thus reposed the distinction already made by Husserl, who stressed that when one sets out to look for the causes that determine psychic life, they must not be sought in life feelings (*Lebensgefühle*) but rather in the „modes” of a life force (*Lebenskraft*) that is announced in them. All this is indicated here within limits because psychology in itself is undoubtedly not a science of the spirit, though the psychic states, on the other hand, will not be validly understood unless and until one arrives, as is demonstrated in the essay under consideration, at the motivation and therefore the spiritual sphere. We would say that our body is animated by a psyche and further enlivened by the spirit.

Keywords: lived experiences; life feelings; „tension of lived experience”; causal law; antipositivist attitude; „prescientific” causality; empiric value; essential structure; intentional lived experiences; spiritual life; „motivation”; apperception.

Inquiry into the human being in all its complexity and manifestations plays a part of particular importance in the phenomenological analyses carried out by Husserl's disciple and assistant, Edith Stein. She dedicated a great deal of attention to the relationship between body and soul and took position with respect to the results of a science – experimental psychology – that at the beginning of the twentieth century was still in its formation process.

* Pontifical Lateran University, Piazza S. Giovanni in Laterano, 400120, The Vatican City. E-mail address: aleca@flashnet.it

In the fifth volume of the *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung* (1922), directed by Husserl, Edith Stein published a long essay, *Beiträge zur philosophischen Begründung der Psychologie und der Geisteswissenschaften*, that has to be seen against the background of lively discussions about the significance of psychology as a science, discussions in which Husserl – under the influence of his teachers, F. Brentano and W. Wundt – had taken part ever since the days of his youthful studies.

The relationships between phenomenology and psychology are complex, subtle and in some case even ambiguous, and the difficulty of throwing light upon them derives essentially from the contrast between logicism and psychologism that characterized the philosophical environment in which Husserl began his reflections: first and foremost, indeed, Husserl wanted to come to grips with the problem of the genesis of mathematics, the formation of numbers, and the dilemma resided in the need for either analyzing purely „objective” logic processes as such or inquiring into its genesis, that is to say, the operations performed by the subjects in elaborating this discipline.

The latter type of inquiry constitutes the connecting moment between phenomenology and psychology, since both are concerned with the analysis of the subject, but it is precisely in connection with the modalities of the description of the subject, the assumption of the methodological viewpoint, that the two disciplines differ profoundly from each other. Notwithstanding all the oscillations and difficulties¹ Husserl's position can be delineated more or less as follows: he held that the two inquiries were different, because phenomenology presents itself as a gnoseology, an *Erkenntnistheorie*, and therefore a research of the philosophical type, but precisely for this reason it is altogether fundamental for clarifying the basic concepts of psychology, so that it was both possible and desirable for the latter to accept the results suggested by phenomenology and to configure itself as a phenomenological psychology².

¹ I examined this question in *Husserl e le scienze*, La Goliardica, Rome 1962², Chapter 4, and *L'oggettività come pregiudizio – Analisi di inediti husserliani sulla scienza*. La Goliardica Editrice, Rome 1982, Chapter I, 3c; Chapter II, 3.

² E. Husserl, *Phänomenologische Psychologie – Vorlesungen Sommersemester 1925*. Husserliana, Vol. IX.

However, Husserl was not concerned solely with psychology, but rather with examining the significance of the sciences as they had organized themselves at the end of the nineteenth century. In all his reflections he strenuously defended the separation between what the usages of his day called the *Naturwissenschaften* (i.e. natural sciences) and the *Geisteswissenschaften* (i.e. sciences of the spirit or human sciences) against the absorption of the latter by the former, or their subordination, as was then being sustained by positivism and neopositivism.

On the other hand, he always underscored the autonomy of philosophical inquiry with respect to the sciences, and, as far as the natural sciences are concerned, deemed it essential that there should be a critical and therefore philosophical examination of the structures and the cognitive valency that characterize them. In much the same way, for the human sciences he had highlighted the need for a philosophical foundation, this in the sense that the fundamental concepts and notions employed within these disciplines had to be sieved and understood by an analysis that, as far as he was concerned, had to have a phenomenological configuration.

It is against this background that one has to read Edith Stein's essay on the philosophical foundation of psychology and the human sciences³ in which she phenomenologically examines the structures on which psychology claims to found a scientific inquiry, albeit without grasping them in their essential significance. The essay represented the realization of Husserl's aforementioned project and, in conformity with Edith Stein's style, came to grips with the matter with great clarity and analytical systematicity. This does not mean that she failed to recognize her debt to her teacher, quite the contrary: notwithstanding the fact that she undoubtedly made an autonomous and personal contribution to the inquiry, she frankly declared to have completely assimilated Husserl's

³ E. Stein, *Beiträge zur philosophischen Begründung der Psychologie und der Geisteswissenschaften, Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*. Vol. V, 1922, republished by Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1970, p. 2. What is examined here is the first part of the essay entitled *Psychische Kausalität*, the annex to the first part, i.e. I. *Über die Möglichkeit einer Deduktion der psychischen Kategorien aus der Idee einer exakten Psychologie*. and the conclusion: *Die prinzipielle Scheidung von psychischem und geistigen Sein, Psychologie und Geisteswissenschaften*. The essay also contains a second part dedicated to: *Individuum und Gemeinschaft*.

methodological indications thanks to her work of revising the second volume of *Ideen*⁴.

Psyche and causality

Edith Stein begins with a question that recurs in philosophical speculation, but became particularly important in the age of positivism: whether the human being is subject to the bonds of causality that characterize nature. The question is clearly underlain by a „classical” vision of the physical sciences, founded on the causality principle, the dominion of which the human sciences – and, more generally, the global interpretation of the human being – were trying to shake off. Since the treatment of this theme takes the form of opposing determinist theses and their indeterminist counterparts, and therefore the counterposition of freedom and necessity, the physical and the psychic, the resolution of these contrasts calls for a systematic analysis of psychic causality and one therefore has to ask oneself, assuming a phenomenological attitude – starting right from the beginning by going back to “things themselves” – what one understands by „psyche” and „causality”⁵. The link between the two moments can be grasped after having performed an analysis of which, as usual, we can here do no more than indicate the results.

She begins by discussing the validity of Hume’s critique of the concept of causality⁶ and underscores that the theoretical needs that represent the starting point of the English empiricist, namely the examination of the „phenomenon of causality”, have to be considered valid; and yet, even though he has correctly identified the terrain on which to commence his inquiry, his objections are not by any means convincing. Reproposing an attitude that Husserl had suggested on several occasions and eventually thematized in *Krisis*⁷, Edith Stein holds that the objection put forward by Hume cannot simply be liquidated as Kant had claimed to do; indeed, Kant had moved in an entirely different direction that took no account whatsoever of the spirit of Hume’s critique. It was not a matter of

⁴ E. Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*. Husserliana, Vol. IV.

⁵ E. Stein, *Beiträge, etc., op.cit.*, p. 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

⁷ E. Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*. Husserliana, Vol. IV.

deducing the form of causality from physical science as already constituted; according to Edith Stein, Kant's transcendental deduction only tells us that there is a bond or link, but does not bring out the type of link [with which we are concerned]. A proficuous discussion with Hume would have required one to remain on the plane of the phenomenon that was the object of the inquiry – the phenomenon of causality – and that had subsequently been done by Husserl. It is only phenomenology that really comes to grips with the question of psychic causality by correlating the two moments and it is therefore only phenomenology that can respond to Hume's objections while yet remaining on his selfsame terrain.

Edith Stein proposes to begin the inquiry by examining a common and daily experience: I feel cold, but can deceive myself as to the contents of this sensation, which I describe as „cold” and be deceived by my consciousness of this lived experience. Certainly, I feel, when I am aware of the sensation, and feel cold and nothing else, when I have this sensation, but it is possible that I feel cold without there really being a condition of cold and I may subsequently realize this. Both in the case of feelings regarding myself (*Gefühle*), feeling cold for example, or those regarding the properties of external things (*Empfindungen*), for example sensations of colour regarding some coloured thing, there is announced an external condition (cold) and an internal property or capacity; in the case of the *Gefühle*, we can speak of a life force (*Lebenskraft*) that nevertheless must not be confused with the pure I as flow of lived experiences (*Erlebnisse*)⁸.

This is a very important point of distinction between psychology and phenomenology and also a point of clarification of the relationship between psyche and consciousness; there is thus reposed the distinction already made by Husserl, who stressed that when one sets out to look for the causes that determine psychic life, they must not be sought in life feelings (*Lebensgefühle*) but rather in the „modes” of a life force (*Lebenskraft*) that is announced in them⁹.

The changes in life conditions reflect a greater or lesser life force; this means that causality has nothing to do with the sphere of lived

⁸ E. Stein, *Beiträge etc., op.cit.*, pp. 19-20.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

experiences – no pure lived experience can form part of a causal event –, but rather concerns, as has already been said, the life force, so that both the life feelings and the lived experiences manifest only the real causality of the psyche and the effects consist of a change of the other psychic properties¹⁰.

On the other hand, it is important to note that psychic causality is different from its physical counterpart and the psyche of an individual is a world of its own, just like material nature¹¹; even force manifests itself differently in the two cases: whereas in physical nature force can be observed as the result of a happening, an event, in the psychic sphere it can be grasped only through its lived modes; but a distinction has to be made between the sphere of lived experiences (*Erlebnisse*) and that of life feelings, which constitutes a lower level of the flow of lived experiences¹².

The relationship between the two spheres can be better understood if one notes that consciousness and the flux of its lived experiences can be imagined as devoid of life feelings; in this case we find ourselves faced with a data flow of a different kind, quality and intensity, but without a „colouring“, and a tension, namely the tension peculiar of the life sphere; in actual fact, one has to note the presence of life feelings, of a „field“ that has its characteristics, but which „colours“ all the data of the flow and this flow cannot be brought to a halt¹³.

At this point Edith Stein cannot but come to grips with the analyses of H. Bergson. Examining the mechanism of the psyche, she deems the latter to be a qualitative continuum and declares herself to be in agreement with the French philosopher as regards the valuation of the moment of psychic life that have to be traced back to differences of intensity; what Edith Stein does not accept of Bergson's analysis contained in *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (1889) is the view that it is not possible to identify the parts of this continuum and the place they occupy: even though it is quite true that the various shades of red are difficult to distinguish, it is nevertheless possible to distinguish red from blue and therefore indicate the life feeling of one or the other

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

quality and also the degrees of tension (*Spannung*) and, further, know the species „life feeling” and grasp its peculiarity as compared with the species „tension of lived experience” that characterizes all the degrees of tension¹⁴.

It is precisely in this distinction between the qualities that there resides the possibility of tracing a causal law, thus getting away from Bergson’s point of view. In actual fact, however, the type of causality that is thus identified is different from the one that underlies scientific research; Bergson’s antipositivist attitude is thus maintained, for the causality that Edith Stein has in mind is not the „exact” causality that forms the basis of the physical sciences, but a „prescientific” causality of the kind that sometimes presents itself also in [our] experience of the physical world. The following can be examples of causal connections in psychic life and experience of nature: “I am so tired that I cannot read a book that makes intellectual demands on me” and, again, “today the air is so limpid as to assure good visibility”; these connections can certainly not be determined in a rigid manner, rather, they are somewhat vague, though this does not mean that they do not express some kind of „necessity”.

The cases just mentioned concern connections between events that occur simultaneously. But is it possible to foresee what is going to happen? At this point Edith Stein seems to come closer to Bergson again, holding that the conditions of the life force can be foreseen only in a vague and general manner, because the life force is different in each individual, and a forecast can be hazarded only if one knows the individual concerned, and even then it is only of empiric value¹⁵.

According to Edith Stein, therefore, there does not exist any kind of determinism in psychic life, even though we can there note some connections and therefore causal relationships; indeed, these enable us to note the presence in psychic life of a causality that is completely different from the exact causality characteristic of scientific thought; in the same way, a quantitative determination of the psychic states is altogether out of the question, because we are here concerned with a flow of qualitative states that can be recognized [only] in their essential structure; this is ultimately the real discriminant between the phenomenological reading

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

of the psyche proposed by Edith Stein and the analysis of Henri Bergson¹⁶.

In the I there is present also another series of phenomena that are characterized by their representing an intentional moving towards something; these are the „acts” (*Akte*) or intentional lived experiences (*intentionale Erlebnisse*) with which spiritual life commences. Even in psychic life it is possible to trace a first form of intentionality, but this is no more than outlined; if we examine some acts that we perform in everyday life, we shall realize the meaning of intentionality. With the meticulousness and clarity that distinguish her, Edith Stein gives us very precise indications to pinpoint them. Our eyes may be turned inwards to discover the acts present there and this, in its turn, is very important, because it enables us to understand all the others and also ourselves: here we have the act of reflection. Assuming a reflective or meditative attitude, we can commence the description of the acts: if we are concerned with an external object that presents itself as „transcendent”, we have an act that places us in relationship with what is outside ourselves – one could describe it, even though Edith Stein does not use this term, as an act of „perception”; in the case of external objects, moreover, we can relate various aspects of them in such a manner that they will no longer be merely one beside the other, but form part of a connection, before and after for example – as is the case of apperception – or we can put them all together – and here we have a „synthesis” – or, again, we can concern ourselves with the particular act that is represented by the „setting in motion of what comes after through what there is before” (*in-Bewegung-gesetzt-werden der späteren durch die früheren*), which is „motivation” (*Motivation*)¹⁷.

Edith Stein then continues with a sober and clear description of some lived experiences of consciousness, which – as we know – Husserl had already analyzed in a very pregnant manner in *Ideen*¹⁸. She repropose them here to suggest an approach to what is indicated as spiritual life.

¹⁶ Husserl was well aware of the affinities between his problematics and those considered by Bergson, to the point of affirming “We are the true Bergsonians”, by which he wanted to underscore that the phenomenological analyses clarified the questions posed by the French philosopher.

¹⁷ E. Stein, *Beiträge etc.*, op.cit., pp. 34-35.

¹⁸ E. Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie I*. Husserliana, Vol.III, p.55 and p. 56.

These particularly significant acts include the one of motivation, which – in her opinion – must not be limited to the ambit of the free acts, the acts of the will, but represents the structure of the entire dimension of intentional lived experiences.

Motivation

Motivation, in fact, presents itself as the type of link that exists between acts. We are not here concerned with a compenetration of simultaneous or successive phases of the flow of lived experiences and not even with an associative connection of lived experiences, but rather with an issuing of the one from the other, a manner in which the one completes itself or is so completed by virtue of the other. Given this relationship, the structure of the lived experiences among which there becomes established a relationship of motivation is such that they become configured as acts that have their origin in the pure I: the I performs one act because it has already performed the other. This can happen either consciously or unconsciously; an explicit motivation exists in the case in which one proceeds from the premises to the consequences, while an implicit motivation exists when in a mathematical demonstration we make use of a theorem without demonstrating it *ex novo*; it is clear that every explicit motivation becomes sedimented as implicit and that every implicit motivation is capable of being explicited¹⁹.

Implicit motivations occur in the ambit of perception; when we examine the knowledge of a thing that can be sensed, it becomes clear that having sensations is a first form of motivation, but we have a motivation relationship in the proper sense of the term when, face to face with some physical thing of which we can see only a part, we deem the existence of the other parts to be equally true, and this comprehension can eventually motivate a free movement that drives us to a verification through real perception. In the same way, something that is perceptively given may be the motive for believing in the existence of a thing and the belief in its existence may be what motivates our judgment regarding its existence; and in the ethical sphere, similarly, grasping a value may be the motive for the will and for acting²⁰.

¹⁹ E. Stein, *Beiträge etc.*, op.cit., pp. 35-36.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 36.

The relationship between act and motivation can be exemplified as follows: when consciousness turns to an object, it does not intend a void X, but something that has a content of determinate sense, as harbinger of a unitary consistency of being that is enclosed within it and, little by little, arrives at being given by fillings, and this is true not only of physical things, but also of our knowledge of propositions and the state of things. In the latter case, a state of things may form part of different logical connections – for that is what rational motivation consists of – but the ambit of the possibilities is limited and when the knowing subject oversteps this ambit, we come face to face with the irrational²¹.

In conclusion, we may note that the passage from one act to another takes place thanks to motivation and it is for the same reason that in the flow of the lived experiences there becomes configured the sum total of the acts and the motivations that underlie them; the motivation therefore serves to justify a series of acts that in the cognitive ambit regard the „turning to”, the taking of position and, consequently, accepting and negating as „free” acts.

The analysis made by Edith Stein, very subtle and limpid in its passages, which explains some essential connections and is well coordinated in the succession of these connections, cannot here be repropounded in its entirety; what merits being mentioned here is the justification she gives for ranking among the „free” acts the important act that is constituted by the epoché, which, as we know, constitutes the starting point of all phenomenological inquiry; its motivation is to be sought in the fact that something is not worthy of being believed when there is a contrast between motives and reasons that induce us to sustain it; for example, if somebody who brings us an item of news is not trustworthy, we would have a „reasonable” motive for epoché, suspension of judgment, because there are reasons that prevent us from considering the messenger as a credible person; and there is also the case in which we do not want to believe the news simply because it is unpleasant or in which our behaviour is not determined by „objective” reasons²².

In general, one may sustain that when motive (*Motiv*) and reason (*Grund*) concord, the motivation is reasonable (*vernünftig*), just as non-credibility

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 45.

in the example is a reasonable motive of epoché. It is therefore very important grasping the connection between credibility, reasonability and acceptance, that is to say, recognition and then affirmation. From the theoretical point of view, in fact, affirmation concerns the state of things (*Sachverhalt*), and in this case we are face to face with a free act in which we „recognize” a state of things and therefore we believe – and the belief in this case is wholly intellectual – that the state of things „is thus”.

Free acts always presuppose a motive, but do not determine an action, which needs an impulse that is not motivated, and in this way we enter the sphere of willing. Edith Stein makes us understand quite clearly why epoché as the initial moment of the phenomenological attitude – but, more generally, we could also speak of philosophical attitude – is a theoretical and practical act, recognition of something that is problematical, a lack of clarity of the state of things and decision to change the attitude of believing, that is to say, a voluntary act of suspending the erstwhile belief to assume a possibility of really seeing the thing, the *Sache*, to go to things themselves, *zu den Sachen selbst*, as Husserl put it, or to understand the *Sachverhalt*, as Edith Stein stressed in the wake of A. Reinach.

Concentrating attention to the sphere of willing and acting, the inquiry tends to indicate the acts that can properly be said to be free acts: they are such if they proceed from an intention (*Vorsatz*) and are guided by a „fiat”, by a decision taken in an appropriate moment; naturally, every intention calls for a voluntary taking of position, but not every taking of position is of itself a free act, because one may want without really proposing to do something. Consequently, one should note that, in accordance with the indications of D. von Hildebrand, a proposal is a „willing” that has a capacity, a „being able to”, as its necessary condition; the ambit of free acts is limited to those – and only those – that can proceed from an intention and are guided by a „fiat”²³.

Only in the case of free acts does the motivation manifest itself in a pregnant manner; this had been sustained by A. Pfänder, who deemed it to be really present only in the case in which there is a relationship between a motive required by the will and an act of the will founded

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-52.

thereon, that is to say, when the I does not just feel a need, but lives this need within it and thus „fills” it, realizes it with an act of the will²⁴.

But this does not mean that the motivation is not to a certain extent present also in straining or tending towards something (*Streben*), albeit in a manner different from the way it is present in willing, where it is associated with a free impulse, an intention²⁵.

In spite of the distinction between causality and motivation, there is a connection between the two moments. Proposing an example that is particularly dear to her, Edith Stein shows how causal factors and motivations can come into play together: the joy that somebody procures me will motivate me to form the intention to procure him joy in turn, but a feeling that suddenly gets the better of me prevents me carrying out something that would be motivated in a reasonable manner²⁶.

Two levels can therefore be identified in the life sphere, one of which is sensual (*sinnlich*) and the other spiritual (*geistig*); on the one hand, they are connected in such a way that the spiritual force is conditioned by the sensual one; as a general rule, in fact, freshness of the spirit disappears as the body tires; but one can also note the independence of the two moments, for example, I can recognize the value of a work of art without being able to become enthusiastic about it²⁷.

The life of the psyche therefore seems to be the combined action of several forces: the sensual force, which presents itself in relation to the learning of sensual data and in sensual impulses, and the spiritual force, which is a force that is wholly new and different from the sensual force and manifests itself in spiritual activities and capacities; but it can unfold only with the collaboration of the sensual force; the latter has its roots in nature and this justifies the psychophysical connection, that is to say, the link between psyche, body and material nature. Through the spiritual force the psyche opens to the objective world and can acquire new impulses; the nourishment of the spiritual force of the individual psyche may derive from an „objective” spiritual world, a world of values, or from the spiritual force of other subjects and from the divine spirit. In

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74.

any case, it is necessary to pinpoint a nucleus (*Kern*) subtracted from all physical and psychic conditioning and constituted by the capacity of willing, the sphere of free acts²⁸.

Psychology and the sciences of the spirit

The analysis so far made enables Edith Stein to establish the link that exists between psychology and the spiritual sciences. Taking position with respect to the principal German theoreticians of her time, i.e. Münsterberg, Natorp, Windelband and Rickert²⁹, she first of all justifies the inquiry into the psyche on the two fronts of empirical psychology and pure psychology. Though the latter does not wholly coincide with phenomenology, it makes use of the essential description proposed by phenomenology to identify the fundamental concepts and highlight the peculiar sphere of the psyche, so that research into pure *Erlebnisse* is a preliminary condition for understanding what is psychic³⁰. Secondly, the analyses carried out enable her to describe the peculiar field of the spirit and are thus in their turn preliminary to an understanding of the human sciences. This makes it possible to distinguish the two ambits, i.e. of psychology and the human sciences, and within these it is also possible to separate the empirical dimension from the pure dimension. We therefore have to clarify why at the end of the essay we are here considering, in a paragraph entitled “*Die prinzipielle Scheidung von psychischem und geistigen Sein, Psychologie und Geisteswissenschaften*”³¹, Edith Stein places the analyses she has made under the title of “*geisteswissenschaftliche Psychologie*”, which seems to coincide with “*apriorische Psychologie*”³². The justification of these definitions is found in the fact that the life of the psyche is the result of the combined action of the sensual force and the spiritual force, so that it is possible to identify the dimension of the *Seele*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

²⁹ Apart from Bergson, the principal thinkers with whom Edith Stein took issue were Münsterberg, Rickert and Windelband, to whom she dedicated long paragraphs, acutely analyzing their position with respect to psychology and the human sciences.

³⁰ This motive present in the text had already been proposed by Edith Stein in her doctorate thesis, *Zum Problem der Einfühlung*. Halle 1917, and in the book that was recently published on the basis of a long text she had written in the period 1917-1932, now conserved in the Brussels archives, *Einführung in die Philosophie, Werke*. Vol.XIII.

³¹ E. Stein, *Beiträge etc.*, *op.cit.*, p. 267 et seq.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 274.

(soul) and that of the *Geist* (spirit). It is clear that the bond between body, psyche and spirit is very strong in the human being and one simply cannot do without any one of these elements. Another problem that comes to the fore is the one concerning the sphere in which theoretical elaboration is carried out. When examining the operation of putting between parentheses (epoché), we have already noted that the activity of rational motivation is peculiar of the spirit, and one can therefore sustain that that theoretical reflection occurs at this level. If the human sciences concern the individual human expressions in the spiritual sense, thus giving rise to specific inquiry sectors – such as history, the social sciences, law – philosophico-phenomenological research, even though it delves more deeply, always involves a substantially spiritual activity. In this sense, if we here have an analysis that grasps the a priori structures of spiritual reality and cannot do without considering the totality of the human being and his psychic life, this justifies a research that self-defines itself „psychology as science of the spirit”. But all this within the limits here indicated, because psychology in itself is undoubtedly not a science of the spirit, though the psychic states, on the other hand, will not be validly understood unless and until one arrives, as is demonstrated in the essay under consideration, at the motivation and therefore the spiritual sphere.

Having thus delineated the ambit of the psyche and that of the spirit, and having established the relationship between the disciplines that study these sectors and stand in need of an essential justification of the phenomenological type, it seems clear in Edith Stein that she is aware not only of the validity of some of the results attained, but also of the inexhaustibility of the search. Though the object has been identified, one cannot conclude to have completed its description; this is the fundamental argument she adopts to confute the possibility of a transcendental deduction from the idea of psychology as an exact science of all the laws concerning the ambit of the psyche.

Polemizing, above all, with the positivist claim of delineating a theory that provides all the conditions of possibility of a science in such a manner that, after having identified a part and the structure of that part, one may proceed to grasp the totality of future events by extension, Edith Stein attains various objectives. First of all, the impossibility of founding psychology as an exact science in conformity with a scientific model bound up with physics, and secondly the impossibility of moving from a constitutive science to deduce its internal components and this in

opposition, albeit not explicitly so, to Kant's deduction and the connection between Kant's position and the positivist mentality with its proclaimed scientism³³. One might say that just as Kant thought that he could justify time and space by moving from arithmetic and geometry, in the same way psychology as an exact science could move from psychic causality and seek to trace this causality in a determinist manner in all lived experiences, in association as in motivation; and from these causal connections it is held that one could recognize the entire structure of psychic life, reducing it to laws, so that it would become possible to construct a concrete psychology.

In this manner of proceeding there is present a double movement that sets out from the assumptions of a theory and then seek to justify this selfsame theory with elements that have been obtained within that theory, thus proposing a deductive extension to the whole of a rigidly structured ambit. As far as Edith Stein is concerned, it is not just a question of subtracting psychology and, more generally, the human sciences from the exemplarity of this model, but to confute the model also in relation to the natural sciences themselves; according to her, the difficulty of exhausting a search by imprisoning it in a theory should be made clear to the physicist by the very conflict of the theories. It is therefore essential to turn the inquiry attitude upside down and, rather than proceeding from the method to the structure of an object, one should allow the method to be indicated by the structure of the object.

Here we come face to face with a very clear delineation of phenomenological inquiry, which lets itself be guided by things - and therefore by the object - rather than by theory and therefore puts analysis in the place of deduction. Here we have a fundamental critique of the structures of Western thought, at least as it has become concretized in scientific inquiry and in the philosophies that move from above, *von oben*, a critique that in this specific sector was undoubtedly commenced by Husserl, but then continued by Edith Stein in a direction in which, even more strongly than in Husserl's case, there is no separation of analysis, intuition and essential research. This leads to a reading of reality that grasps it in its totality, but this totality is not a circle that encloses everything, identifying a point of unitary theoretical force, as could be history, the economy, reason, the unconscious, but a

³³ More particularly, this objection was levelled against Münsterberg in Annex II: *Münsterberg's versuch der Begründung einer exakten Psychologie*.

totality that becomes delineated by expansion in a twofold direction of further delving and gradual definition from the part – analyzed ever more accurately and constituted by nature, by human beings, both as individuals and as community³⁴ – to the whole that it reveals within itself and to which it refers in order to be comprehended.

In the series of these references nothing is either exhausted or concluded, the beyond to which each moment alludes cannot be theorized beforehand; it is not a question of dominating with thought in order to grasp and close, but rather patiently searching and following roads that lead afar. This is the new manner of proceeding that has left its imprint in twentieth-century philosophic search precisely thanks to the presence of phenomenological inquiry, to which Edith Stein made a valid contribution, attaining original results.

Phenomenological description of the soul as common terrain for psychology, anthropological philosophy and mysticism

Phenomenological analysis of the soul forms part of the essential description of the human being that Edith Stein had already delineated in her graduation dissertation dedicated to empathy, *Zum Problem der Einfühlung*, and was further developed, as we have just seen, by means of inquiries that concentrically tend to delve further into the life of the psyche and of the spirit in *Psychology and the spiritual sciences – Contributions for a philosophic foundation*. Though the realities taken into consideration are the psyche and the spirit, Edith Stein is well aware that they are the object of inquiry of a number of disciplines that became delineated in the course of the nineteenth century, namely psychology and the sciences that concern themselves with human spiritual productions, including – for example – historiography, cultural anthropology, law, sociology. All these are configured as partial searches that have their value, but have to be founded on an accurate examination of the significance of the human being that can be furnished only by philosophical inquiry or, better, phenomenological inquiry; the latter, in fact, tends to highlight what is essential in the examined phenomena and therefore what is essential in the life of the psyche and the spirit.

³⁴ This is clearly brought out in some of her works, some of which have already been cited, from her dissertation on empathy right through to the text entitled *Über den Staat* (in *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*, VII, 1925) and *Einführung in die Philosophie*.

In this way one can understand the references to psychology as science that are to be found at the end of the comment made by Edith Stein on a work that would seem wholly extraneous to philosophical reasoning, being a work of mysticism, namely *Die Seelenburg* (The Interior Castle) by Saint Theresa of Avila³⁵ and one can readily understand also the warning regarding the risk that psychology is running in describing psychic phenomena without making reference to the soul, that is to say, to a well configured structure that can be highlighted only by a serious philosophical inquiry.

What the text about Saint Theresa seeks to underscore is that it is not only philosophical search that can indicate a road for entering in interiority and understanding it, but this can be done also – and one might even say above all – along the road travelled and proposed by the mystics, and therefore by Saint Theresa.

Saint Theresa acts as a guide along a road from which she is seemingly far removed, a stranger, namely the road of an intellectual search, but what Edith Stein seeks to sustain is that there are many roads that can lead to truth, including also partial truths, like that relating to the structure of human interiority and its possible apertures³⁶.

This approach is already present in her work *Endliches und Ewiges Sein* (Finite and Eternal Being) and, more particularly, in the part dedicated to the Image of the Trinity in Creation. Analyzing the personal being of man, Edith Stein repropose the results of her previous inquiries, underscoring that “man’s being is *leiblich* – *seelisch* – *geistig* (corporeal, psychic, spiritual)”³⁷

We can take this first description as our essential guiding thread, trying to find further clarifications in her texts.

³⁵ E. Stein, *Die Seelenburg – Darstellung der hl. Teresia von Jesus*. Works VI, Nauwelaerts-Herder, Louvain-Freiburg 1962. The essay was intended to constitute an appendix to *Endliches und ewiges Sein*.

³⁶ Cfr. A. Ales Bello, *Edith Stein – La passione per la verità*. Edizioni Messaggero di Padova, Padua 1999².

³⁷ E. Stein, *Endliches und ewiges Sein – Versuch eines Aufstiegs zum Sinn des Seins*, Works II. Nauwelaerts-Herder, Louvain-Freiburg 1950, p. 336. As regards the treatment of the soul, see also the following texts by Edith Stein: *Die ontische Struktur der Person und ihre erkenntnis-theoretische Problematik*. Works VI; *Einführung in die Philosophie*. Works XIII, Herder, Freiburg 1991.

We have already noted that, contrary to the tendency of psychological science to do without the soul, Edith Stein deemed it urgent that it should be taken into consideration. It is quite true that the term soul (*Seele*) is used in a fluctuating and not always univocal manner in her writings and creates some difficulty of comprehension, but we shall see that her intentions are very clear. Indeed, in the aforementioned analyses it is said that the human being possesses psyche (*Psyche*) and spirit (*Geist*); now, the term *Seele* is sometimes referred to the union of psyche and spirit, at others only to one of these moments. This linguistic oscillation is justified by the fact that phenomenological analyses tend to consider the soul not as a monolithic unit, but as a complex terrain of acts and operations that have also different qualities; some of these constitute the psyche, which has to be referred to everything that we find within ourselves by way of impulses, tendencies and spontaneous assumptions of position that cannot be eliminated, though they can eventually be controlled by a series of free and voluntary acts; since the latter enable us to take decisions, they have peculiar characteristics and therefore form part of a different sphere that is defined as spirit. The psychic and spiritual complex is different from corporeity (bodiliness) and, wanting to use a unitary term, can be called soul.

While the bodily and psychic spheres make us similar to the world of the higher animals, the spiritual sphere characterizes us in a peculiar manner and one can therefore understand the definition cited above, namely that “man’s being is *leiblich, seelich, geistig*”, which seeks to tell us that our body is animated by a psyche and further enlivened by the spirit. This also justifies the affirmation that immediately follows the indicated definition: “Inasmuch as man’s soul is spirit, it rises above itself in his spiritual life”, but even though man distinguishes himself from the animals, he is not a pure spirit, and therefore: “... man’s spirit is conditioned from above and below: it has its roots in his material structure, which it animates and forms, giving it its bodily form. The human person carries and comprises „his” body and „his” soul, but at the same time is carried and comprised within them. His spiritual life rises from a dark depth, like the flame of a candle that shines forth, but is sustained by a material that of itself does not shine. It shines without being wholly light: the human spirit is visible of itself, but is not completely transparent; it is capable of illuminating other things, but not of perfectly penetrating them”³⁸.

³⁸ E. Stein, *Endliches und ewiges sein*, op.cit., p. 337.

Given its intermediate nature, one might say in the wake of the humanist Pico della Mirandola that the human being has the possibility of elevating himself or regressing and it is his soul that decides which it is going to be. Continuing with her analysis of the soul, Edith Stein provides us with a very exhaustive description, indicating it as the „space” at the centre of the totality made up of body, psyche and spirit; consequently, it has a sensual aspect and acts in the body, a spiritual aspect that enables it to issue from within itself and establish an intelligent contact with the external world; but inasmuch as it is soul in the strictest sense, it dwells within itself and the I dwells within it. The definition thus becomes larger and englobes a new element: the I, which can move freely within the soul, sometimes tending outwards, sometimes inwards. One can thus understand that, since the soul is a space and the I has this possibility of traversing it from the outside inwards or viceversa, the comparison with the interior castle is possible and even inevitable; it is a castle that comprises many dwellings³⁹. The image proposed by Saint Theresa „illuminates” the essential description given on the philosophical level with a new light and it is therefore easy to establish a kind of circularity between the two moments.

Certainly, Saint Theresa was not interested in further philosophical delving, in analyzing the structure of the soul, the possibility of entering it and understanding it also by means of rational research, she simply described the experience of a calling: „... as the Lord calls the soul that has lost itself in the external world, attracts it increasingly to Himself, until He can unite Himself with it at its centre”⁴⁰. But it does interest Edith Stein, because she never ceases to be a philosopher or to want to understand to what extent experience of the faith and even mystic experience can be instruments for understanding the human being.

We may therefore conclude by observing that the study of the soul, subtracted from the dominion of psychology and carried out on the phenomenological terrain, serves as an indispensable basis for returning to this selfsame psychology with greater insight for delineating a convincing philosophical anthropology and understanding the religious – and more particularly the mystic – experience lived by the soul.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 344.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 344, Note 33.