

The Vision of the Whole and Spiritual Life in Edith Stein

La visión del todo y la vida espiritual en Edith Stein

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Abstract

The Positivism approach to human knowledge has barred us from seeing the «meaningful whole» and, consequently, has produced not only a progressive fragmentation of knowledge, but also a fragmentation of the understanding that each human has of oneself. This fragmented view of the human self has hindered the understanding of one's life as a *continuum* and the unity of one's action. At the same time, the fragmented vision of one's being and action barres the access to the personal spiritual dimension and to the understanding of oneself as a «meaningful whole». Under such epistemological and anthropological fragmentation, modern culture does not provide enough elements to the contemporary human being to access through graces to a sacramental life, that is, to a spiritual life. The sacramental life is the

Resumen

La imposibilidad de la visión del «todo de sentido» que introdujo el positivismo en relación a lo que es el conocimiento humano ha producido progresivamente no sólo una fragmentación del saber, sino también una fragmentación de la comprensión que cada persona humana tiene de sí misma. Esta visión fragmentada le ha dificultado la misma comprensión de su vida como un *continuum*, así como la unidad de su acción. A su vez, la visión fragmentada de su ser y de su acción le impide acceder a su dimensión espiritual y a comprenderse desde sí como un «todo de sentido». Bajo dicha fragmentación epistemológica y antropológica, la cultura moderna no proporciona elementos al hombre contemporáneo para acceder a una vida sacramental, si se comprende la vida sacramental como la participación en la misma vida divina

participation in the Divine Life (grace) from which the Holy Spirit acts in the human person, then his grace and human freedom can act together without opposition. Under the perspective of such fragmented view of the human being in contemporary culture, the sacramental life is presented as lifeless (without spirit) religious practices and not as a life in and by God, through the reciprocal gift between the Holy Trinity and the human person.

Keywords: Edith Stein, grace, spiritual life, vision of the whole.

(gracia), desde la cual el Espíritu Santo actúa en la persona, y en donde la libertad humana y la gracia pueden actuar conjuntamente sin contraponerse. Bajo dicha fragmentación, la vida sacramental se reduce a un funcionalismo de prácticas religiosas sin vida (sin espíritu), y no a vivir en y por Dios, en el don recíproco entre las Tres Divinas Personas y la persona humana.

Palabras clave: Edith Stein, gracia, vida espiritual, visión del todo.

Introduction

One of the problems introduced by the psychological logic of Positivism in the area of the knowledge of the person, is the inability of the contemporary human being to understand oneself as well as the other as a «meaningful whole». Built on Husserl's criticism of Psychologism, this manuscript will examine why Positivism prevents the *vision of the whole*. In addition, it will discuss how Edith Stein's phenomenological proposal shows an understanding of the person as a «meaningful whole», as she develops a dynamic structure of the human person where body-psyche-spirit interact in unity, and it explains specifically how the human spirit is a dynamic principle. Edith Stein's conception of the human spirit as a dynamism that permeates the entire life of the human person allows the understanding of the sacramental life as the participation in the Divine Life itself. This insight vivifies the entire life of the human person and avoids reducing the sacraments to a way to achieve concrete results.

Overcoming the «typified human» of Positivism from Husserl's Criticism

Skepticism adopts the conceptualization of human action from Psychologism and, in principle, leads to a fragmented view of the human person's being. The introduction of the experimental scientific method to the study of the human psyche or action has caused a fragmentation in the knowledge of it, and, consequently, in the understanding that the contemporary human has of oneself. A briefly review of Husserl's criticism of Skepticism will assert the possibility of acquiring knowledge of a human person's being as a «meaningful whole».

In order to contextualize, it is important to note that Husserl's criticism presented in *Logical Investigations* is framed in a cultural

climate characterized by a tendency to make all products and validation of reason dependent on the human psyche structure. Even nowadays, we have not overcome this cultural climate, given by the undiscerning use of neuroscience, as if all the contemporary human's questions could be answered by the study of the nervous system. Therefore, to ask oneself about the validity of these postulates simply means to ask oneself about the biological and psychic principles that support the universality of certain rules of human thought and action.

Husserl focuses his criticism on Positivism through the question about the need of our reasoning: Why certain premises are concluded or not concluded from certain consequences; that is, what makes our reasoning necessary or not. The resolution of Psychologism affirms that our reasoning is governed by certain rules that discriminate between rational and arbitrary thought. However, this need or arbitrariness depends on the psychic constitution that, in fact, characterizes them. According to Positivism, the logical principle is justified by understanding the mental processes that take place when something is thought or acted out. Thus, the need for reasoning is governed by the «mental (cerebral) fact» and not by a rule or principle that is beyond the facticity of the mental process or mental event.

Therefore, the need for all reasoning depends on the psychic constitution, which is by definition «factual»; so, if this structures were different, then we would think differently. This is as much as saying that logic depends on psychology, which John Stuart Mill clearly states:

Logic is not a different science from psychology and it is coordinated with it. As a science, it is a part or branch of psychology, which is distinguished from it both as part of the whole and as the art of science. Logic owes its theoretical foundations wholly to psychology and contains both this science and what is necessary to establish the rules of art (Mill, 1979: 451).

In regards to this posture, Husserl argues that deducing logical principles from facts is invalid because facts are «accidental», and

consequently, they may or may not be different from what they already are. Hence, they could be other facts or logical laws, although these would also be accidental, relative to the facts that establishes them (Husserl, 2001: 56-59).

Husserl argues that these principles are not valid because science requires the need to be science, and the fact cannot give the need to science because, as mentioned earlier in the text, the fact may or may not be (the fact is contingent). Therefore, the psychological logic based on «facts» leads to a relativism, which is, in fact, a skepticism in turn, because the notion of truth is melted in the variety of factual situations. So, if truth depends on a certain type of psychic structure, this means that there is no need, other than physical causality. This relativism, which is a skepticism, turns the being of the world into an enigma, since the existence of objects is reduced to the events in the mind.

Even though Husserl made this criticism and already visualized the crisis of the sciences of the spirit more than 100 years ago, in our culture we continue to look for the answers to the daily anthropological questions in measurable «facts»: chemical substances, biological structures, cerebral electricity, etc.

Within the globalized world, the only valid answers to the questions of «what we are» or «what is happening to us» are those produced by the only method considered scientific: the experimental scientific method. Nevertheless, this method, following its own principles, can only offer a knowledge of «types» regarding the human being, that is to say, the sum or quantification of «common» characteristics under certain measurement parameters. Evidently, this kind of knowledge will never have enough elements to answer the question about the specificity of the personal being, which is unique within diversity.

Therefore, in contemporary culture, the human being has no epistemological or anthropological elements to understand herself as a «meaningful whole» and in her uniqueness within diversity. Also, the contemporary human being does not find ways to re-establish harmony with herself, with others and with her environment. Therefore, the present-day human is lost in a mass of data where she

has to answer the questions: Who am I? What is happening to me? The human person tries to find a place in the different typifications of her fragmented being that was thrown at her by experimental science. The contemporary person does not have better means to choose her career or partner, or to identify her gender, or to assess her intelligence, or many other typifications than those given by the «tests» made from reagents. Thus, presented with a series of fragmented data that cannot be associated with each other, and even less form a unity, then as a result, the contemporary human being avoids existential questions through drug abuse, evasive lifestyles such as consumerism, or the practice of religiosity as a «task» instead of looking for her wellness.

The human person as a «meaningful whole»

To readdress Husserl approach through Edith Stein, it is necessary to affirm or «re-affirm» the possibility of an essential knowledge (vision of essences) of the human person. The intuition of essences enables the knowing of a person in her essence, without having a previous perform of an analysis of her parts. This intuition allows a vision of the whole; even if that whole is not exhaustively known in all its parts, or if it is not compared with a large number of individuals of the same species. Edith Stein states:

According to the phenomenological conception, philosophical evidence is not obtained through induction. It is not the philosopher's task to examine and compare a certain number of material things and to expose the common qualities in order to determine the «essence» of the material thing. Through such «*abstraction*» the essence is not reached; on the other hand, a plurality is not necessary; eventually, an exemplary singular intuition is sufficient to conclude the «*abstraction*», which is of a completely different type from that previously described and allows to truly reach the essence. The abstraction presently addressed consists of «*dispensing with*» that which relates to the

thing in a purely «causal» mode; in other words, that which can be diverse, without the thing ceasing to be a material thing; and, in a positive sense, it is a focus on what concerns the material thing as such, on what belongs to its *ratio* (as Thomas likes to say) or belongs to his idea (Stein, 2014:134-135).¹

When Edith Stein refers to the elimination of the purely causal, she is precisely pointing out that all causal relations proper to the natural sciences, which are contingent, are not considered. Instead of that, such abstraction overlooks these causal relations to focus on what pertains to its *ratio*, that is, to what makes it *what it is*. This abstraction is carried out through a description of one's own characteristics, regardless of what is causal (contingent), i.e., of what is not apodictic. Unlike the other way of understanding abstraction, to make an abstraction as it is understood in phenomenology, it is not necessary to assess, compare and «extract» the essence of a multitude of similar individuals.

Through the intuition of essences, the human person is presented to our experience as a person, it is immediately presented to us as who she is in a unitary way. At a first glance, I do not know something «undetermined» not identified, which I will later identify by resorting to cultural prejudices coming from culture, previous empirical data, or concepts already acquired, in order to identify a series of characteristics of what I have already known as a person and finally, identify the object as a personal being. As Husserl clarifies,

1 "Nacht phänomenologischer Auffassung wird philosophische Einsicht nicht durch Induktion gewonnen. Es ist, um bei dem gewählten Beispiel zu bleiben, nicht die Aufgabe des Philosophen, eine Reihe von materiellen Dingen zu beobachten und zu vergleichen und die gemeinsamen. Eigenschaften herauszuheben, wenn er das «Wesen» des materiellen Dinges feststellen will. Durch solche Vergleichung und «Abstraktion» gelangt man nicht zum Wesen; andererseits ist keine Mehrheit nötig, es genügt evtl. eine einzige exemplarische Anschauung, um daran die ganz anders geartete «Abstraktion» zu vollziehen, die in Wahrheit der Zugang zum Wesen ist. Diese Abstraktion ist ein «Absehen» von dem, was dem Ding bloß «zufällig» zukommt, d.h. was auch anders sein könnte, ohne daß das Ding aufhörte ein materielles Ding zu sein; und positiv eine Einstellung des Blicks auf das, was dem materiellen Ding als solchem zukommt, was zur *ratio* des materiellen Dinges (wie Thomas gern sagt) oder zu seiner Idee gehört" [The English translation is mine].

it is not through the induction of a series of characteristics that I become aware that this being who is approaching or facing me is a person. Such an induction would base knowledge on prejudices; one would verify whether an experience coincides with the concept (pre-judgment) that one already has, in order to later be able to make the judgment: «this is a person», after having identified the specific characteristics of the concept of person with the presence of the object that is presented. Thus, the phenomenological and the eidetic reductions are moments of essential knowledge: “Strictly speaking, we have not lost anything but rather have gained the whole of absolute being which, rightly understood, contains within itself, all worldly transcendencies” (Husserl, 1983: 113).

Spiritual dynamism of the human person

Edith Stein concretizes the possibility of understanding the person as a «meaningful whole» in her approach to the human person as a dynamic unity of body-psyche-spirit, particularly in relation to the specificity of the person’s being, which is her spiritual life.

Consciousness is not shown to us only as a causally conditioned event, but it is shown simultaneously as that which constitutes an Object; therefore, consciousness is out of the purely natural relationship and confronts it as a correlate of the objective world, that is, consciousness is not nature but spirit (Stein, 2004: 123).²

Edith Stein understands that human life specifically comes out of the own (rigid) rules of nature, and she further states that there are acts that are proper of the spirit within the acts of consciousness.

2 “Die «Lebensgefühle», Frische und Mattigkeit, und sinnliche Gefühle, wie ein körperlicher Schmerz, sind das, worin die Einheit von Leib und Seele am unmittelbarsten erlebt werden. Sie sind bewußt, als mir zugehörig erlebt, aber im ganzen Leib oder an einer bestimmten Stelle des Leibes lokalisiert erlebt. Das bewußte Erleben ist das Personal-Geistige daran; und es zeigt sich gerade hier, wie der ganze Leib davon durchdrungen ist” [The English translation is mine].

Therefore, Stein notes that, in order to understand the own life of the human being, the self—which, up to this moment, has lived in the flow of data that she «owned» without «looking at it» yet—must open now her spiritual gaze and go towards something that is presented to her, which becomes an «object» to her. Going towards that something (immanent data) is *intentio*, which is built on the foundation of immanent data (Stein, 2010: 35). The highest form of the spirit is actuality exercised in intentional activity. Intentionality, intelligibility, and personality are shown as specific hallmarks of spiritual life (Stein, 2005: 83-84).

In the field of human acts, a new type of connection is presented where intentionality takes on a totally peculiar character. In apprehension, we no longer look only at a series of continuously flowing data, or merely at a succession of separate apprehensions from singular images, but now we have an: *apprehension*, *synthesis* and *motivation* (Stein, 2010: 36-37): “Motivation is the legality of spiritual life; the network of the spiritual subjects’ experiences is a whole of meaning experienced (in an originary or empathic manner) and, as such, understandable” (Stein, 1989: 96).³

Therefore, the action proper to spiritual life occurs not by «rigid» relationships (natural causality) but by motivational relationships. Evidently, motivation is not reduced to the field of free (voluntary) acts in this context, but it is referred as the setting in motion in the field of intentional experiences (Husserl, 1989: 231-232) because the self in the spiritual life is the subject of intentionality; that is, intentionality does not only occur within the subject but in a particular way (Stein, 2010: 35).

This peculiarity in the dynamism of motivation lies in the fact that an experience comes from another one, that implies that these experiences do not simply happen in sequence, nor do they occur through associative union. Peculiarly, motivation is an experience

3 “Motivation ist die Gesetzlichkeit des geistigen Lebens, der Erlebniszusammenhang, geistiger Subjekte ist ein erlebtes (originär oder einfühlungsmäßig) Sinnnganzes und als solches verständlich” (Stein, 2008: 114).

fulfilled on the basis of another experience; figuratively, experiences are set one on top of the other, bonding one to another one.

Accordingly, the motivated act has its origin in the nucleus of the person, it is originary; therefore, this act is an «impulse» or a movement towards «the other», «the external», or the «object». The self does not originate the motivated act, since the self is a «continuous flow of experiences»; thus, it is the spirit that begins the motivated act. The dynamism of the human spirit, as it follows the legality of the motivation, is a relational dynamism where two reciprocal poles (not opposite) are present: subject-object, *noesis-noema*, I-You.

If the human spirit is understood as a continuous dynamism (alive) that unifies the entire life of the human person and integrates the body and the psyche, which are subject to another type of legality; then, this spiritual dynamism occupies the entire life of the person, due to the fact that the human has a personal nucleus.⁴ The understanding of the spirit as a life-giving dynamism encompasses the entire life of the person through an internal dynamism that manifests itself outwards.

The interaction between the human spirit and grace in Edith Stein

As explained earlier in the text, in her understanding of the structure of the human person, Edith Stein emphasizes motivated acts such as those that are specifically spiritual. This remark allows to not limit spiritual acts to those that are directly performed by intelligence and will, instead of that, the actions of the intellect and will can be considered spiritual acts, but they are not the only ones. The understanding of the unity of the human action integrated by the intentionality of the personal nucleus opens up new anthropological possibilities for a better understanding of the action of grace in the human person.

In her work *Die Ontische Struktur der Person und ihre Erkenntnistheoretische Problematik*, Stein shows “on the one hand her vocation to

4 Edith Stein provides a «new» concept called the «personal nucleus», which integrates the entire «living» of the human person.

philosophical research and on the other the path towards the center of human interiority, in which the finite and the eternal meet” (Ales Bello, 1999: 10). As pointed out earlier in the text, the human spirit has a motivational dynamism where the acts of intelligence and will are not the only ones that enable and give rise to freedom. Edith Stein’s explanation of the ontic structure of the human person highlights the presence of the within-without dynamism, which permeates the entire person’s action. Within this dynamism, Stein distinguishes the psychic life from the spiritual life precisely in the liberation of the natural-spontaneous. Hence, the spiritual life is the life of the liberated soul, but this liberation is not given by the simple use of free will. Free will is also limited in itself because it is a self-determination, that for the soul is an essentially diverse structure:

In contraposition to the natural-spontaneous life of the soul, there is a life with an essentially different structure, which we want to call *liberated* [*befreite*]: the life of the soul that does not come from the outside, but it is guided *from on high*. This *from on high* is simultaneously from within because for the soul to be elevated in the kingdom of heaven means to be totally implanted in itself and vice versa: it cannot find secure support in itself without being elevated above itself precisely towards the kingdom that is on high. While it is realized in itself and, for this reason, anchored on high, it is *fenced off* at the same time, withdrawn from the impressions of the world and left without defenses (Stein, 2016: 328-329).⁵

5 “Dem natürlich-naiven Seelenleben stellen wir eines von wesentlich anderer Struktur gegenüber, das wir (mit einem noch zu klärenden Ausdruck) das *befreite* nennen wollen. Das Leben der Seele, die nicht von außen getrieben, sondern *von oben geleitet* wird. Das *von oben* ist zugleich ein *von innen*. Denn in das Reich der Höhe erhoben werden, bedeutet für die Seele ganz in sich hineingesetzt werden. Und umgekehrt: sie kann nicht bei sich selbst festen Fuß fassen, ohne über sich selbst- eben in das Reich der Höhe-erhoben zu werden. Indem sie in sich selbst hineingezogen und damit in der Höhe verankert wird, wird sie zugleich *umfriedet*, den Eindrücken der Welt und dem wehrlosen Preisgegebenheit entzogen”.

Evidently, there are other laws that rule in the realm of the spirit; these laws were initiated in the understanding of the human person structure as an inside-outside dynamism where the self is constituted from the You. However, the laws of the inside and outside are overcome because, in this relationship with the *on high*, —with the spiritual sphere—, the Other performs from within the human person, which empties one’s soul to replenish it with spirit. Meanwhile, the laws of the spirit also go beyond the egological position that the psychophysical individual cannot forsake in the empathic act: “Abandoning oneself to a spirit has a double meaning: entering a spiritual sphere and allowing one self to be filled by it” (Stein, 2016: 345).⁶

Thereby, grace understood as participation in the life of God, which can act in the human person due to one’s spiritual being, would not «enter» into the human person’s life in a psychic structure, but rather in a spiritual one. In this spiritual structure, the human spirit and Divine Spirit come together in a unifying act that transcends the egological limits. Therefore, Edith Stein refers to the action of grace in the human person as something that it is not only originated in the person, but moves «from within». This transcendence introduces an innovative anthropological element, since such an understanding of the human spirit explains in a better way how the binomial freedom-grace can occur. Indeed, the spiritual act is a motivated act that comes from within, which elucidates the words of Jesus Christ in John’s Gospel that refers to the action of the Holy Spirit: “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So, it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (St. John, 3, 8).

Grace is best illustrated as a force (a wind) that joins another wind, and then they move together. Human action is not annulled, for the liberated soul needs to be master of itself. However, the initial force or impulse does not come from the human spirit, but from an initiation from other than the self in which it is installed —one could say— in the inner center of the human person. Therefore, the

6 “[...] als Unterwerfung im strengen Sinne vollzogen sein: er stellt sich kraft eines freien Aktes in den Dienst jener Sphäre und ihres Herrn” [The English translation is mine].

Divine Spirit vivifies from within, and its laws of movement surpass the laws of nature, the rigid laws of physics. Thereby, the Divine Spirit acts simultaneously as a centrifugal and centripetal force, where the centrifugal force of the personal nucleus and the centripetal force of grace are not opposed, but united in the same living person.

With this understanding of the human person's life, structure and dynamism, and an approach that emphasizes motivated acts such as those specifically spiritual, we could better understand how grace works not in the human person, but in conjunction or in union with the action of the human persona, which «participate in the divine life itself». Therefore, the action of grace in our being is not like a conjure or a connection with electric energy, and it's no either an action governed by the intellect and executed by the will.

The stratification of human action itself has led us to stratify the action of the vivifying Holy Spirit. Life is a *continuum* that unifies the spirit and so is the action of the enlivening Holy Spirit. Understanding the spirit not as a structure but as a dynamism, a force, a reality that flows like water or the wind, a moving, but yet a diverse set (a whole), All of these aspects would help us to comprehend the sacraments not as a structure into we enter, but as a dynamism in which we live.

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