

# “Moral interiority” and self-realization: The essential relationship between God and human being in Edith Stein’s thought

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## Abstract

The ethics perspective which I shall focus on in this chapter is necessarily founded on Stein’s investigations about the human spiritual dimension, in which her phenomenological and metaphysical-theological research are synthesized. Stein describes the human being as “essentially spiritual”, namely intellect and will. In fact, he can comprehend reality in its “meaning” (*Sinn*) and act freely in it. The ethical consequences of Stein’s anthropological reflections will be explained through what we shall call “moral interiority”. Following Augustine, Stein perceives the original consciousness of oneself (interiority) as “an inner place, not a place” (*interiore loco, non loco*), where to start explaining intellectual knowledge, and most of all free acting and consequently ethics. Action is not just expressed outwards, and is first of all self-actuation – acting and being are mutually implied. The direction of moral actions is thus already present in the ‘essence’ (*Wesen*) of each individual and this essence, thanks to the creative ‘essentiality’ (*Wesenheiten*), is *ab eterno* in the *Logos*. In view of this complex theological node, the purpose of this essay is to show how we can say, with Stein, that Christ incarnates the only possible ethics.

**Keywords:** Edith Stein, phenomenological anthropology, essence, meaning, *Logos*, interiority, ethic.

## 1. The human spiritual dimension

### 1.1 Essentiality, essence and actual-real being

MY INVESTIGATION STARTS FROM THE study of a particularly delicate topic, to which Stein has devoted much time and energy: the issue of *essence*. It is a fundamental and much articulated topic, a crossover between phe-

nomenology and scholastic philosophy, both of which were the object of study by Edith Stein throughout her life. The purpose of Husserl's phenomenology is the «return to essence», an issue that dates back to Greek philosophy and is an important part of all Christian tradition. Edith Stein perceives such continuity in the Greek term εἶδος used by Husserl himself and synthetically elaborates the problem, providing an original and personal interpretation<sup>1</sup>. In *Finite and Eternal Being*, Stein specifically focuses on it, albeit avoiding the term idea (εἶδος) - which from Plato onwards generated conflicts and ambiguities - and prefers to use the German term *Wesenheit*<sup>2</sup>. The starting point is always the life of the ego as it emerges from a phenomenological study. The *experiential units* (*Erlebniseinheiten*), resulting from the transcendental reduction, are a flow of *Erlebnisse* which manifest continuously one after the other, but they have a stable foundation, which according to Stein consists of *essentialities* (*Wesenheiten*). She writes:

Unless essentialities (*wesenheit*) were realized in the life of the Ego, this latter world be a chaotic maze in which no formal structure whatever could be distinguished. It is the essentialities which impart to the life of the ego unity and multiplicity, organic articulate structure and order, meaning and intelligibility. *Sense* (der Sinn) *and intelligibility*: actually we are face to face here with the primordial source of all sense and intelligibility. For what is sense (Sinn) (λογος)? What does this word signify? We are unable to define or explain it because it is itself the ultimate ground (*Grund*) or reason of all definitions and explications. All human speech rests on the certainty that words have a meaning, and every explanation and argument rests on the conviction that all our questioning and reasoning arrives in the end at an ultimate intelligible reason or ground.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und einer phänomenologischen Philosophie*, «Husserliana» III/1, Karl Schuman (Hrsg.) (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976). In this work, Husserl speaks about “*Wesenswissenschaft*”. Differently from *Logische Untersuchungen*, to avoid misunderstandings, he does not use any more the term “*idea*”, but rather the German word “*Wesen*” or the greek one “*eidōs*”: «Vielleicht nicht ganz so schlimm hinsichtlich beirrender Vieldeutigkeiten steht es mit den Ausdrücken *I d e e* und *I d e a l*, aber im ganzen doch schlimm genug, wie mir die häufigen Mißdeutungen meiner “*Logischen Untersuchungen*” empfindlich genug gemacht haben. Zu einer Änderung der Terminologie bestimmt mich auch das Bedürfnis, den höchst wichtigen *K a n t i s c h e n B e g r i f f d e r I d e e* von dem allgemeinen Begriffe des (formalen oder materialen) *Wesens* reinlich geschieden zu erhalten. Ich benutze daher als Fremdwort das terminologisch unverbrauchte *E i d o s*, als deutsches Wort das mit ungefährlichen, gelegentlich allerdings ärgerlichen Äquivokationen behaftete “*W e s e n*”». (ibid., p. 6). Cf. Angela Ales Bello, *Introduzione a Edith Stein, La ricerca della verità. Dalla fenomenologia alla filosofia cristiana*, a cura di Angela Ales Bello (Roma: Città Nuova Editrice, 1993), 14.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Edith Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being*, (Washington: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 2002), 65; differently from this translation, I will use the term “*essence*” for *Wesen* and “*essentiality*” for *Wesenheit*.

This ultimate ground is the sense [*der Sinn*], intelligible in itself and through itself. *Meaning and understanding belong together*. Meaning is what can be understood, and understanding is the grasping of meaning (*Sinnerfassen*). To understand (*verstehen*) what is intelligible (*Verstehbare*) is the precise nature or being of the human spirit (*eigentlichste Sein des Geistes*) which for this reason is also called *intellectus*<sup>3</sup>.

So the human’s intellectual-spiritual dimension does not create a meaning (*Logos*) for what is real, but, on the contrary, it grasps meaning in the reality, which is therefore intelligible for it. Here Stein reclaims the Christian metaphysical tradition and the classic distinction between *ratio* and *intellectus*. The first one is a logical or rational connection procedure, while the second is «resting in the understanding of the ultimate meaning»<sup>4</sup>. Thus, the essentialities play a key role: simple, independent of time and change, they represent the ultimate meaning, the intelligible itself. They are not real-actual, but without them the real world would not be. The becoming real, in fact, is understandable to us only because, thanks to its *essence (Wesen)*, it participates in the immutability of the essentialities. Essentialities are neither *concepts*<sup>5</sup>, the result of abstraction, nor essences. Human beings cannot know the pure simplicity of essentialities, but can grasp it when, by giving a name to things, they know them. Through names, in fact, their essence is manifested. And the essence is the mediate place between essentiality and the real-actual world<sup>6</sup>.

According to what we have learned so far about essentialities, it appears certain that their essential being (*wesenhaftes Sein*) is the only kind of being they possess. On the other hand as far as the essences are concerned they may possess an additional actuality in their respective objects, and a relationship to those objects whose *quid* they determine is already implied in their pre-actual being. This duality in the being of the essences corresponds to the mediating function which they exercise with respect to the essentialities, on the one hand, and the “real-actual world”, on the other<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 65. In the footnote 3, the philosopher specifies the difference between *intellectus* and *ratio*.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Ibid., 66: «The danger of mistaking the essence of a *concept* is even greater. We form concepts by bringing into relief certain characteristic marks of an object. We thus have a certain amount of freedom in the formation of concepts. Essentialities, on the other hand, are not formed by us but rather *found discovered*».

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Ibid., 79-80. Here, Stein’s metaphysical research is correlated with theological perspective: before of the original pity, the human being knew things in their essence and he could give them an appropriate name. The Biblical reference is Gn. 2, 19.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 84.

According to a first definition, following Thomas Aquinas and also Husserl's investigations, essence «[...] is *that which determines the "quid" or "what" of the object* (το τι ἐν εἰηαι). An "essence-less" (*Wesen-los*) object is therefore inconceivable; without a essence it would no longer be an object, but only the empty form of an object»<sup>8</sup>. A rielaboration of this classic issue is fundamental to study a human spiritual dimension. The «double being» of essence – Stein writes – corresponding to the «mediate place [...] between essentialities and the "actual-real world"» can be better understood through the distinction between "full *quid*" and "essential (pure) *quid*". The latter represents the essential possibility (*Wesensmöglichkeit*) which is immutable and at the same time can only be expressed in the actual-real being. The full *quid* can be caught, however, considering the whole becoming process to which every temporal reality is subject to. Stein uses joy as an example:

*The essence and the essential quid (Wesens was) of this (my) joy is actual as a whole at every moment of the joy's (actual-real) duration. [...] There is no doubt that the essence of this (my) joy is actual only as long as the joy itself is actual (full quid). Prior to the actuality, the essence of my joy has no being in the "real world [...]. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that the essence of my joy is not prior to this actuality. Since we are able to grasp its essential quid independent of its actualisation in its object*<sup>9</sup>.

Essence thus depends on essentiality, through its essential *quid* – what in Medieval tradition was referred to as "universal" –, but also on the object it needs to complete itself through the full *quid*<sup>10</sup>. According to Stein, a discourse on essentialities is to be intended as a reinterpretation of Plato's world of ideas and the universals of Scholasticism, opening the way to a comparison with the classic doctrine of *exemplarism*, from which Stein elaborates her own "version" of it<sup>11</sup>.

## 1.2 Essence and singularity

We have said that the human spirit can grasp the meaning of the real only through essence, as essence participates in the simplicity of the essentialities. We must now ask ourselves if these essentialities are "copies" of real entities.

Stein's ontology describes the reality of the world as independent of the spiritual-intellectual subject (realism). However, the reality can assume a

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 70-71.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 82-83.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Ibid., 84 footnote 43: Stein comments the husserlian *Wesensanschauung* (E. Husserl, *Ideen I*, pp. 8 ss.). She argues that Husserl have not considered this double nature of *Wesen*.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Letterio Mauro, «*In principio era il senso*». *L'ordine del mondo in Edith Stein*, in «*Minima metaphisica*», *Il divino e l'ordine del mondo*, a cura di M. Marassi e R. Radice (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2015).

meaning when it is known by the spiritual subject<sup>12</sup>. This is possible thanks to the essence of known things and to the essence of the knowing spirit. This perspective remains faithful to the noetic-noematic description proposed by phenomenology and it is enriched by the adhesion to Christian metaphysics. The universal according to Stein coincides with the essential *quid* – as discussed above – which is neither mere name, nor mere concept. It is not an arbitrary result of abstraction, but it can be “found” in objects, even independent of their being actual-real. The human being, in fact, knows things «as such» because he can “find” in them their own meaning thanks to his spiritual being, which is individually connotated. The material world is thus intentionally grasped and understood according to a specific “scale of values”. It is not rational *knowing (ratio)*, but *thinking*, the work of intellect (*intellectus*)<sup>13</sup>. The known world is independent of the knower, but the latter, operating intentionally on the world, “provides meaning”. The human knowing process cannot however be described as autonomous, because to receive the essence in the meaning of things is not the same as to perceive it in its purity and simplicity, namely in its essentialities; the human being does not see things as they are themselves but he can understand their meaning<sup>14</sup>. These observations lead to the recognition of an eternal foundation outside time, and belonging to the field of essentiality. The Greek expression *tò ti en einai* can be translated as “to be that which was” in its essence. «Whatever essentiality is immutably what it *was*», writes Stein. «Said more precisely, the difference between present, past, and future is suspended here. Whatever is essentially does not enter into existence; it *is*, not as from moment to moment wrested from the naught, it is not temporal. But because it is independent of time, it *is* also in every instant»<sup>15</sup>. It is apparent how Stein adheres to tradition which, through Plato, Augustine and Thomas<sup>16</sup>, deals with the topic of the exemplarism, avoiding hypostatization and so duplicity between archetype and things. The archetype (or essentiality) is not something different from real-actual being: it is its most authentic actuation, it is what it ought (was destined) to be<sup>17</sup>. Later, this gnoseological and ontological argument will assume a moral meaning.

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Stein 2002, 85-90.

<sup>13</sup> This difference is typical of Christian metaphysical thought (for instance Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure and Nicholas of Cusa) and it is shared by Stein. Then, in the contemporary philosophy the theme is studied also by Heidegger, which he uses the terms *Wissen* and *Denken*. Cf. Giuseppe Barzagli, *Lo sguardo di Dio. Saggi di teologia anagogica* (Siena: Edizione Cantagalli, 2003), 96 e ss.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Stein 2002, 70-71.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>16</sup> Stein refers to Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de Potentia*, q. 3, a. 5 and *Quaestiones disputatae de Veritate*, q. 3, a. 1 corp.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Stein 2002, 303-304.

## 2. Theory of being [Seinslehre]

### 2.1 Essence, existence, creation

As we have shown, the topic of essences and essentialities leads Stein to refuse the “dualistic” interpretation of Plato’s doctrine of ideas<sup>18</sup>. To clarify this point and avoid such criticism – which Aristotle made to Plato - is no easy task. However, Stein repeatedly emphasizes that she is not sure Aristotle correctly understood his Master. Ideas are not things, but they are truer than every entity (μαλλον οητα):

[...] the ideas cannot be anything but “true”. - she writes - [...] Ideas are what they are, and they are manifest to the divine spirit. [...] ideas are nothing but the divine spirit itself, which as such is completely manifest or intelligible to itself.<sup>19</sup>

Here it is clear that the Stein’s philosophical perspective is related to the Revelation. In this light, in fact, Stein’s elaboration of the problem of *essence* is particularly interesting. This theme is not merely used in a gnoseological context to explain the dynamism of the human knowledge, but constitutes the ontological framework within which it is possible to comprehend Stein’s anthropological and moral perspective. The question about the “meaning of the reality” is the framework within which the doctrine of the *Wesenheiten* should be placed. It is not enough to describe how it is possible to know something - the question becomes “why that thing is” and “what is its origin”. From here, the philosophical necessity to encompass the issue of analogy, between human beings and their Principle. Plato’s ideas remain an important reference point. However, the idea of creation was still foreign to Plato. Stein’s metaphysics, on the contrary, does discuss the problem of unity-multiplicity within the context of creationism<sup>20</sup>. The philosophical reason behind drawing from the Holy Scriptures is also in the metaphysical question which Heidegger brought to the attention of his contemporaries: “why being and not nothing?”<sup>21</sup>. However, Stein’s answer is completely different from Heidegger’s. In fact a phenomenological investigation on

<sup>18</sup> Like Thomas, Stein is thoroughly convinced that there are real intelligible structure and Plato’s doctrine of ideas was in this perspective. Cf. *ibid.*, chap. IV, § 4, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 306.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 308: «the attempt to harmonize the simplicity of the divine being with the manifold of the ideas bears the marks of the reason illumined by faith, a reason which – impelled by the words of revealed truth – seeks to grasp mysteries which defy and confound all human concepts».

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 325-331. «We can conceptually conceive of the nothing, but it is not a “structure” [*Gebilde*]. It is without content and thus without an essence. It cannot even be called an empty form, but merely the annulment, negation, or crossing out of an empty form, namely, of the form of a something. The nothing evinces the incapability of thought to generate by itself “something that does not rest on an already given reality».

the Ego leads her to seek perspectives of meanings capable to explain its origin. The actual life of the pure Ego flows from one lived experience to the other and it cannot be independent, she writes. It needs a foundation<sup>22</sup>. Thus it is through a phenomenological analysis that Stein recognizes the Eternal Being, the Creator, as the measure of being of each and every Ego. So, Husserl’s discourse on essence is synthetically connected to that on existence and to the question about origin. In this context, Stein’s doctrine of essentiality [*Wesenheiten*] provides a philosophical contribution to the theological problem of Creation.

## *2.2 From essence to existence*

Among the different meanings of *ens*, which Stein analyzes in detail from the Aristotelian and Thomistic traditions<sup>23</sup>, the most important one is that used to indicate “something which *is*”. We thus reach the question of existence (*Existenz*)<sup>24</sup>. The need for completeness in Stein’s investigation on being allows her to point out the mutual dependence between essential dimension and existential dimension. The essential *quid* of every thing *is* before the real-actual being<sup>25</sup>, but such *quid* can be determined only in synthesis with the real being (from potency to act)<sup>26</sup>. An investigation on existence cannot thus be avoided. The main purpose of research is, in fact, to reach an understanding of the world of experience in its real multiplicity. According to Stein, the need to understand this fullness of being starts from the experience of the real, but it refers back to essentialities, which, as we have seen, are not an arbitrary result of abstraction. Stein writes: «Being is one, and all that which is shares in it. Its *full meaning* corresponds to the fullness of all existents. And when we speak of *being*, we *mean* this total fullness. No finite intellect, however, is ever capable of enclosing this fullness in the unity of a fulfilled apperception. To approximate the apperception of this fullness is the infinite task and goal of human knowledge»<sup>27</sup>. Using the *analogy of proportionality* (*analogia proportionis*)<sup>28</sup> – like Thomas – “being” can be said analogically, albeit different. We shall not here discuss in detail Stein’s arguments on analogy, but this perspective allows us to understand a nodal point. Stein reflects on the passage from the Bible in which God says “I

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. E. Stein, *Potenz und Akt: Studien zu einer Philosophie des Seins*, ESGA 10, (Freiburg in Breisgau: Verlag Herder, 2005), 14: «Es ist für das fließende Leben etwas da, was ihm “zu Grunde liegt”, was es trägt – eine *Substanz*».

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Stein 2002, chap. IV, §2, 11.

<sup>24</sup> Cfr., *ibid.*, 354.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 325-331.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 333.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

<sup>28</sup> Cf., *ibid.*, 335: here Stein distinguishes between aristotelic *analogia entis* and thomistic *analogia proportionis*.

am who I am”<sup>29</sup>. The very name of God, “I am”, expresses His total fullness of being with no need of further attributes. It allows us to understand that unity beyond time in which there is no difference between name, meaning and reality. The name of God is fullness of meaning, and can be expressed only as a verb: “I am” (*sum*). «God’s “I am” is an eternally living presence, without beginning and without end, without any voids and without any darkness»<sup>30</sup>. For analogy the human spiritual being has the possibility to define himself as “I”. Only a human being, in fact, can think himself as a single individual and can describe himself using such word, which however needs to be specified through a number of predicates and becomes in time. The word “I” in this case is a sign of conscious and spiritual life, albeit not coinciding with the real fullness of its being. The life of the I is in fact present in every moment, but it is “filled” with contents which differ from moment to moment, forming a multiplicity of becoming lived experiences. «And thus we see that while the being of the I is separated from divine being by an infinite distance, it nevertheless – owing to the fact that it is an I, i.e., a person – bears a closer resemblance to divine being than anything else that lies within the reach of our experience»<sup>31</sup>.

### 3. “Moral interiority”

#### 3.1 *The human spirit as self-knowledge*

How can we interpret this analogical relationship? We would like to focus on what we shall call “moral interiority”, having its apex in Christ. In fact, the augustinian issue of interiority seems to be the best way to describe man’s capability to access his inner self and know it. Such inward “opening” is what characterizes the spiritual dimension of human beings<sup>32</sup> and seems to be their *maior similitudo* with the Creator. If the human soul is spirit according to its most intimate essence, it is by looking at its spiritual determination that we can discover its analogy with God, pure Spirit<sup>33</sup>. The human being, as we have said, is spiritual because is capable of comprehending reality and of knowing himself (memory)<sup>34</sup>, and he can act freely (will). The phenomenological investigation is enriched with Augustine’s description of the spirit (*mens* in Latin) as memory, intellect and will. Phenomenology

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Es 3, 14.

<sup>30</sup> Stein 2002, 344.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 344.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Edith Stein, *Der Aufbau der menschlichen Person. Vorlesungen zur philosophischen Anthropologie*, ESGA 14 (Freiburg im Breisgau, Verlag Herder, 2010), 78: «Wir sagen dafür auch: eine *freie geistige Person*. Person sein heißt, ein freies und geistiges Wesen sein. Daß der Mensch Person ist, das unterscheidet ihn von allen Naturwesen».

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Stein 2002, 460.

<sup>34</sup> Cf., *ibid.*, 362.

defines spiritual life as an “*intentional* movement” by which the subject looks at an object<sup>35</sup> and considers it according to a specific meaning content (*Sinnesgehalt*)<sup>36</sup>, through the essentialities. According to Stein, this human spiritual knowledge is toward the external world and then it is toward the inner world. So thanks to his spiritual being, man can look also inwards - *in interioritate* – and know himself. It is not psychic consciousness (reflective), but rather spiritual self-knowledge; it is a pre-reflective “original consciousness”. Stein writes:

We shall confine our inquiry to the inner world of the ego. And this means in the present context not only the conscious ego-life – the present ego-life of past and future, to the extent that they are accessible by reaching backward and forward in memory and anticipation (i.e., the unity of the *stream of experiences* [*Erlebnisstrom*]) – but also that which is not immediately conscious, that out of which conscious life arise<sup>37</sup>.

This access that the human spirit has to its own interiority is not always actual and is of the same nature as Husserl’s *internal perception*. It is completely different from the consciousness that accompanies the pure Ego<sup>38</sup> - it is not always immediately present and is pre-reflective: stored in memory, it forms a collection of experiences allowing for “self-knowledge”<sup>39</sup>. This spiritual self-knowledge capacity – i.e. interiority – is however limited, as it is not totally clear to oneself. Indeed the spiritual soul is characterized by interior light and darkness, similar to «a lighted surface over a dark abyss»<sup>40</sup>.

### 3.2 *The human spirit as will*

The spiritual life, as we have seen, is intellectual knowledge through essence and essentialities, it is self-knowledge, namely interiority, and finally it is free will<sup>41</sup>. Thanks to the latter, the subject can be defined as

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Edith Stein, *Beiträge zur philosophischen Begründung der Psychologie und der Geisteswissenschaften*, ESGA 6 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2010), cit., 64 ss.

<sup>36</sup> In the phenomenological description, the spiritual capacity to grasp intentionally an object it’s thanks to the “motivation”. Cf. Stein 2002, chap. IV, §3, 20 e §4, 8.

<sup>37</sup> Stein 2002, 388.

<sup>38</sup> About “interior perception” see Stein 2002, 374-376.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 500-501.

<sup>40</sup> Stein 2002, 365.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 372: «The realm of spiritual life is the authentic realm of freedom. Here the I can be genuinely creative out of the depth of its own self. What we call *free acts* – a firm resolve, the voluntary inception and execution of some action, the explicit turning toward a “rising” thought, the conscious termination of a succession of ideas as well as all questioning, demanding, granting, promising, commanding, obeying- are deeds” of the I, manifold in their meaning and inner structure, but uniform in one respect. In all of these deeds the I determines the content or direction of its own being [...]. This does not mean, of course, that

a “person”<sup>42</sup>. He can freely choose how to act and thus pronounce his *fiat*. This ethics issue, about appetitive faculty<sup>43</sup>, is discussed by Stein in her anthropological description, which we can define as phenomenological-metaphysical. According to Stein, this faculty is oriented towards good. The desire for good which is characteristic of the spiritual dimension is explained starting from the thomistic discussion on transcendentals, especially the transcendental *bonum*. Willing the good implies knowledge; what is willed is known, and therefore true<sup>44</sup>. *Bonum* and *verum* are closely related and – like in Thomism – they impart perfection to the existent (*ens*)<sup>45</sup>. As we have seen, the spirit can understand reality because it grasp its essence, and thus essentiality. We are back to the topic of archetypes, to be understood not as something different from the real-actual being, but rather as the existent in its actualization: “the existent as it should be”<sup>46</sup>. The cognitive faculty (intellect) and the appetitive faculty (will) are seen in their mutual determination and the classic theory of transcendentals is integrated with the contemporary moral “value theory”. Stein writes: «[...] which we call *value* belongs to the realm of essential being. It is pre-designed from eternity not only what an existent (*ens*) is, considered in itself, but also what significance, i.e., what value, attaches to it in the total context of all existents»<sup>47</sup>. Here, we can see clearly the metaphysical origin of Stein’s moral perspective, which we have tried to discuss synthetically with her anthropological investigation about the human spiritual dimension. The question behind Stein’s work – the meaning of being – is not disconnected from her reflection on moral acting. The human being, thanks to his appetitive faculty, tends to improvement and his acting is part of his being: «The effects (i.e., the resultant quid of the efficacious activity), however, depend on *what the existents are*»<sup>48</sup>. The human beings, as real-actual existent, are subject to becoming and, acting freely, can tend to the realization of what they are essentially. Unlike the pure Act, in them being and acting do not coincide, but there are potentialities *in interioritate* which can be realized in

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in these deeds the I becomes [...] the creator of its own self. The I has *received* the freedom of self-determination as a gift».

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Stein 2002, 366-367.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Angela Ales Bello, *Edith Stein: lo spirito umano in cammino verso la santità*, in AA. VV., *Edith Stein. Lo spirito e la santità*, a cura di Michele D’Ambra, (Roma: Edizioni OCD, 2007), 15: «Il regno dello spirito è il regno degli atti liberi, quegli atti caratterizzati dal fiat, che implicano una decisione e una presa di posizione. Si entra nella sfera del volere e dell’agire, lontana da ogni determinismo, nella quale si può “agire” o “tralasciare”, ed è qui che si innesta la vita etica e la scelta morale».

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 312.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Q. de Veritate*, cit., q. 21, a. 1 e a. 3.

<sup>46</sup> About this theme, Stein describes the difference between human being and angelic creature. Cf. Stein 2002, chap. VII, §5.

<sup>47</sup> Stein 2002, 316.

<sup>48</sup> Stein 2002, 316.

time<sup>49</sup>. In this sense, we have use the word “moral interiority” to indicate the person as capable of seeing and realizing what he is essentially. Only as free to “create” his life can the subject be defined as a *person*. This freedom of self-determination is however a *gift* that man has received and that can be developed in any freely chosen direction.

#### 4. Deus Trinitas as the apex of moral love

We have seen that man is an actual-real person: his essence can be freely actuated in existence, in a temporal process. However, what is actuated in such process is since eternity. We have finally explained this apparent contradiction. With Stein, we can say that the *meaning*, completed through this becoming process, is fully contained in the *Logos*, beginning and origin of this fullness of meaning. No contingent entity can exist outside the absolute and eternal Being – it would be a logical contradiction. The temporal becoming of the real being, and therefore of human existence, is based upon what Stein called “the realm of meaning”<sup>50</sup> to which every meaningful unit belongs. These units, however, receive meaning as a *gift* in the creative act, that is not temporal. Since in God being and acting coincide, there is no beginning in the creation act. It cannot be conceived with the temporal categories which characterize human production. Created beings are called into existence in time, but they *are* in their meaningfulness since eternity, according to their essentiality. From this point of view, Stein interprets the first verse of the Prologue to St. John’s Gospel as “in the beginning was the meaning (*Im Anfang war der Sinn*)<sup>51</sup>”. And then: “through him all things came into being”<sup>52</sup>. The generation of the Word through the Father expresses His real-actual being. In fact, *Logos* is a real person. However, His existing is not separated from His essential being, since in Him there is no beginning. This generating act, which is eternal and *in* God Himself, already contains the whole creation; there is no before or after. The archetype problem, again. How can we solve it? What role should this topic play in the moral perspective we have outlined? This passage of the Scriptures, says Stein, prompts us to return to Augustine’s theory of ideas as “creative essentialities in the spirit of God”.

How is the *con-stare* of things, their *subsisting* or *being alive* in the *Logos*, to be understood? It has been pointed out that it cannot be understood as their actual being. [...].The name *Logos* seems to indicate that what is meant might be the *essential being* of things,

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 376.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 150.

<sup>51</sup> *Der Sinn* is often translated as “meaningful existence” (cf. Stein 2002, 106).

<sup>52</sup> Cf. John 1, 1-18.

that the meaning of things (which we have previously characterized as “not-become” [*ungeworden*]) might have its habitat in the divine *Logos*. That which from eternity subsists a component part [Glieder] of the divine plan of Creation is “imparted” to things as their meaning and is actualized in them<sup>53</sup>.

The creative essentialities are in Him, because “through him all things came into being”. The interpretation of the above passages, however, should not lead us to posit that essentialities in the *Logos* are previous to their realization *hic et nunc*. Essentialities are in fact already real-actual in Him, *ab eterno*. In this sense, they are defined by Stein “creative archetypes”. She writes: «the being of the finite in the eternal carries a twofold meaning: 1) a being-encompassed of all finite things by the divine spirit and 2) a causal being-founded on all finite things in the divine essence»<sup>54</sup>. These considerations lead to the problem of *individuation*, which we cannot examine here – it would carry us beyond the topic of “moral interiority”. However, we would like to note that, if the individual essence has a twofold aspect – essential *quid* and full *quid* – it could be a good starting point to try and solve the apparent contradiction between unity and multiplicity. Essence is the *quid* of each actual-real entity (full *quid*), and at the same time is contained in the *Logos* since, participating in essentiality, is in the *Logos* as not other from Him, and at the same time with its specific individual being. According to Stein, from this point, it is possible to enter the mystery of the twofold Revelation of the *Logos*: in the incarnate Word and in the created world<sup>55</sup>. The Word, i.e. Christ, becomes therefore the only possible archetype, for each acting which is already being. He is the *medium* who solves the seeming contradiction between One and many. If the creative archetype is the actual-real being “as it should be”, since it is its origin and thus its most authentic being (1) and if such archetype is present since eternity in the *Logos* made flesh in Christ (2) then the “model” of each acting can only be the living God made human. No ethical argument is therefore possible outside the *imitatio Christi* as a moral model. What we have called “moral interiority” is the way individuals try to realize at best their essential *quid*. This is possible only through self-actualization, thanks to the love which originates in the Word made human. What can be realized morally, is in the individual’s interiority – what Augustine called the place of eternal truths – what can be realized morally. The path to impart perfection to oneself – the natural pining for good characteristic of appetitive faculty – is in free human action, preceded by knowledge and expressed with love. This ethics perspective, metaphysically and theologically founded, finds its explanation in the mystery of the Trinity. Only with the Trinity as a model

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 116 (my translation).

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, chap. III, §12.

can we understand ethical life as the realization of love, says Stein<sup>56</sup>. Indeed, the relation between a finite “I” and a finite “you” can only be imperfect, since in the “we” there is an irresolvable difference of essential and existential. It is not so in the Trinity, three People linked by a perfect identity of essence. The “we”, in the Trinity, is relation between People and at the same time full unity<sup>57</sup>. Here, the relation is a total love gift, where the I gives itself totally to the you in the act through which the Father generates the Son and breathes with Him the Holy Spirit. It is a mutual gift of a single eternal infinite essence between Divine People. Stein writes: «This essence and being the Father gives from eternity to the Son by generating him, and from this gift proceeds, as the fruit of mutual love, the Holy Spirit»<sup>58</sup>.

To conclude we can say that thanks to the fact that he is a spiritual creature and can open himself to himself<sup>59</sup>, man can intellectually grasp the meaning of reality and act in it. Following Augustine, Stein perceives this original consciousness of oneself (interiority) as “an inner place, not a place” (“interiore loco, non loco”), the starting point for an explanation of intellectual knowledge, but especially the free acting and consequently ethics and, consequently, ethics.

Action is not just expressed outwards: it is first of all self-actuation. Acting and being are mutually implied. The direction of moral actions – as will of perfection – is thus already present in the essence of each individual and this essence, thanks to the creative essentiality, is *ab eterno* in the *Logos*.

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, chap. IV, §4, 5.

<sup>57</sup> The Holy Trinity is full spirit, namely total gift of love. For analogy, the human spiritual dimension’s capacity to give itself. Cf. *ibid.*, chap. VII, §2.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 351.

<sup>59</sup> Stein refers to thomistic theory of *analogia proportionis*.

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