

## Reviews & Notices

**Borden-Sharkey, Sarah. *Edith Stein's Finite and Eternal Being: A Companion*. Maryland: Lexington Books, 2023. pp. 252. ISBN: 9781666909678. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55997/2007pslxil85br1>**

Not a few people who study the philosophy of St. Edith Stein would often comment that her works, in particular *Finite and Eternal Being*, are not so easy to digest. This is quite normal, coming from a philosopher whose background, way of thinking, and life are complex and multi-layered.

To answer this need, *The Edith Stein Studies*, headed by Mette Lebech and published by Lexington Books, aims to publish high quality research works on Edith Stein authored by Steinian experts and vigorously peer reviewed. The series of publications are meant to assist researchers and those who are in love with the philosophy of Edith Stein. The book of Sarah Borden Sharkey, one of the top experts on Edith Stein's philosophy, is part of this series, meant to facilitate understanding on Edith Stein's magnum opus, *Finite and Eternal Being*.

Much has been written on *Finite and Eternal Being* and commentaries are not lacking, including books, monographs, dissertations, and fora among others. But Borden-Sharkey has the knack of simplifying the not only difficult concepts in *Finite and Eternal Being* but identifying the tensions and recent proposed solutions to issues Stein herself encountered. Moreover, the author explains the contributions of the book not only in scholastic and in particular Thomistic way of thinking but likewise in contemporary and post modern leanings. The word *Commentary* in the title is not understood as merely a summary of a specific section of FEB. Borden Sharkey engages the text and provides her own contributions. Her work is a welcome one in the Steinian epistemic community, most especially in the anglophone world.

The work is organized in two parts. Part one begins with the explanation of the context of *Finite and Eternal Being*, identifying its structure, method, sources, and significance. Part two provides the synopsis of the whole book and the commentaries of the author by section. An additional joy is the inclusion of the two appendices on Heidegger and Teresa of Avila not found in the 2002 translation of Kurt F. Reinhardt.

As always, Borden-Sharkey is a clear writer, guiding the readers with conviction and coherence. She sees *Finite and Eternal Being* as an “utterly stunning book,” a “classic *summa*” and invites the readers to use the *Companion* as a “tool-kit” which is often seen as not so easy to read and understand. Borden-Sharkey’s aim is clear and straightforward. She hopes that this *Companion* “may help push open the door a bit so that others may enter more fully into her great work.” This does not imply presenting Stein’s philosophy in a simplistic way but simply to guide readers of *Finite and Eternal Being* so as to avoid misinterpretations of Stein’s work which occurs often and also to assist studies on Stein’s opus in articulating its significance and place in a world in search of meaning. She uses the most recent English translation of *Finite and Eternal Being* done by Walter Redmond, explaining the important German words used by Stein and presenting the reasons why it should be translated this way into English. At the same time, the author proposes her own way of translating, something that shows her expertise and acumen in the philosophy of Edith Stein. Moreover, she is not blind to the limitations of her book. She acknowledges immediately at the beginning that one of the things not found in the *Companion* are the illustrations made by Edith Stein herself in *Finite and Eternal Being*. Borden-Sharkey sees this as a great loss, since these examples of Stein are powerful means in clarifying her philosophy.

Another noticeable feature of the book are the footnotes. Borden-Sharkey not only offers veritable sources to support her claims but also gives the readers topics and unresolved issues in the Stein’s *Finite and Eternal Being*. Future scholars may take one or two issues and develop them so that the Steinian scholarship may grow.

Also, of particular importance is the proposed reading of the author concerning the two appendices written by Stein in *Finite and Eternal Being*. The first one is on Martin Heidegger’s *Existential Philosophy* and the second, about Teresa of Avila’s *Interior Castle*. It is obvious that Stein gave several critical remarks against Heidegger’s quest concerning the meaning of being. Based on the study of Borden-Sharkey, she made the claim that it is not the Existential philosophy of Heidegger which can lead to the meaning of being but the mystical thought of Teresa of Avila. Whether this claim is plausible or not, the contribution of Borden-Sharkey is to open the question and trace the answer to someone least expected. The 16th century Spanish mystic is not even a professional philosopher. It is suggested that the meaning of being is unlocked not necessarily by someone who rigorously studied it but by one who, living the simplicity of a little child, enters into being’s mystery through the eyes of wonder and attitude of receptivity. As the author pointed out, the discovery of the meaning of being for Stein is both an ascent and a descent. The ascent we may say is from the point of view of the seeker’s quest in order to understand the meaning of being. The descending movement on the other hand is from the point of view of the Creator down to the creatures. It means for Stein, as the author pointed out clearly, the meaning of being is incomplete if only seen in the ascending movement. More important is the descending element welcomed in the spirit of openness and receptivity. This is a fitting conclusion of the book whose aim is to guide those captivated by the mystery of being which leads to a contemplative act.

The author's aim in writing this commentary is to "push open the door a bit" to let others understand Stein's opus. In publishing this work, the door was pushed *halfway*, not just a bit. Borden-Sharkey presents, clarifies, and expounds the different terms and nuances Stein used in her work. In this point, the author did a good job and contributed to the furtherance of Steinian studies. But the door is still halfway closed, since the readers are challenged by the author to *descend* to the meaning of being. Many already did the ascent but equally important and much more difficult to do is to descend to the meaning of being for it requires a contemplative gaze and a simplicity of a child, something that the present world does not acknowledge as a legitimate way of knowing. Borden-Sharkey showed this point throughout the book though couched in heavy philosophical language. The meaning of being is just too rich to be grasped in an instant nor it can be understood in a discursive way. One should have the courage to admit that since being is multifaceted, human effort is not enough to understand it and that being is much bigger than what we think it is. One has to enter into its mystery. No surprise here since St. Edith Stein as author of *Finite and Eternal Being* is a woman whose life is centered on contemplation and whose being is a complete gift and surrender to the Being of beings. Her quest for the meaning of being led her to complete descent and martyrdom. She shed her blood for the Truth of beings. It is in this sense that Stein is a teacher, a *doctor* in the strict sense of the term.

Borden-Sharkey attempted to open the door a bit. In this way, she did a service for those who are struggling with the work of St. Edith Stein but also for those whose search for the meaning of their being is not so clear. It is for us to fully open it. And not to do so is a loss to an otherwise fruitful effort of the author. The book thus goes beyond mere academic work; it leads to wisdom and challenges all not to remain in the surface of reality.

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**Ruggiero, Fabio. *La follia dei cristiani. La reazione pagana al cristianesimo nei secoli I-V*. Prefazione di M. Simonetti. Roma, Citta Nuova Editrice: 2002. pp 260. ISBN 8831103350.**

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Christianity, then and now, has always been met with opposition by some quarters. The message of Christ, she preaches and lives, is not always understood and welcomed by all. This aspect of Christian religion is the theme of Fabio Ruggiero's book entitled *La follia dei cristiani. La reazione pagana al cristianesimo nei secoli I-V*. Focusing on the antipathy against the Christians from the first until the fifth century, Ruggiero brings to light the varying views against the Christians in the Greco-Roman empire, where Christianity found herself as she grows and expands from Jerusalem to Rome.

In writing this opus, Ruggiero brings with him knowledge and experience that render him competent on the topic at hand. Presently, he works in the University of Bologna, teaching Patrology in the faculty of Emilia-Romagna. He has research interests on Early Christianity, New Testament and Christian Origins, Christian Apologetics, and