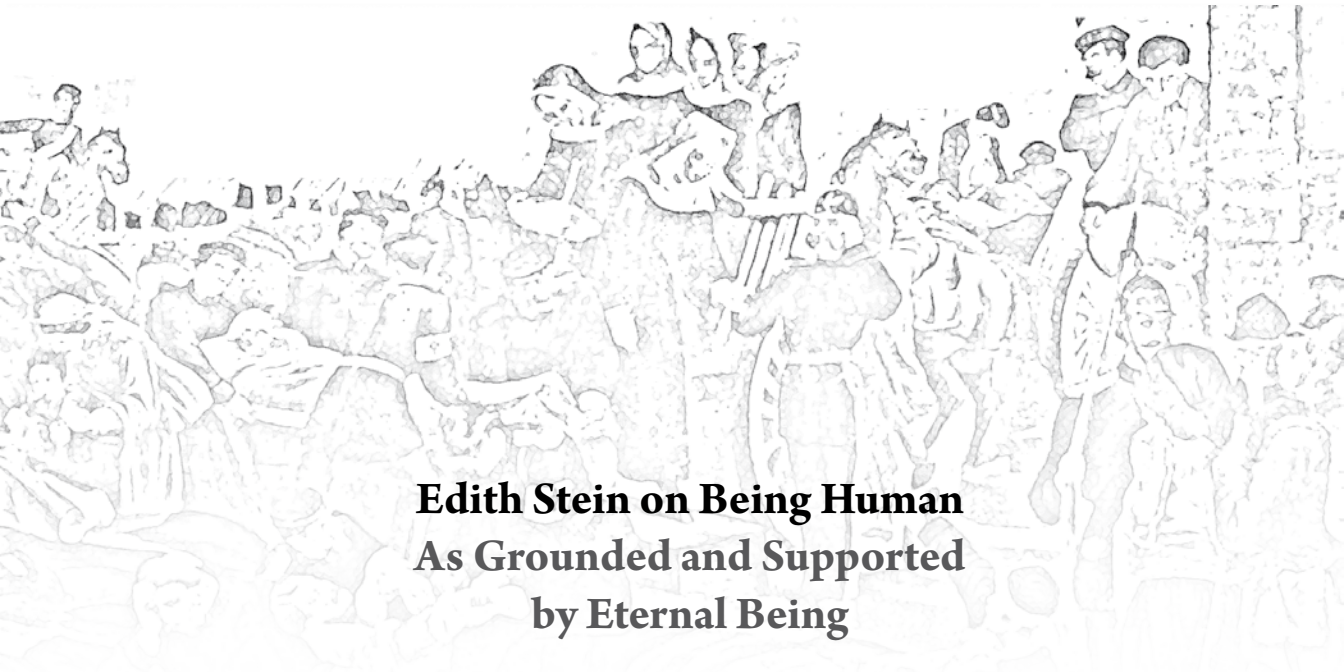




## **Edith Stein on Being Human As Grounded and Supported by Eternal Being**

*Jose Conrado Estafia & Romualdo Abulad, S.V.D.*

The study is an exposition of Edith Stein's claim that the human person is grounded and supported by eternal being. Stein's investigation is significant to the dialogue between faith and reason. Her inquiry into the meaning of being begins with a discussion of the doctrine of *act* and *potency*. She further inquires about the nature of our own being. She discovered the *inescapable fact of our own being*. In looking at our own being the idea of a pure being or a true being or eternal being is revealed. God's nature and our own are different. Being human is only a transition from one moment to another. The being of the ego is not all-embracing, but merely a received being, but still it is a being, making sense the term *analogia entis*.

However, Stein believes that our conscious life cannot truly know who we are. She realizes that our search for what it means to be human brings us to that being who is the archetype and author of all finite beings. This being has disclosed himself to us as a person, even a tri-personal being. Revelation, therefore, can deepen our understanding of being human.

**Keywords:** *being human, act and potency, the being of the ego, finite and eternal being*

Edith Stein is particularly preoccupied with the study of the human person. Her dissertation on the problem of empathy is already a blend of phenomenology and the perennial quest for what it means to be human.<sup>1</sup> It must be made clear, however, that this dissertation of Stein did not yet provide her with a full understanding of the human person.

Five years after her dissertation, in 1922, she wrote two treatises contained in a book called *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*. These two treatises are among her significant pre-conversion writings. They also correspond greatly to the early years of the phenomenological movement.<sup>2</sup> Baseheart claims that this subsequent work was Stein's continuation of "her search for a deeper knowledge of person."<sup>3</sup> These two treatises provide us with a fuller knowledge of the human person; this consideration, however, no longer dwells on the pre-conversion period of Stein.

The study of the human person continued to preoccupy Stein during her years in Münster from 1932 to 1933.<sup>4</sup> During this time, she developed a critical method of investigating the human person. We would not dwell on this development; instead, we would go straight to her monumental work, *Finite and Eternal Being: An Attempt at an Ascent to the Meaning of Being*. All her philosophical journey culminates in this one great book. The foreword to the English edition claims that it is "the culmination of her lifelong search for truth in all its philosophical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions."<sup>5</sup> The present study

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<sup>1</sup> See Edith Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Revision, trans. Waltraut Stein (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1989). For this contention see also Mary Catharine Baseheart, *Person in the World: Introduction to the Philosophy of Edith Stein* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997), 30.

<sup>2</sup> See the preface to Stein's *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*, ed. Marianne Sawicki, trans. Mary Catharine Baseheart and Marianne Sawicki (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 2000), x.

<sup>3</sup> Baseheart, *Person in the World*, 41.

<sup>4</sup> For Stein's Münster anthropology, see Beate Beckmann-Zöller, "Edith Stein's Theory of the Person in Her Münster Years (1932-1933)," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 82, No. 1 (Winter 2008): 47-70. An analysis of Stein's research on the human subject during her phenomenological years and the period of her writing as a Christian philosopher can be read in Angela Ales Bello's article entitled "Edmund Husserl and Edith Stein: The Question of the Human Subject" (trans. Antonio Calcagno) in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 82, No. 1 (Winter 2008): 143-159. Also, we can read Stein's discussion of the identity of the person in an article by Peter J. Schulz entitled "Toward the Subjectivity of the Human Person: Edith Stein's Contribution to the Theory of Identity" (trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner): 161-176. This article is part of the same volume mentioned above. It is good to mention here that the *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* (formerly *The New Scholasticism*) has dedicated one issue of articles on various aspects of Edith Stein's philosophy (Vol. 82, No. 1 [Winter 2008]).

<sup>5</sup> Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being: An Attempt at an Ascent to the Meaning of Being*, trans. Kurt F. Reinhardt (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 2002), xiii.

is an exposition of her idea of our being human as grounded and supported by eternal being.<sup>6</sup>

## A. An Inquiry Into The Meaning of Being

### 1. Stein's Method

Edith Stein's inquiry into being begins with an exposition of Thomas Aquinas' doctrine of *act* and *potency*, which serves as her method. She admits at the outset that this approach is a "bold undertaking," for it is not easy to understand these concepts apart from the whole philosophical system of Aquinas. But Stein is convinced that there is only "one Truth" unfolding from a step-by-step conquest of various "individual truths;" so that from one "particular direction" there opens up "a larger horizon" which reveals "a new depth." The ultimate problems of being begin with a distinction between potency and act. Such a discussion brings us to "the very heart of Thomistic philosophy."<sup>7</sup> This makes Stein's approach very phenomenological. The phenomenological method is used as a starting point in order to find a way into "the majestic temple of scholastic thought."<sup>8</sup>

The Thomistic doctrine of act and potency serves as the basis of Stein's inquiry into the meaning of being. She considers it as "the portal of a huge building which appeared to us in its commanding height from afar."<sup>9</sup> At first glance, this doctrine "may well encompass the entire amplitude of that which is."<sup>10</sup>

This method alone suggests the kind of a philosopher Edith Stein is: *Christian. Finite and Eternal Being* is definitely a work that can be described as a Christian philosophy. But are we really permitted to speak of a Christian philosophy?

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<sup>6</sup> The statement may sound theological and hence can be easily criticized for not being philosophical anymore. Antonio Calcagno writes, "One may criticize Edith Stein's metaphysics as being more of a work in theology than in philosophy, for she develops much of her thinking on the basis of Christian Revelation... Stein is not a fideist who blindly believes that experiences of faith somehow transcend the capacities of human reason... Ultimately, what Stein leaves to her readers is the assurance that our personal beings are conditioned and marked by both finitude and eternity." ("Die Fülle oder das Nichts? Edith Stein and Martin Heidegger on the Question of Being," in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. LXXIV, No. 2, 2000, 285). Such observation of Calcagno is very pertinent to our present study. We are always convinced that Stein's analysis on being human has a vital contribution to the dialogue between faith and reason. Stein is obviously a Christian philosopher. But hers is not a blind appeal to faith for she also employs her most cherished method: *phenomenology*. The texts in this exposition will show what a great synthesizer Stein is. Borrowing from Calcagno's final word in the above article: "Ultimately, Stein will employ the works of Husserl, Thomas and other Christian philosophers to ground the validity of her insights, thereby rendering *Endliches und Ewiges Sein* true to its project of synthesis." (Ibid.)

<sup>7</sup> Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being*, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Stein wonders about this point. Is there a Christian philosophy? She warns us, “Any attempt to arrive at a mutual understanding between modern and medieval philosophy has to overcome an even greater obstacle than the language barrier: The two differ radically in their attitude regarding the interrelation of knowledge and faith or philosophy and theology.”<sup>11</sup>

In a word, reconciliation remains difficult unless all seekers of truth admit a common ground.<sup>12</sup> For St. Thomas, according to Stein, “natural knowledge and supernatural faith (philosophy and theology) are not so radically separated as to be entirely unrelated to each other.”<sup>13</sup>

Stein borrows Jacques Maritain’s solution to the problem between faith and reason. If Christian philosophy exists, what do we mean by it? Maritain has to distinguish between the *nature* and the *actual situation* or condition of philosophy. Concerning its nature, philosophy, in its entirety, does not depend on faith and theology, but when philosophy is actualized and situated in a particular historical condition, one can be justified in speaking of a *Christian situation or condition of philosophy*.<sup>14</sup>

In Christian philosophy, revealed truth becomes the standard by which to judge its findings. Stein further claims that in Christian revelation, one can find an entirely new dimension of existence and being.<sup>15</sup> “Revelation,” she continues, “speaks in a language accessible to natural human reason and offers subject matter for the formation of purely philosophic concepts.”<sup>16</sup> Quoting lengthily Stein’s words for unbelievers, she says,

Unbelievers have no good reason to distrust the findings of Christian philosophy on the grounds that it uses as a standard of measurement not only the ultimate truths of reason but also the truths of faith. No one prevents them from applying the criterion of reason in full stringency and from rejecting everything that does not measure up to it. They may also freely decide whether they want to go further and take account of those findings which have been gained with the aid of revelation. In this case they will accept the truths of faith not as “theses” (as do believers) but

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 12. For Stein’s discussion on linguistic difficulties, see pages 7 to 12.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. On Maritain’s exposition regarding the matter at hand, see further his book *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, trans. Edward H. Flanney (New York, Philosophical Library, 1955). However, in her endnotes, Stein uses this text of Maritain: *Von der Christlichen Philosophie*, translated from the French and introduced by Balduin Schwarz (Salzburg, 1935). It is unfortunate that we do not have an access to this text of Maritain. However, for further clarifications of the use of the term Christian philosophy, see Stein’s endnote number 18 in the first chapter of *Finite and Eternal Being*.

<sup>15</sup> Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being*, 23.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 23-24.

only as “hypotheses.” But as to whether or not the conclusions at which both arrive are in accord with the truths of reason, there prevails again a standard of measurement which both sides have in common. Unbelieving thinkers may then calmly consider whether or not they find themselves able to make their own the synthesis which results for Christian philosophers from the two sources of reason and revelation. And unbelievers must judge for themselves whether by accepting this additional knowledge they may perhaps gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of that which is. They will at any rate not shrink back from such an attempt if they are really as unbiased as, according to their own conviction, genuine philosophers ought to be.<sup>17</sup>

Christian philosophy, since it is based on natural reason aside from revelation, allows Christian thinkers to establish a “common ground” with “unbelieving” philosophers. Moreover, the “noble task” of Christian philosophy is “to prepare the way for supernatural faith.”<sup>18</sup> Stein maintains that if only “unbelieving thinkers” are willing to take a “part of the way,” they will be guided beyond their original intention.<sup>19</sup> Christian philosophy, Stein continues, is indeed very open for it wishes to learn from the Greeks and the moderns. Whatever can meet its own standards are appropriated into itself. It generously offers its findings to the unbelievers for them to examine and to select, Stein says.

Stein is indeed a great synthesizer like her master St. Thomas and a truly unbiased seeker like her other master Husserl. She writes,

We shall earnestly strive to join our thinking to that of the ancient masters, and yet not only to these but also to those others who in our own time have in their own manner and method resumed the identical inquiry. This latter procedure appears fully justified in view of the fact that these modern thinkers have out of an inner necessity – not under the influence of any traditional intellectual ties – penetrated anew to the depths of the problem of being. They are living in closest proximity to its reality and can therefore help us to understand the original intentions and motives of the old masters.<sup>20</sup>

Stein departs from phenomenology in order to reach what she calls “the majestic temple of scholastic thought.”<sup>21</sup> Obviously, Stein’s starting point is

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>21</sup> Let us be reminded that Stein’s approach to Scholastic thought is one that is critical. It is not just a simple revival of medieval philosophy. During the early years of the twentieth century, a synthesis or a “substantive conversation” between medieval and contemporary philosophy was of great interest to philosophers. Among them were Erich Przywara, Martin Heidegger and Edith Stein.

modern, which is anthropocentric. Now, however, we shall see how Stein brilliantly harmonizes medieval with modern philosophy on the question of being.

## 2. *The Doctrine of Act and Potency*

Stein's task begins with an analysis and an inquiry into the manifold meanings of the terms *act* and *potency*.<sup>22</sup> She follows closely St. Thomas Aquinas' exposition of this doctrine in the *Questiones disputatae de potentia*, where Stein finds a very detailed and comprehensive treatment of the problem. In her findings, the treatise on act and potency was written simultaneously with the first part of the *Summa Theologiae*. The latter contains the treatise on the existence and nature of God. Certain problems which in the *Summa* are treated only in passing are discussed at greater length in the *Quaestiones*. That is why Stein focuses on the *Quaestiones*, although a perusal of the text brings "purely philosophical matters" greatly dealt with by Aquinas.<sup>23</sup>

Stein admits that to disengage philosophy from its theological context is not an easy job. Philosophers or readers with no clear knowledge of the link between theology and philosophy would think that they are treading on a "forbidden ground."<sup>24</sup> Hence, there is a need for an objective analysis of the problem at hand. To do this, Stein turns from the *Quaestiones* to *De ente et essentia*, an early work where the "fully developed doctrine" can nonetheless be found, like "a seed that later on grows into a

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Their researches are "a genuine encounter" between medieval and contemporary philosophy. In it we find full acknowledgments of both insights. For this comment see Sarah Borden Sharkey, "Edith Stein and Thomas Aquinas on Being and Essence," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 82, No. 1 (Winter 2008): 87. In *Finite and Eternal Being*, there is even a section entitled "A Critical Appraisal of the Thomistic Doctrine on the Ground or Foundation of Individual Being" (See pages 471-503). This shows Stein as a critic of Scholastic thought.

<sup>22</sup> We are unlucky that we do not have in our possession Stein's work written in 1931, entitled *Potenz und Akt* (Potency and Act). It is Stein's *Habilitationsschrift* in order for her to qualify for a professorship at the University of Freiburg. This work was posthumously published in 1998, but at that time the English translation was still in progress. This work is Stein's attempt to study the foundations of Thomistic philosophy by using the phenomenological method. It is indeed an attempt to bring together the phenomenological method, in which Stein is an expert, and Thomistic philosophy, which Stein embraces as a convert to Catholicism. We have known that Stein failed to get a professorial position at the University of Freiburg. But this work of Stein was not a waste. Later in her life as a Carmelite nun, she was encouraged by her religious superiors to continue her work, revising and expanding it. The result was *Endliches und Ewiges Sein* (*Finite and Eternal Being*), which is our major source in our present attempt to present Stein's philosophy of being. For this information, see the Foreword to the ICS Publications Edition of *Finite and Eternal Being*, xiv-xv. Luckily, one can refer to Walter Redmond's article entitled "A Nothing that Is: Edith Stein on Being Without Essence," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 82, No. 1 (Winter 2008): 71-86. In that article we can have a glimpse of *Potenz und Akt*. Actually, Redmond is the translator of *Potenz und Akt* into English, which is being published by ICS Publications.

<sup>23</sup> Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being*, 31.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

mighty tree.”<sup>25</sup> A careful study on this early work is for Stein a necessity in order for us to penetrate into the original meaning of the *doctrine of act and potency*.

The ontology of Aquinas is outlined into three major gradations: 1) *material or composite substances* (composed of *matter* and *form*); 2) *intelligent* [spiritual] or *simple substances*; 3) and the *first existent*, that is, God. Stein says that Aquinas considers these gradations of the “totality of that which is” as “hierarchically ordered.”<sup>26</sup>

The first gradation, which is the lowest realm, comprises the world of matter – both inorganic (lifeless) and organic (including humanity). The second one includes the angels which Aquinas calls intelligences; they are simple and considered *pure forms*. Stein mentions that it was hotly debated during the Middle Ages whether *pure intelligences* have some matter. The highest realm of the hierarchy is the *first existent*, that is, God; and it is widely agreed by medieval writers that this first existent is absolutely simple and pure being. What marks the difference between this first existent (God) and created intelligences (angels), which are not composed of matter and form, is the separation of *form* and *being* [i.e., the act of existing] in created intelligences. Rather, their *form* is identical with their *essence* [*essentia*]. It is best to quote *De ente et essentia*:

An intelligence [*intelligentia*] is form and being, and it has its act of existing from the first existent, who is pure being, and this is the first cause, which is God. But every being which receives something from another is in potency with respect to what it receives, and what it receives is its act. And thus potency and act are found in the intelligences, but not form and matter... And because the quiddity [*quidditas*] of the intelligences is the intelligent itself, its quiddity or essence is identical with itself, and its being (act of existing) which it has received from God is that whereby it exists independently in the world of things (*quo subsistit in rerum natura*)...” “And since in the intelligences both potency and act must be admitted, it is not difficult to account for their multiplicity. If, on the other hand, there were no potency in them, there could not be a multiplicity of them, either.... The intelligences thus differ from one another in accordance with their respective degrees of potency and act, so that a higher intelligence, being closer to the first existent, has more actuality and less potency, and the same is proportionately true of the others.”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 32-33. Chapter 2 of *De ente et essentia* begins a treatment on material or composite substances: *In substantiis igitur compositis forma et materia notae sunt, ut in homine anima et corpus...* The discussion on composite substances proceeds until Chapter 3. Chapter 4 deals with simple substances and the first existent: *Nunc restat videre per quem modum sit essential in substantiis separatis, scilicet in anima intellective et in intelligentiis et in causa prima...* (See Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opusculum *De Ente et Essentia*, edidit Vincentius-Maria Pouliot, O.P., diligent cum cooperation Domini Akio Kusaka [Kyōto, Japonia: Institutum Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, 1955], Caput II to Caput III, 4ff, pp. 36-58; Caput IV, 18ff, pp. 58-68).

<sup>27</sup> Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being*, 32-33. Here is the original Latin text of the ones quoted by

Stein observes that there is a link between St. Thomas' concepts of act and potency and Aristotle's concepts of form, matter, substance, etc. However, a discussion of these other Aristotelian concepts is no longer included in our exposition.<sup>28</sup> For the time being, Stein finds it unnecessary to discuss these Aristotelian concepts. She has to confine herself at first only to discussing the above passage of St. Thomas.

Stein discovers in St. Thomas' pure intelligences a distinction between "what they are (their quiddity)" and "the fact that they are." The being of these pure intelligences is designated by St. Thomas as the "act of existing." This conforms to the idea of the "first existent" which is, together with Aristotle, defined as *pure being* and *pure act* by St. Thomas.<sup>29</sup> If something, however, receives being, as has been shown by St. Thomas, that something is in potency to that which it receives. If *potentia* would denote "a possibility or a *being able to*, then *esse in potentia* means possible being, having the possibility of being, or being able to be [*im Vermögen sein; in der Möglichkeit sein; Sein-können*]. That which can be, however, does not – as has been explained – by itself have the power of giving to itself its being or its act of existence."<sup>30</sup>

However, to say "being able to be" is more than just to say that something is not hindered "from receiving the act of existence." What is implied when we speak of possible being is a being which is understood in a dual sense: (1) a being toward being as *act* and (2) "a certain *mode of being*."<sup>31</sup> One cannot simply mean that "being possible" is "not-being." Possible being is already a mode of being; if not, to speak about *degrees of potentiality* would be without sense.

For Stein, what being means is not "always and everywhere one and the same." Act and being are not absolutely identical and convertible, for this would make it impossible to say that "something is more or less in act and thus closer to

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Stein: *Patet ergo quod intelligentia est forma et esse, et quod esse habeat a primo ente quod est esse tantum; et hoc est causa prima quae est Deus. Omne autem quod recipit aliquid ab aliquot est in potentia respectu illius, et hoc quod receptum est in eo est actus ejus. Oportet ergo quod ipsa quidditas vel forma, quae est intelligentia, sit in potentia respectu esse quod a Deo recipit, et illud esse receptum est per modum actus. Et ita invenitur potentia et actus in intelligentiis, non tamen material et forma nisi aequivoce; unde etiam pati et recipere, subjectum esse, et omnia hujusmodi quae videntur rebus ratione materiae convenire, aequivoce convenient substantiis intellectualibus et substantiis corporabilis, ut in III de Anima COMMENTATOR dicit. Et quia, ut dictum est, intelligentiae ejus est ipsum quod est, et suum esse receptum a Deo est id quo est vel subsistit in rerum natura; et propter hoc a quibusdam dicuntur hujusmodi substantiae componi ex quo est et quod est, vel ex quod est et esse, ut BOETIUS dicit. Et quia in intelligentiis ponitur potentia et actus, non erit difficile invenire multitudinem intelligentiarum; quod esset impossibile si potentia in eis non esset... Est ergo distinctio earum ab invicem secundum gradum potentiae et actus, ita quod intelligentia superior, quae plus propinqua est primo, habet plus de actu et minus de potentia, et sic de aliis (De Ente et Essentia, Caput IV, 22-23, pp.64-66). [Emphasis mine]*

<sup>28</sup> For Stein's treatment of these Aristotelian concepts see chapter four of *Finite and Eternal Being*, 121-275.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

or farther removed from the first being.”<sup>32</sup> So for Stein, it is justified to distinguish between *gradations of being* and “calling act and potency *modes of being*.” She says further that from what is potential to what is actual being, the transition is not just from “one mode of being to another” but from inferior to superior.<sup>33</sup>

Gradations can even be spoken of in reference to possible and real beings. This is the reason why there is sense in saying that this is “a *pure act*” and that this pure act is designated as the *highest being*.<sup>34</sup>

Stein remarks that these considerations do not exhaust what we mean by act and potency. What has been attained so far is only an understanding of the terms but not a sufficient understanding of the content. In Stein’s analogy, a blind man can only know, when told, what colors signify but he cannot have an experiential knowledge of these colors. Are we better than the blind man? Yes we are, for we can now distinguish possibility from actuality, Stein continues to say.<sup>35</sup> However, we are facing new difficulties. The meaning of act and potency as degrees or modes of being is still insufficient. We are still far from a real understanding of the terms. Hence, Stein inquires whether we can find a way toward a closer understanding of the terms act and potency. This leads us to her next concern.

### 3. *The Indubitably Certain Point of Departure*

To advance farther in her investigation, Stein has to inquire about the knowledge of the nature of our own being. Or how do we know about God? How do we know the *highest being* or God as *actus purus*? It seems the answers are beyond our reach. Earlier we presumed that these terms are understood. But Stein’s approach is consoling: it is very human, close to us – believers and unbelievers alike. Following St. Augustine, she writes, “There is, however, something which is not only very close to us but even inescapably near. Whenever the human mind in its quest for truth has sought an indubitably certain point of departure, it always encountered the inescapable *fact of its own being or existence*: ‘Of all the things we know, how much do we know with the same certitude as we know that we exist?’”<sup>36</sup>

One can doubt about God’s existence, but one cannot doubt about one’s existence. The *Cogito, ergo sum* of Descartes establishes this first certitude; no skeptic can counter such an assertion. In Husserl there is this *life of the ego* (*Ichleben*). One may not be certain that something exists, but one is certain that one perceives something. For Stein we are here already beyond the “delusions of the senses.” To

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 35. Also see St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, X, 3 and XV, 12.

know that we exist is the most intimate of knowledge. “In the ‘I live’ of St. Augustine as much as in the ‘I think’ of Descartes, and in Husserl’s ‘being conscious of’ or ‘experiencing’ – there is implied the same *I am*.”<sup>37</sup>

The certainty of one’s existence is not first knowledge in a *temporal* sense, since there is no doubt that the external world exists. Phenomenology is already beyond Descartes; there is no more isolated ego, for the world out there exists though in a bracket (phenomenological reduction). Moreover, this knowledge is not in the manner of a *first principle* from which all other truths are deduced. “The certainty of my existence,” Stein maintains, “is rather most primordial in the sense that it is the most intimate or immediate knowledge I have: It is a knowledge of that which is inseparable from me, and it is therefore a primordial starting point.”<sup>38</sup>

The certainty that I exist comes to us without any reflection, in Stein’s words, an “unreflected knowledge,” meaning such knowledge as “precedes all reflective and ‘retrospective’ thinking.”<sup>39</sup> Without being naturally concerned with external objects, the intellect in self-knowledge turns upon itself. It contemplates “the simple fact of its own being” and, according to Stein, it asks a threefold-question: “(1) What is that being of which I am conscious? (2) What is that self which is conscious of itself? (3) What is that intellectual movement in which I am and in which I am conscious of both myself and the movement itself?”<sup>40</sup>

When we look at “being as it is in itself,” we see two aspects: “that of being and that of not-being.” Stein observes,

The “I am” is unable to endure this dual perspective: that in which I am is subject to change and since being and the intellectual movement (“in which” I am) are not separated, this being is likewise subject to change. The “former” state of being is past and has given way to the “present” state of being. This means that the being of which I am conscious as mine is inseparable from temporality. As actual being – that is, as actually present being – it is without a temporal dimension [*punktuell*]: It is a “now” in between a “no longer” and a “not yet.” But by its breaking apart in its flux into being and not-being, the *idea of pure being* is revealed to us. In pure being there is no longer any admixture of not-being, nor any “no longer” and “not yet.” In short, pure being is not temporal but *eternal*.<sup>41</sup>

Being human is to realize that one is temporal and what we call pure being is eternal. Hence Stein concludes that the intellect has an encounter within itself with ideas like eternal, temporal, immutable and mutable being (and also not-being);

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 36. From the “simple fact of being,” Stein distinguishes an “intellectual movement,” which is the awareness of my own being, of the ego, and of being itself. (Ibid., 62)

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

these ideas are not borrowed from the outside of the intellect.<sup>42</sup> This finding confirms the fact that we can legitimately have a philosophy which is based on natural reason and natural knowledge. This is not yet to show whether God exists or not. What comes to mind at this point of Stein's investigation is the term *analogia entis*, which we shall discuss only later in our exposition. It is enough to say for the time being that *analogia entis* indicates the "relationship existing between temporal and eternal being."

#### 4. Present Being as Actual and Potential

In thinking about "being and not-being," what becomes apparent is actuality. At this point, what manifests to us as being is what Stein calls *actually present*.<sup>43</sup> She also calls this being as *fully alive*, for what is considered here is the being of the "living self." But what is the "actual state" of this being? Stein is certain that this is not a not-being, for "that which once was but no longer is and that which will be but is not yet is not simply not-being." The past and the future epistemologically exist "in memory and expectation."

How about the present moment? Stein observes that it does not exist "by itself in isolation." Like a point in a line, the present moment does not exist apart from the past and the future. The actually present, which is something which rises "out of darkness, passes through a ray of light only to sink back again into darkness." Or in another metaphor used by Stein in describing the actually present: it is like the "crest of a wave which itself is part of a mighty stream." Stein is telling us here of a being which endures even if it is not actual during the whole time it extends as being.<sup>44</sup>

In my present being, there is something which is no longer actual but which shall be in the future. As Stein puts it, "And what I am now actually I was at some time in the past, but not actually."<sup>45</sup> This means that what is contained in "my present being" is "the *possibility or potentiality* [*Möglichkeit*] of future actual being." And what is also presupposed here is that my actual being is a "possibility or potentiality" of "my former being."<sup>46</sup> In a word, my present being is both actual and potential. So from the fact of our own being, we can deduce actuality and potentiality.

Earlier we have seen how Stein discusses the doctrine of act and potency from the writings of St. Thomas. We have seen also how such a discussion has brought us towards some understanding of the term, and yet with its content we have not gone that far. Now, in introducing the fact of our own being, Stein brings

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

us to a better understanding of the doctrine of act and potency. But we are not yet done here. We have to move further.

### 5. *Temporality as a Progress of Actuality*

Stein reminds us “that the two different modes of being in which I ‘still’ am what I once was, and in which I am ‘already’ what I shall be in the future are both parts of my present existence.”<sup>47</sup> This we have discussed above. Stein continues saying that “my past and future existence *as such* are completely void [*nichtig*]: I am now, not at any other time past or future.”<sup>48</sup> Definitely I exist, but “my existence” is “suspended over a sword’s edge.”

There is then what Stein calls an “enigmatic nature of *time* and *temporal existence*.” Past and future are never static. They do not contain something that is preserved or something that can emerge. In a word, there is nothing in them that can be concealed as “enduring being.”<sup>49</sup> “The peculiar nature of enduring being,” Stein maintains, “cannot be understood from the point of view of time, but rather conversely, time must be understood from the point of view of non-dimensional actuality.”<sup>50</sup>

There is time because there is being, not the other way around. Enduring being only appears to us as “a *continual passing* over the point of contact.” This is what Stein calls “the original *existential movement*”- a movement where time is created and it is created as a space.<sup>51</sup> Being, therefore, is becoming, not static; and time is needed for it to be. It can be posited only in actuality or in the present, which now becomes the “space in which the act of positing can be performed.”

We can speak of the “present” when “this primordial ontic act occurs.” But what we have here is only a “‘point’, never a breadth,” for the present continues to break “in upon nothingness.” Actuality then is to advance a farther step. Stein explains that with actuality what is reached is “a new position” and that what has been is not anymore valid.<sup>52</sup> What we call time or its dimension is no other than just a “progress of actuality.” “The firm anchorage of time,” Stein continues, “lies in the *passing present*.” “Any concrete existential hold” or “any breadth dimension of the present” cannot be furnished by time. The reason is that what is temporally posited

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 39-40.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Let us not fail to mention here that these ideas of Stein are borrowed from Hedwig Conrad-Martius. In her notes, Stein mentions that H. Conrad-Martius has confined the meaning of actuality to a non-dimensional being and therefore it is not applicable to what we call eternal being. See endnote 13 of the Chapter II of *Finite and Eternal Being*, 554.

is “the existential form of an existent” that is only factual and not essential. It means further that “a definitive positing of being” cannot be arrived at *in and by itself* for that which is only a “factually existing being.” In a word, “a true possession of existence [*Existenzbesitz*]” cannot be attained here.<sup>53</sup>

What is described here is temporal existence, that is, “a nondimensional actuality continually illuminated by flashes of light.” But temporal existence for Stein cannot be considered as pure actuality. She clearly puts it: “In my nondimensional present there is simultaneously actual and potential being. I am not in the same manner and degree everything that I presently am.”<sup>54</sup> Being human therefore is temporal, which means it is simultaneously actual and potential or, in a word, it is a progress of actuality. With such finding Stein has to consider a being in which both potentiality and actuality are necessarily seen as one.

## 6. *The Experience of Capability*

Stein makes us realize that in our own being, we experience “capability.” She writes, “Whatever human beings *do* is a realization of what they are *capable* of doing; and what they are capable of doing is a manifestation of what they *are*.”<sup>55</sup> In a later chapter Stein again says, “What human beings are ‘capable of doing’ as free persons they learn only by doing it or, perhaps, in anticipation, when they meet with a specific *demand*.”<sup>56</sup> Hence upon realizing our capabilities, our *essence or nature* reaches the peak of our *ontological development* [*Seinsentfaltung*].<sup>57</sup> This is what education is all about, for to be truly human is not an instant event. A series of development is needed, but every person is capable of it. Stein brilliantly puts it,

The I is, as it were, the breach between the dark and deep ground and the clear luminosity of conscious life and therewith also between “potentiality” or “pre-actuality” and full and present actuality (i.e., between potency and act). In the experience of its “capability” [*Können*], the I becomes conscious of the “powers” which are “dormant” in the soul and which sustain the ego-life. And the ego-life in turn is the actualization, the actual effectuation of these powers. It is that thereby these powers become visible.<sup>58</sup>

What is the source of this power which is dormant in the soul? Such power, Stein believes, sustains the life of the ego [*Ichleben*]. In later pages Stein mentions about capability [*Können*], obligation [*Sollen*, the “Ought”] and the inner life. The experience of human capability or what we can do and what we ought to do and the

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 376.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 376.

experience of freedom as it is related to the power that commands us suggest an access to a God dwelling in our soul.

Maybe one will criticize Stein for being theological, but reading her closely convinces us that her arguments are experiential and, hence, philosophical. We have seen earlier that her starting point is the fact of our own being. She argues that the being of the soul is anchored in divine being.<sup>59</sup> The power which is dormant in the soul is already within the disposal of the human person. And yet this power “has a *measure*.” It is a “finite quantity.” Every time we perform a “free act”<sup>60</sup> that consumes our power, we are naturally exhausted unless there is a sufficient supply of this power coming from its source. Stein gives the example of a physician who is already very tired after a day’s work, then still receives a sick call during the night. The physician feels that this is already beyond his power, but there is a *demand*: the life of the person is what is at stake here. That is why the physician tells himself that he can still do it because he ought to do it. This strikes Stein as being similar to Immanuel Kant’s moral imperative. The emphasis of Stein in this situation is that the “experienced demand” is adequately expressed.

It can happen according to her that we are deceived into thinking that we cannot do a task but if pushed to the limit, we are actually capable of doing it. It can also happen that we are obliged to do it even if it is already beyond our power. For Stein, Kant’s categorical imperative means that in the face of a “demand of duty,” one’s freedom with respect to its own nature is revealed. This does not mean that the “I” is capable of doing something that is beyond its nature. For if this is so, the “I” becomes a “creative power,” but this is impossible for there is no creature so endowed. If we are obliged to do a demand which is already beyond our natural power, then this added vigor comes already from an outside source; this would be outside our nature. And where can we seek such additional source of strength? Stein claims that in faith we can find the answer.<sup>61</sup>

It is not yet time for us to see Stein’s understanding of faith; this we will do later. She asserts that God’s demand is coupled with a corresponding power to

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 444.

<sup>60</sup> Stein has defined the person as “a conscious and free I.” To be a person or to be this “I” is to be *free* because it can determine its own life only by doing *free acts*. “Free acts,” continues Stein, “thus constitute the primary sovereign dominion of the person.” (Ibid., 376) Due to his free acts, the person can influence not only his being, but also his environment. He can extend his dominion to others and justifiably claim that it is “mine.” Stein further explains, “Whatever the person does freely and consciously is ego-life, but persons draw their ego-life out of some greater or lesser depth. The resolve to take a walk, for example, derives from a layer that is much closer to the surface than a decision that concerns the choice of a vocation.” (Ibid.) In a word, there are choices which entail deeper reflections. “This depth,” Stein maintains, “is the depth of the soul which comes ‘alive’ and becomes luminous in the ego-life, but before its coming alive it was hidden, and it remains mysterious despite this luminosity.” (Ibid.) This human capacity of doing things flows from being free, and for Stein, this can only be learned by doing it or maybe by anticipating “a specific *demand*.” (Ibid.)

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 444-445.

comply with it. This is taught by faith. Stein says further, “The innermost being of the soul is like a vessel into which flows the spirit of God (i.e., the life of grace) if the soul by virtue of its freedom opens itself to this vital influx.”<sup>62</sup> Stein is convinced that God’s spirit is “meaning and power.” She continues saying that the soul without this God-given capability does not gain new life and is insufficient.

Moreover, it is God who gives a definite direction to the activity of the soul.<sup>63</sup> “Every *meaningful* demand” that obliges us is God’s word. For every meaning comes from the Logos; and to receive God’s word is at the same time to receive the “divine power to comply with the demand.”<sup>64</sup>

Stein’s intention is to express the difference between God’s nature and our own. Let us be reminded that earlier Stein has already inquired into this problem (see Sec. 3 above). Now it is becoming clear that what is separated in our nature is united in God, Stein says. God’s “capability is realized in action.” His “entire essence is eternal and immutable in the fullest and highest actualization of his being.” God’s existence and essence are one. He *who is* is the name revealed to us by God in order to describe his very being.<sup>65</sup>

In being divine there is unity, while in being human there is only brokenness and division. There is that “abyss” between the creature and the creator. And yet what is common to both is the possibility of speaking of *being*. Stein claims that everything, insofar as it is, bears some semblance with the divine being. “But all being,” excluding the divine, “also bears some semblance of not-being.” And this is what it means to be a creature. Only God, as creator, is *actus purus*. There is no potentiality in God. While in being human the two modes of being (potential and actual) can be found, in God there is only *actu esse*.<sup>66</sup>

Moreover, we can speak of “infinite plenitude.” God is perfect or pure form, for in him, there is no need of any formation. We have seen our own nature as being capable or in need of development; it can be influenced by outside factors. With God there is no more possibility of receiving external influences. He is fullness, unlike our finite existence which is indeed very limited. Creaturely fullness indeed cannot achieve ultimate perfection. In addition, “finite actuality,” says Stein, is a “creaturely fullness,” meaning “limited fullness;” and this fullness of the creature makes the creator as the “totally other.” Because of such limitation, the creature in order to be full needs the “divine formative power.”<sup>67</sup> “By virtue of this fullness,” Stein continues,

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 445.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 41. Cf. Exodus 3:14.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 41-42.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 417.

“the creature can plastically mold itself by means of its own formative power, i.e., by means of the formative power of its own form, and the creature remains always open to the extraneous influences exerted by other creatures.”<sup>68</sup>

### 7. *Being Human as Transitory*

Being human is a process of formation; it is a constant becoming. “The life of the ego,” Stein maintains, “thus appears to be nothing but a continuous living-from-the-past-into-the-future whereby the potential is constantly actualized and the actual constantly sinks back into potentiality.”<sup>69</sup> Being human is just a transition from one moment to another - a “fleeting moment” indeed. Stein speaks of *experiential unit* which means “a structural whole which during a certain period of time grows up organically in the conscious life of the individual self and thereby ‘fills’ this temporal span.”<sup>70</sup> What is being *actual* here is not the “past unit” but the present one. And yet this “*actual unit*” is not entirely actual. What is in the “immediate now” is what Stein calls “fully alive.”

The “now” is an undivided moment, yet in the next moment it is sinking again into the past.<sup>71</sup> Hence, whatever is filled with a new life is a new now.<sup>72</sup> Stein clarifies further that what “is not fully alive reaches the height of its vitality, and that which is now fully alive becomes a moment later ‘life that has been lived’ [*gelebtes Leben*].”<sup>73</sup> To be fully alive then is in the present moment, for the past has already been lived; the future is not yet alive. Anything that can “really ‘be’” cannot be found in the past or in the future. In other words, actual being cannot be found in the two temporal dimensions of past and future. What we can have here “*are* only lacunae [*Leerstellen*]” – just the extension of time from the past to the future. It is only in the present moment where we can have *real fullness* or *fulfillment*.<sup>74</sup> Everything that I was continues to be with me and alive with me in the present moment.<sup>75</sup> Stein insists that her “existence is a continuous movement, a fleeting and, in the strictest sense, a *transitory* kind of being and thus the extreme opposite of *eternal* and *immutable being*.”<sup>76</sup>

To be human is to continually become and pass away. And yet, according to Stein, in our experience this constant becoming and passing away is constantly pointing further than itself. She says that “it strives toward being (that is, of course,

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 43-44.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 44-45.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

merely a metaphorical manner of speaking), but it touches it only fleetingly from moment to moment.”<sup>77</sup> How do we describe our own being? Stein writes, “Our own *being* then – which is this continual becoming and passing away and as such always only on the way to true being – reveals to us the *idea of true being*, i.e., of the perfect and eternally immutable being of the *pure act*.”<sup>78</sup>

It is very clear by now that our finite being reveals the idea of a true being, which is eternal and immutable. But we have to go further into Stein’s analysis. Earlier we mentioned about the *fact of our own being* as an inescapable starting point of Stein’s analysis. Stein writes, “What remains after this phenomenological reduction as the field of investigation is the area of consciousness understood as the *life of the ego* [*Ichleben*].”<sup>79</sup> What is this life of the ego? Husserl, as mentioned by Stein, speaks of pure ego. What is it?

## B. Our Own Being As Sustained By Eternal Being

### 1. On the Pure Ego

Immediately given to us in consciousness is the *self*, which Husserl calls the *pure ego*. In the pure ego, we cannot find any contents; it is in itself indescribable.<sup>80</sup> And yet the pure ego is alive in these statements: I perceive, I think, I draw conclusions, I experience joy, I desire, etc. In perceiving, thinking, desiring, the pure ego tends toward that which is perceived, thought, and desired. To interpret how pure the ego is, no longer occupies Stein. What is important to her is that in every experience the pure ego is alive and indispensable.

The pure ego and the content of experience are inseparable, and yet the former is not a part of the latter.<sup>81</sup> Stein says, “Rather the converse is true: Every experience is part of the pure ego; the pure ego is alive in every experience; *its life* is

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 36. This area of consciousness is very important in the study of what it means to be human. In fact, this is what is closest to us. This is the starting point of Stein as she tries to make an attempt at an ascent to the meaning of being; or in a word, an ascent from the finite being of the self to the eternal being of God. Karl Schudt even considers this as Stein’s proof for the existence of God from consciousness. (See Schudt, “Edith Stein’s Proof for the Existence of God from Consciousness,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 82, No. 1 [2008], 105-125.). However, strictly speaking, Stein does not call her argument a *proof* (*Finite and Eternal Being*, 109). It is good to recall also Teilhard de Chardin’s admission that “evolution is an ascent towards consciousness” (Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, trans. Bernard Wall [New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1959], 258). Now Stein’s reflection is already an ascent from human consciousness to that which is Divine.

<sup>80</sup> Husserl speaks of an “essenceless” and “empty Ego.” (Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1952), 127.

<sup>81</sup> Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being*, 48.

that very flux in which ever new structures of experiential units arise.”<sup>82</sup> Indeed, the pure ego is not a part of the experiential content, Stein insists. She writes earlier that the ego transcends her experience, like the way the object does although in a different manner. This is the reason why in Husserl, both the object and the psychological ego [*das psychische Ich*] are termed *transcendental*.<sup>83</sup>

Take for example the experience of joy. This is Stein’s classic and favorite example. Good news can bring joy to me who has heard of it. Presupposed in this experience of joy is the appreciation I feel while listening to it. I am gratified to know that I comprehend the news, but my appreciation and gratification do not belong to the joy unit as such. I may have known the news prior to this joy over its content. I may not have possessed a clear understanding of how gratifying the news is. Or I may not experience joy due to some other matters.<sup>84</sup>

Stein mentions two ways to condition the experience of the content “joy.” First is by the object. The joy as experiential content does not contain the object which is the content of the news, that is, the object is not a part of the experiential content. But what is a part of the experiential content is the tendency toward the object. This is called *intentionality* in phenomenology. It is a “constitutive part of joy” to tend toward the object. This particular joy is completed the moment I no longer experience this joy or when I experience joy over a different object. A second way of conditioning the experience of the content “joy” is by the ego [*Ich*]. When I realize that it is a joyful news and yet I am not joyful, my realization and my not experiencing joy both contain the ego. The ego cannot be eliminated from both experiences.<sup>85</sup> In Stein’s words, “I can experience nothing without the ‘I’ [*Ich*] experientially involved.”<sup>86</sup>

I may have known the reason why there is no experience of joy or I may not experience joy if there is no specific reason to be joyful. But what convinces Stein is this: The reason for not experiencing joy lies in her even if there is no possibility of tracking it down.

Therefore she concludes “that there are things hidden ‘within me’ – all kinds of things – which are unknown to me.”<sup>87</sup> Hence it is said that the ego is not part of the experiential content. The converse is true for Stein: “All experiential *contents* are part of the pure ego.”<sup>88</sup> “The ego is *alive*, and its life is its *being*,” she avers. The ego lives in a moment of joy when I experience it right now, in my longing when the joy

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 46-47.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 46-47.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 48.

is no longer there, in my “thoughtful reflection” over my experience of joy.<sup>89</sup> Stein observes, “But while joy fades away, longing dies, and reflection ceases, the ego does not fade or pass away: It is alive in every now.”<sup>90</sup>

Does she mean here that the ego possesses *eternal* life? Definitely not. There is no need to ask whether it eternally exists or not, but Stein is only trying to show us that the pure ego does not come to be and die away as in the case of those experiential units.<sup>91</sup> The pure ego, however, “is a living ego whose life is filled with changing contents.”<sup>92</sup> It is not a “ready-made vessel” which is filled gradually with

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<sup>89</sup> Notice that in our example, following Stein, the personal pronoun “I” is employed in order to make our exposition also phenomenological.

<sup>90</sup> Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being*, 84.

<sup>91</sup> In later pages Stein has additional explanations concerning the being of these experiential units. She says, “The actually-alive being of the ego (revitalized from moment to moment from hidden sources), on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the being of the experiential unit arising and growing in the life of the ego. This being of the experiential unit is, as we have learned, a becoming and passing away, a rising to the height of living actuality followed immediately by a descending movement.” (Ibid., 62) And yet for Stein this description of the experiential unit is not yet complete. There is still a need to distinguish between “becoming and passing away and *what* becomes and passes away.” Stein observes that what has become, even if it again sinks back into the past, continues to remain in a certain manner. (Ibid.) See, for instance, Stein’s favorite example: “My joy – the joy which I experience right now – comes into being and passes away. Joy *as such*, on the other hand, neither comes into being nor does it pass away.” (Ibid., 63) Take note of the joy *as such*. We know that there are different kinds of experiencing joy, and different durations of joy experienced by us. But Stein’s point here is a consideration of the essence of joy. She explains further saying, “The essence of joy, however, is *one*. It is not mine or yours, not now or later, not of shorter or longer duration. It has no being in space and time. But wherever and whenever joy is experienced, the essence of joy is *actualized*.” (Ibid.) The experience of essences – like for example, the experience of the essence of joy – is for Stein not an experience in the strict sense. Rather, for her, the experiential units are preconditioned by these experienced essences. Now she asks what kind of being can be attributed to these essences. Her reply is that their being is not similar to that of experiences, which we have previously seen as becoming and passing away. It is not also similar to the being of the ego, which receives a new life from moment to moment. Stein claims that the being of these essences is what we call “changeless and timeless.” Is it then eternal? Is it similar to the being of the first existent? Stein says that Plato’s ideas are similar to the divine being as described by Christian philosophers. Aristotle also has no clear distinction between the being of the divine and the being of these changeless and timeless essences. Only Christian thinkers have clear distinctions between the two. (Ibid., 66-67) Stein explains that there is a great difference between the “first being” and “the being of ideal essences.” “The first being,” she clarifies, “is being in absolute perfection: It is not only changeless being that never becomes or passes away, but it is infinite being, comprising in itself all *plenitude* and *vitality*. The being of ideal essences, on the other hand, is not perfect in this sense. Its preeminence in comparison with the actual experiential units lies in the fact that, raised above the flux of time, it changelessly rests and abides on its ontological summit. But if the individual semantic unit of the ideal essence is taken by itself in its delimited subsistence, it is not living being but appears rigid and dead.” (Ibid., 67) This is actually an objection to the Platonic doctrine of ideas. The being of these ideal essences is “*inefficacious*” and hence it is “*non-actual*.” The first existent is absolutely efficacious and actual. (Ibid.) However, the being of these ideal essences is not a non-being. It is something. Stein writes, “The very fact that it is something indicates that it *is*. Only what is *nothing* is *not*.” Essence is not realized as real, but it only conditions other being to become real. If so, it also possesses being. Stein calls this being of the essence as essential being, as opposed to real being. (Ibid., 68) It is not actually our intention to broaden our understanding of essential being. What we have written here may suffice.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

different contents, but rather it is “a life that wells up anew at every moment; *in every moment its being is actually present*.”<sup>93</sup>

In and by themselves, the experiential contents are not capable of “real being.” What does Stein mean? What these experiential contents have touched as real being is “in fact not *their* being.” How is the ego related to the “height of being” and to act and potency as “rudimentary stages of being”? Stein clarifies that the ego is in act and not in potency.<sup>94</sup> The ego is always alive. Stein writes, “If the self is not alive, it neither is nor is it an ego. It is nothing. It is empty in itself, and all its fullness derives from it.”<sup>95</sup>

The ego endures despite the constant flux of experiences. Stein continues, “The ego, always alive, proceeds from one content to the next, from one experience to another, so that its life is one constant flux.”<sup>96</sup> This is called a *stream of experiences* by Husserl.<sup>97</sup> For Stein, Husserl is justified in saying this. The ego remains because it cannot be nothing. When it is no longer alive it is already past, and when it is not yet alive it is still something in the future; the ego retains its grip on what it has experienced. It stretches forward and reaches out for the future or for what will arrive. Even that which is not presently within the ego’s grip is still within its reach in some way.<sup>98</sup>

When is the time that the ego is really alive? I can recall my past life through memory or recollection, but I cannot make the past present. Stein notices that “what has passed remains past, and I can merely recall *what* was real at that time and, in doing so, I must remain conscious of the fact that I merely repeat or recollect the past

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 48-49.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>97</sup> Within the stream of experience a “unitary form of all experiences” can be found, which is that of “one pure Ego.” (Husserl, *Ideas*, 234) A single experience begins and ends; thus we can speak of duration, like for example, our experience of joy. However, there is no beginning or end for the stream of experience. The Ego can direct its “pure personal glance” to such an experience, grasping it as “really being” or as something that endures in what Husserl calls “phenomenological time.” Hence, any experience which is real necessarily endures and lies within a “continuum of durations” which never ends; such a continuum is filled concretely. Necessarily, the temporal extension, which endlessly stretches away on every side, is filled concretely. This is what Husserl calls an “endless *stream of experience*.” (Ibid., 236) We can also see this in Henri Bergson. In speaking of duration, Bergson mentions about the past and the present as forming an “organic whole.” He says, “We can thus conceive of succession without distinction, and think of it as a mutual penetration, an interconnexion and organization of elements, each one of which represents the whole, and cannot be distinguished or isolated from it except by abstract thought” (Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F. L. Pogson [New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1960], 100-101.) Bergson cites as an example the notes of a tune. These notes are melting into one another, succeeding one another and yet they are perceivable in one another. Their totality can be compared to those closely connected parts of a living being – distinct and yet permeating one another.

<sup>98</sup> Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being*, 50.

intellectually.”<sup>99</sup> To illustrate this Stein says, “I do not live in my past joy as I live in my present joy.”<sup>100</sup> Moreover, she claims that the “‘past ego’ is nothing but an image of myself, an image of the manner in which I was once alive, and no mere ‘image’ of the self can properly be called an ego.”<sup>101</sup> She concludes that the ego is “always actual, always actually living present.”<sup>102</sup>

However, Stein discovered that the life of the ego [*Ichleben*] consists of a totality: the past, that is, the life lying behind it and the future, that is, the life ahead of it. Though a totality, it can never be “actual as a whole.” What we call “present reality” is merely the “now”, that which is alive. In other words, the being alive of the ego is not all-embracing. Stein says, “The ego is always alive as long as it is, but its *vitality* is *not that* of the all-embracing being of the *pure act* but rather the *temporal vitality* advancing from one moment to the next.”<sup>103</sup>

*As long as the ego is.* This is the qualifying condition Stein attaches to the statement just quoted. The ego can always recall its former life, that is, the past, but in doing it there are always lacunae that the ego cannot fill. There always remain “empty temporal spans” that the ego encounters. For Stein, the failure is due maybe to *blanks in the ego’s memory*.<sup>104</sup> Or we may say memory gaps. Everything gets blurry as the ego views its past farther and farther away.

Stein, however, claims that the ego is actually a *preeminent being*. What is this preeminence of the ego’s being? Stein speaks here in a dual sense: the ego as *always alive* (composed of past and future) and as a *carrier* (related to what is carried). Without the ego what is carried has no life (see page 194 below). What is revealed here is that this preeminent being is both peculiarly weak and fragile.<sup>105</sup>

No question that the ego is always alive, but those experiential contents which the ego needs for its own life to be sustained cannot be kept alive. These contents should always be there for the ego to have life. For what happens without these experiential contents? We have seen that without these contents, the ego is empty. It is nothing for it is without life. On the other hand, the contents have life only because of the ego, but such life imparted by the ego is only momentary for they eventually fade away. Writing about these contents, Stein says, “They remain *being* of a sort, not as possessing any sovereign ruling power, but merely in that weakened mode which pertains to things that are no longer truly alive.”<sup>106</sup> If indeed the ego is

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 51

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 52

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

nothing without the contents, where does it acquire these contents? Stein answers that the “conscious life of the ego” acquires contents from a “twofold beyond” (transcendence): external and internal worlds. These twofold beyond manifests itself in consciousness (this is called immanence in Husserl’s terms).<sup>107</sup>

We have seen earlier that the ego imparts life to the experiential contents. Can we say that the ego is the source of life? This is Stein’s final inquiry. She answers, “Since life is the *being* of the ego, this would mean that the ego *imparts to itself* or *posits its own being*.”<sup>108</sup> But this would be contrary to her previous discovery of the unique “characteristics of the ego’s being”: the mysteriousness of its “whence and whither”, the gap that cannot be filled by it, the lack of power to keep and uphold in being those experiential contents.

Stein admits, “The ego knows itself as a living, actually present existent and simultaneously as one that emerges from a past and lives into a future; *itself and its being are inescapably there: It is a being thrown into existence [ins Dasein geworfen]*.”<sup>109</sup> Thus the being of the ego can be seen as extremely different from a being which is “autonomous and intrinsically necessary.” Quoting this bold claim of Stein, she writes,

The being of the ego is alive only from moment to moment. It cannot be quiescent because it is restlessly in flight. It thus never attains true self-possession. And we are therefore forced to conclude that the being of the ego, as a constantly changing living present, is not autonomous but *received* being. It has been placed into existence and is sustained in existence from moment to moment.<sup>110</sup>

It is very clear that the project of Stein is to overcome Heidegger’s thought especially on being human. We have seen in the introduction that, in his article, Rafal Kazimier Wilk asserts that any study of Heidegger in this area must also consider Stein’s criticism.<sup>111</sup> Now how is it to be a received being?

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Rafal Kazimier Wilk, “On Human Being: A Dispute Between Edith Stein and Martin Heidegger.” The anthropological research of both Stein and Heidegger is founded on “the time-dependent character of human existence.” The “I” is presently alive and it constantly emerges from the past and into the future. This “I” can only be undivided in the present. The human being cannot help but face this process of life from moment to moment. The “I” cannot escape from being there. That is why it is a being “thrown into existence,” a passing present described as “received.” So, the “being of the ego” is only from one moment to another. It is a restless flight. True self-possession cannot be attained. Thus for Stein the “being of the ego” is never autonomous but is received. The human being exists and continues to exist from moment to moment. It begins and ends and suffers a break. Something is thrown into existence. Obviously, Stein refers to Heidegger’s Dasein. Dasein comprehends itself. But the problem Stein detects in Heidegger’s Dasein is that “thrownness” is opposite to “self-possession” and “self-comprehension.” Dasein by being thrown finds existence without the knowledge of how it came to be. An ego obviously exists but it is also obvious that it cannot exist from

## 2. Received Being as Dependent of Eternal Being

If the “being of the ego” receives life, from whom does it receive life? The answer has two possibilities: either from the transcendental worlds (external or internal) as mentioned above or from the pure being. Stein admits that the being of the ego receives its life or existence from a pure being which directly acts upon it. But she also admits that it receives something from the transcendental worlds. She further asserts that a received being cannot be independent of eternal being. For a received being to be independent of eternal being is unthinkable, for “nothing exists that is truly in full possession of being.”<sup>112</sup>

She further explains that fleeting being “is not in possession of an existence whose very nature it is to be fleeting: It must receive this existence ever anew as a gift.”<sup>113</sup> Now who can give such a gift? Stein declares that it is only the Lord of being

itself and through itself. Human nature is never groundless. The idea of being thrown suggests the idea of a thrower. Being thrown, therefore, is being created. A finite being demands an infinite one – an Eternal Being without beginning and end, a wholeness whose existence comes from itself. This eternal “I” is life. This is fullness of existence, something which is wanting in a human being. (Ibid.) Heidegger is really in the opposite view. For him there is no more ground but already the swaying of the ground. The ground quakes and sways. There is no more stable ground on which to stand. Heidegger calls this the *Unground*, the “dissembling, disswaying.” (Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999), 216-217; see also Romualdo Abulad, “Postmodern Critique and the Ethics of Postmodernism,” *Karunungan: A Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 19 (2002): 67. According to Antonio Calcagno, Stein criticizes Heidegger for stifling the basic questions of every being. If being is thrown into the world, then what is its origin? Stein claims that Heidegger fails to ask these fundamental questions of man: Where did I come? What is my origin? A human being always desires to inquire into his “ultimate origin.” Other questions Heidegger never bothers to ask: “Whence have I been thrown? Who threw me into this existence?” These are questions of man’s ultimate meaning. This is the “why” of one’s existence. (See Antonio Calcagno, “*Die Fülle oder das Nichts?*” Edith Stein and Martin Heidegger on the Question of Being,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. LXXV, no. 2 [Spring, 2000]: 272) Nevertheless, as argued by this article, Heidegger influences Stein, but only negatively. Calcagno writes, “Stein saw in Heidegger a great thinker who indeed opened the door to the question of being. His approach, however, was much too solipsistic, nihilistic and pessimistic. Heidegger viewed being in much too dark a fashion. We know that the later Heidegger gives a more ecstatic interpretation of being; Stein, however, never knew the text of the later Heidegger. She employs Heidegger’s thought as a tool of inquiry. She dialogues with Heidegger’s phenomenology of being. Meditating on similar experiences such as death, fallenness, throwness and *das Man*, Edith Stein draws quite different conclusions about the *Sinn des Seins* (meaning of being), for the meaning of being is viewed as an experience of fullness concretized in radically personal and communitarian terms.” (Ibid., 284-285) See also Stein’s essay “On Death,” reprinted in Florent Gaboriau’s book *The Conversion of Edith Stein*, trans. and preface by Ralph McInerney (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press, 2002), 46-49. Stein wrote this essay with reference to Heidegger.

<sup>112</sup> Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being*, 55. Karl Schudt protests why Stein claims it to be unthinkable. This portion, according to him, is no longer elaborated by Stein. Schudt suggests that Stein must have likely drawn this idea from the scholastic notion that an “infinite causal series” is not possible. He comments, “If a chain of ten beings that depend progressively on each other needs a being to get them started, so does a chain of a hundred, a million, or an infinity. Mere multiplication of beings cannot eliminate the need for a cause of being. Multiplication is not explanation, and cannot substitute for a first cause” (Schudt, “Stein’s Proof for the Existence of God,” 117).

<sup>113</sup> Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being*, 106.

who can give it, for he alone beyond doubt possesses being. “And only a *person*,” she adds, “can be Lord.”<sup>114</sup>

This claim of Stein is not an outright appeal to faith. We have seen from her investigation that from the fact of our own being, a fleeting being is revealed. It is a being which only exists from moment to moment. We cannot conceive it to be unless there exists “another kind of being which, resting firmly in itself, is supremely creative and – as Lord of all being – is being itself.”<sup>115</sup> Stein insists that “he who gives being and simultaneously fills this being with meaning must not only be the Lord of being but also the Lord of meaning: All plenitude of meaning [*Sinnesfülle*] is contained in eternal being, and eternal being can draw the meaning with which every being is filled that is *called into existence* from no other source but from itself.”<sup>116</sup>

A finite being then cannot sustain its own being; it is limited. But within this limited realm of the finite comes the possibility of making “some valid predications concerning our relationship to pure being.”<sup>117</sup> Stein is already speaking here of *analogia entis*. She writes, thus,

My own being, as I know it and as I know myself in it, is null and void [*nichtig*]; I am not by myself (not a being *a se* and *per se*), and by myself I am nothing; at every moment I find myself face to face with nothingness, and from moment to moment I must be endowed and re-endowed with being. And yet this empty existence that I am is *being*, and at every moment I am in touch with the fullness of being.<sup>118</sup>

Despite these finite limitations, this finite is still a *being*. We can indeed predicate being to both the finite and the eternal. This is the significance of *analogia entis* which we will see later. The ego, says Stein, is said to be closer to pure being, because at a certain moment it is being and at every moment it is sustained in being, though not necessarily immutable for its experiential contents constantly undergo change.<sup>119</sup>

With this analysis, Stein declares that the idea of eternal being can be attained through the ego. The nothing is unacceptable to the ego for its desire is fullness of being. It “desires not only an endless continuation of its own being but a full possession of being as such: It desires a being capable of embracing the totality of the ego’s contents in one changeless present instead of its having to witness the continually repeated disappearance of all these contents almost at the very moment they have ascended onto the stage of life.”<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

Stein also adds that with the ego, we can have an *idea of plenitude* [*Idee der Fülle*]. The ego crosses out from its own being what it knows to be a “privation.” The ego experiences within itself varying degrees of approximating itself to that which is *fullness of being*. The ego has “degrees of *vitality in the ego’s present existence*.” It can be a being of greater or lesser *intensity* and can arrive “at the idea of *all-embracing being in its highest degree of intensity*.”<sup>121</sup> Earlier we have seen that Stein speaks of gradations of being, that is, from lower to higher being. So that when we describe the gradation of the actual being of the ego, its distance from the “perfect being of the *pure act*” is infinitely far removed. Compared to pure being, the ego is merely a “feeble image,” and yet the gradations of being always remain true.

Real being as act consists both of the *pure act* and the *finite acts*. The former is the eternal being and the latter is the finite being, which is an infinitely feeble image. Nevertheless, these finite acts are in different degrees of imperfection. It is in the pure act or eternal being where the ego finds its own *measure*. Now the ego learns that the eternal being is the *source* or the *genuine cause* of its own being. How? Stein continues, “The nullity and transiency of its own being becomes clearly manifest to the ego once its *thinking* seizes upon its own being and seeks to lay bare its deepest roots.”<sup>122</sup>

### 3. *The Feeling of Security Against Anxiety*

In delving deeper into its own being, the ego also experiences anxiety [*Angst*]. For Stein this experience is prior to the reflection and retrospection of the ego’s own existence. “Experiential anxiety,” she declares, “accompanies the unredeemed human being throughout life and in many disguises – as fear of this or that particular thing or being.”<sup>123</sup> There is always this existential anxiety of being no more, for to be anxious is to come face to face with nothingness.

However, for Stein, what ordinarily dominates the disposition of human life is not anxiety. Our normal experience is a feeling of security, except for those who are undergoing some pathological problems.<sup>124</sup> Stein is convinced that “normally we go through life almost as securely as if we had a really firm grip on our existence.”<sup>125</sup> This “feeling of existential security” is not groundless and irrational for Stein. Her findings are already contrary to that of Heidegger. Stein argues,

The undeniable fact that my being is limited in its transience from moment to moment and thus exposed to the possibility of nothingness is counterbalanced by the equally undeniable fact that despite this

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

transience, I *am*, that from moment to moment I am *sustained in my being*, and that in my fleeting being I share in enduring being. In the knowledge that being holds me, I rest securely. This security, however, is not the self-assurance of one who under her own power stands on firm ground, but rather the sweet and blissful security of a child that is lifted up and carried by a strong arm. And, objectively speaking, this kind of security is not less rational. For if a child were living in the constant fear that its mother might let it fall, we should hardly call this a “rational” attitude.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid. This feeling of existential security is opposed to Heidegger’s feeling of Angst. Remember that on July 24, 1929, in his inaugural lecture entitled, “What is Metaphysics?” delivered at Freiburg University, Martin Heidegger posed a very intriguing question: How is it with the nothing? (See Martin Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” trans. David Farrell Krell, in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998]). The lecture, according to Richard Polt, was a “concentrated, powerful exploration of anxiety and its relation to nothingness owes much to Being and Time, but its spirit is one of opening new questions and provoking fresh thought. The lecture was not meant as a clear statement of a doctrine, but as a challenge to philosophize.” (Richard Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction* [Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1999], 121). The lecture indeed made an astonishing impact on the audience. As one writer puts it, “When I left the auditorium, I was speechless. For a brief moment I felt as if I had a glimpse into the ground and foundation of the world. In my inner being something was touched that had been asleep for a long time. Heidegger awakened it with his question, ‘Why are there beings instead of nothing?’” (Heinrich Wiegand Petzet, *Encounters and Dialogues with Martin Heidegger, 1929-1976*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly, intro. Parvis Emad [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993], 12-13). The nothing is manifested in anxiety. Heidegger says, “Anxiety robs us of speech. Because beings as a whole slip away, so that precisely the nothing crowds around, all utterance of the ‘is’ falls silent in the face of the nothing.” (Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” 89). Polt observes, “We get a sense of beings as a whole, in anxiety and experience of nihilation. This transcendence makes it possible to relate to particular entities, including *ourselves*” (Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, 126). Heidegger defines Da-sein as “being held out into the nothing” (Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” 91). Dasein transcends “beings as a whole,” he asserts. Henceforth, there must be an original manifestation of the nothing in order for Dasein to have “self-hood and freedom.” Stein criticizes this lecture of Heidegger saying: “It is evident that Heidegger’s inaugural lecture was intended for a non-professional audience and was meant to be provocative rather than instructive; it therefore lacks the stringency of a scientific treatise. The terms and phrases used sound at times more mythological than philosophical. Heidegger speaks of the nothing [*Nichts*] almost as if he were referring to a person whose long suppressed rights must be vindicated. One is reminded of that ‘nothing that once upon a time was everything’” (See Stein’s endnote 36 of the Chapter II of *Finite and Eternal Being*, 557). For Stein, “the revelation of the nothingness in our own being marks at the same time our breaking through this finite, empty being of ours to the infinite, pure, and eternal being.” (Ibid., 558). Moreover, Heidegger was also badly criticized by Rudolf Carnap. Carnap accuses Heidegger of violating a logical syntax. (For fuller details please see Rudolf Carnap, “The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language,” trans. Arthur Pap, in *Logical Positivism*, ed. Alfred Jules Ayer, New York: The Free Press, 1966, pp. 60-81). Carnap argues that there are “pseudo-statements of metaphysics” which are left unnoticed. Examining these statements, he says, “The fact that natural languages allow the formation of meaningless sequences of words without violating the rules of grammar, indicates that grammatical syntax is, from a logical point of view, inadequate. If grammatical syntax corresponded exactly to logical syntax, pseudo-statements could not arise. If grammatical syntax differentiated not only the word-categories of nouns, adjectives, verbs, conjunctions, etc., but within each of these categories made the further distinctions that are logically indispensable, then no pseudo-statements could be formed.” (Ibid., 68) In a schema, Carnap shows the pseudo-statements found in Heidegger’s use of the word “nothing.” (Ibid., 70) Heidegger commits a contradiction here. The “nothing” it introduced as a “name or description of an entity” would be admissible, but “the existence of this entity would be

There is indeed a being sustaining our own being. It is our support and ground. "In my own being, then," Stein continues, "I encounter another kind of being that is not mine but that is the support and ground of my own unsupported and groundless being."<sup>127</sup>

So far, this is where Stein's investigation has led us. Can we really know who we are? Can we really penetrate the depths of what it means to be human? Stein admits saying that "my entire conscious life is not equivalent to 'my being'."<sup>128</sup> She submits that her intellect can only know about what is in the present life and about those things in the past which were once present. The knowledge of the intellect for Stein can only have fragments of the past. It can anticipate the future but its particular details are only seen with "some degree of probability."<sup>129</sup> "In its larger expanse," Stein laments, "the future remains indefinite and uncertain – though conceivable in this indefiniteness and uncertainty – while the origin and ultimate end remain completely inaccessible."<sup>130</sup>

How about this present moment? Stein contends that this immediacy of the present life is just "the fleeting fulfillment of a passing moment, instantaneously sinking away and completely disappearing forthwith."<sup>131</sup> What I have is only a surface of who I am. Stein maintains that our conscious life only "resembles the lit surface that covers an obscure depth, a depth which manifests itself in and through the medium of the surface."<sup>132</sup> But if we have to proceed toward a deeper understanding of what it means to be human, Stein suggests that "we must penetrate this obscure depth." How? The opening statement of the seventh chapter of *Finite and Eternal Being* has given us the inkling. Stein writes, "The search for the meaning of being has led us to that being who is the author and archetype of all finite being."<sup>133</sup> And for Stein this author and archetype of our being has been disclosed to us as a person, and even a tri-personal being.<sup>134</sup> "And this consideration," she persists, "may now aid us

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denied in its very definition," argues Carnap. (Ibid., 71) Hence, he insists that to affirm the existence of the nothing is a contradiction, an absurd assumption. With this criticism of Carnap which was then popular in the Anglophone world, the philosophy of Heidegger was reputed to be "the worst sort of verbal trickery, a wooly-headed and dangerously confused concoction that did not deserve the name 'philosophy' at all, and certainly was not worth reading." (Polt, *Heidegger*, p. 122)

<sup>127</sup> Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being*, 58.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 364.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 355.

<sup>134</sup> Fr. Frederick Fermin, OP has an interesting commentary to the author's Licentiate thesis on Stein's empathy problem. He writes, "I wonder what Stein herself thought of her thesis once she had received the light of faith. She probably dismissed it as a pretentious attempt to understand what actually exceeds our comprehension. Who are we? What makes that we can perceive the world of which we are part and can interact with it? What, finally, enables us to have an intimate knowledge of other persons and enter into a "spiritual" relationship with them? If you accept that man is a creature,

in our attempt to make the content of revelation fruitful for a deeper knowledge of finite being.”<sup>135</sup>

Hence, Stein’s search for what it means to be human involves now a clear necessity of both faith and reason. ■

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only the Creator can answer those questions for He knows how he built us. But if the concept of God and creation is inadmissible, no reasoning can fully explain those things. We know ourselves only through experience, and can agree with an analysis to the extent that we recognize our experience in it. Otherwise the explanation remains just words. Some of Stein’s analysis strikes me as that: a juggling with words. What makes it possible for us to break out of our shell? Stein calls it empathy. But what is empathy? Perhaps it is as difficult to define empathy as it is to define life and love, for it is part of them. The capacity to empathize is inseparable from our understanding of what it means to be a living person, in need of being loved and capable of loving. In last analysis, your study would be a preliminary investigation into the history of Stein’s conversion. Empathy led her to an understanding of the human person, and the person revealed itself as having a transcendental (spiritual) dimension that can only be explained in relation to God, who escapes explanation. But then you are already in the field of theology. It seems that the whole laborious process of Stein’s philosophizing served to make her receptive to the gift of faith. In faith, we know that man was created in the likeness of God. God reveals Himself as love, which postulates plurality of subjects. In fact, He has manifested Himself as Father, Son and H. Spirit. Our being, then, must reflect God’s “constitution” as intersubjectivity, and our life must be patterned after the divine life, which is a shared life of love. The H. Spirit is the liaison between Father and Son, between God and us, and also between human beings as they interrelate. He gives us the capacity to interact as the divine Persons interact, “giving” one another their “personality”, which is entirely relational. The Christian name for empathy is the capacity to love. It is the H. Spirit who is Love, who gives us that capacity. He, then, capacitates us to empathize, and he makes empathy blossom into love. By loving, we discover who we are and who God is.” (Commentary to the author’s thesis on Stein’s empathy problem, June 23, 2004)

<sup>135</sup> Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being*, 355.

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Jose Conrado Estafia is a priest from the Diocese of Talibon, Bohol. He just recently defended his Doctoral Dissertation entitled *Edith Stein on Being Human: Her Contribution to the Dialogue Between Faith and Reason* at the Ecclesiastical Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Santo Tomas, Manila. In 2004, he finished his Licentiate and Master's Degree in Philosophy at the the Ecclesiastical Faculty of Philosophy and at the Graduate School of the same University, respectively. Fr. Estafia is the former academic dean and formator of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Seminary, Diocese of Tagbilaran, Bohol. He can be contacted at [joconr@gmail.com](mailto:joconr@gmail.com).



Rev. Romualdo E. Abulad, SVD, Ph.D. is currently Chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at the University of San Carlos in Cebu City. As a fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung of Germany, he had a two-year stint in the Hamburg and Freiburg. He finished his Ph.D. in Philosophy in the University of Sto. Tomas, his M.A. in the Ateneo de Manila University, and his Ph.B. in the University of Sto. Tomas. He is the country's specialist in Immanuel Kant and the first Filipino philosopher to speak publicly and professionally about Postmodernism, which continues to be his interest. As a missionary, he has been formator, council member and educator in the Philippine Southern Province of the Society of Divine Word (SVD). He can be contacted at [romualdoabulad@yahoo.com](mailto:romualdoabulad@yahoo.com).