



Community in Edith Stein (1891–1942)

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Edith Stein understands community in two fundamental ways. First, there is the phenomenological sense, in which the lived experience of community is marked by the grasping of one living in the experience of another in solidarity with others. Second, there is the theological sense that is paradigmatically lived in the communal life of the three members of the Christian Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a divine community in which humans participate by virtue of their creation By God and grace. The second sense of community is a traditional Christian theological view. The first sense, however, is unique to Stein's philosophy and can be viewed as one of her original and significant contributions to philosophy. Whereas sociology, political science and anthropology describe forms of community as they exist in history and external reality, Stein focuses on the mind's experience of community. As an example of how we grasp community mentally, Stein gives the example of the death of a beloved troop leader. One can understand simultaneously what it is for "me" and an other to experience the loss of the death through empathy [*Einfühlung*], but one can also have a lived experience of community [*Gemeinschaftserlebinis*] insofar as one can understand what it is for the community as a whole to grieve the loss of the beloved leader. She maintains that for one to live an experience of community one requires body, psyche and spirit, all constative of the human person, to make possible the living of an experience of intense togetherness in solidarity. Furthermore, unlike other phenomenologists like Max Scheler and Gerda Walther, community never means that one can fuse or completely identify with others: the experience of community has its own unique sense and is always grasped by an I. The I always remains the foundation of communal experience for Stein.

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