



## Empathy in Edith Stein (1891–1942)

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Empathy or *Einfühlung* is described as a *sui generis* act of mind that permits one to enter into the mind of another and grasp its content or experience. In *On the Problem of Empathy*, Stein also maintains that in addition to making the mind of the other present in consciousness, empathy can also allow us to have better self-understanding. It also allows us to grasp ourselves as objectively constituted as persons, and can serve as a tool shared by all human beings that permits us to investigate particular human phenomena, such as our humanity, which form the objects of investigation of the human/spiritual sciences [*Geisteswissenschaften*].

In an act of empathy, the I grasps content given by another, whom I immediately grasp is co-given to me as another self. The content may be given through my own perception of the other's body, expression, speech, mood, decisions, values, and/or motivations. I understand what the other presents only insofar as I can analogically compare her experience with my own. I bring the other's mind into relief vis-à-vis my own by standing in the place of the other or trading places with the other. For example, the facial expression and the body movements of another combined with learning of a great accomplishment, allow me to understand the other as experiencing great joy. I understand, through empathy, what the other is experiencing as joy because I have experienced joy myself and can grasp the sense of joy through my own inner perception of my own states. Not only do I understand the other's joy, but I also understand joy as phenomenon itself. I and other continually modify one another and help build and communicate the objective sense of things. In *Einführung in die Philosophie*, Stein limits the capacity of empathy: it is described as presenting an aspect of the interior life of the person, but it no longer serves as a foundation of knowledge in the human sciences, as other forms of knowledge, including other sciences, also yield knowledge of the realm of human activity and cultural expression.

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