



Knowledge of Divinity in Edith Stein (1891–1942)

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In *Finite and Eternal Being*, Stein presents a philosophical account of how one can move from an understanding of being in its simplest forms to the knowledge of the highest being, which is God. Synthesizing Greek and medieval Christian philosophy with phenomenology, Stein claims that the categories of matter, form, and essence permit us to move from the most basic comprehension of being to its highest, more complex sense. Our senses allow us to experience the basic materiality of existence, and the fact that our senses also allow us to passively acquire experience of sensual material that can be later deployed to understand higher, more complex realities is foundational for any form of knowledge, including that of God. For example, experiences of the divine come to manifest themselves in our interiority through certain bodily affects, for example, trembling that often accompanies profound joy.

Our psyche allows us to understand the way affectivity, emotion and natural causality work. The experience of the divine, then, can be psychological and we can come to know aspects of the divine through affective experiences, for example, the dark night of negation and absence, as experienced by John of the Cross. Spirit, understood as the realm of rational motivation, intellection and will, is understood by Stein as enabling the highest and deepest knowledge of the divine. One can use human rationality to inquire about the being of God. For example, following Dionysius the Areopagite, Stein says we can use apophatic logic to inquire about what God is and is not. We also can use what revelation and the experience of faith, in conjunction with reason, to understand what God is. For example, Christian Revelation tells us that we are made in the image and likeness of God. We are persons. We can use analogical reasoning to understand what it is for God to be a Trinity of persons based on the knowledge of our own personhood.

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