Ontology of Social Life in Edith Stein (1891–1942)

Anna Jani

Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest

Ontology is one of the most important terms of Husserlian phenomenology i.e., to its basic methodological concepts of reduction and constitution. In the *Ideas I* (see: §§148–150), Husserl divided the ontological field of the phenomenology into the formal ontology of the mind and the different material ontologies of the experienced world life. Edith Stein follows the methodological instructions of Husserl, while she attributes a specific ontology to the social life and distinguishes it from the personal act of the empathy.

Edith Stein was concerned with the problem of social life in her early phenomenological writings. Her dissertation *On the Problem of Empathy* investigates the relation between empathy and other psychical acts by the elucidating the perception under the psycho-physical bodies. Since the development of individual takes place in the life of the community, every bodily effect manifests itself as an interior psychical causality, which is at the same time responsible for individual development. The aim of the first part of *The Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*, the "Sentient Causality", is to show how psychical effects determinate the whole constitution of experiences and delineate the core of the person. Meanwhile Edith Stein emphasizes in the dissertation thesis the priority of the one-to-one act of the empathy and characterizes the act of empathy as the fundamental act of the personality, she separates the act of empathy from the social act of the communal life in the second part of *The Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*. "It's a peculiarity of 'social' acts (in the broadest sense) that they cultivate new objectivities: relations between persons like friendship, enmity, companionship, authority, and the like. And these exhibit both an individual and a typical side, just like the sources from which they spring." (Stein 2000, 292).

Regardless of the involvement of the two types of acts in both of the experiencing of the Other and the community life, Stein made a sharp difference between the individual experiences and that of the communities. "These typical manners of behavior aren't 'masks' that the individual takes up and under which the individual conceals his 'true face' (although that can be the case too). Rather, the individual renders himself in the 'social

perspective' which is required by the 'social slant' of the moment, and which at each moment corresponds to one or another of his essential traits. For in every single case, the typical behavior and the type itself receive their individual imprint from the persons who enter into them." (Stein 2000, 293).

While communal experiences aren't the sum of single experiences and single effects, but rather arise from those as something new and unique beyond them (Cf. Stein 2000, 190), we can talk about the different acts in the two kinds of experiences, which constitutes the field of the social ontology.

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