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Community as core concept in political and educational theory according to Edith Stein

La comunidad como concepto central de la teoría política y educativa según Edith Stein

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ABSTRACT: The rich educational vision Edith Stein developed in the light of the Christian faith must be understood in the light of her early political awareness and of the political thought she sketched out at the end of the twenties, in her strictly phenomenological period. Central to this is her analysis of the concept of *community*, which led her to criticise the theories of the social contract. This article shows the continuity between the political vision proposed by the young Edith Stein in her phenomenological period, and her vision of education, developed after her baptism and her immersion in the thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas. After outlining the determining role of the concept of community in her political thought, we show how

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this concept is also essential for understanding her educational vision. The educational mysticism that she developed in the 1930s thus appears to be what might be called a mysticism of community.

KEYWORDS: Community, education, politics, mysticism, phenomenology.

RESUMEN: La rica visión educativa que Edith Stein desarrolló a la luz de la fe cristiana debe entenderse a la luz de su temprana conciencia política y del pensamiento político que esbozó a finales de los años veinte, en su periodo estrictamente fenomenológico. Su análisis del concepto de comunidad, que la llevó a criticar las teorías del contrato social, ocupa un lugar central. Este artículo muestra la continuidad entre la visión política propuesta por la joven Edith Stein en su periodo fenomenológico y su visión de la educación, desarrollada tras su bautismo y su inmersión en el pensamiento de Santo Tomás de Aquino. Tras esbozar el papel determinante del concepto de comunidad en su pensamiento político, mostramos cómo este concepto es también esencial para comprender su visión educativa. La mística de la educación que desarrolló en los años treinta parece ser lo que podríamos llamar una mística de la comunidad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: comunidad, educación, fenomenología, misticismo, política.

1. INTRODUCTION

From the start of her student life in Breslau, Edith Stein was involved in education. She took part in meetings of the University's "Pedagogical Group" and gave evening classes to employees, who appreciated their young teacher. During the First World War, she agreed to teach at her former school in Breslau, in response to the headmaster's call for help, as many teachers were mobilised. For almost a year, she combined this work with her doctoral research on empathy. This early commitment to education can be seen, from the outset, as a *political* commitment. What does this word mean here?

Edith Stein indicates that she had, from her years of study, "an unusually strong sense of social responsibility" (2001a, 145).² She was "grateful to the state" for the opportunity to study at university and wished "to show later her gratitude to the people and the state through her professional work" (2001a,

² All translations are my own.

146). She actively campaigned for women's right to vote and was passionate about the study of history, inhabited, in her own words, by a "passionate participation in the political events of the present as history in the making" (2001a, 145). This "passion" was accompanied by a strong sense of belonging to Prussia (2001a, 313), where she was born, and more broadly to Germany. This feeling is expressed in the letters she wrote to Roman Ingarden during the First World War. She described her state of mind at the start of the war as follows: "today my individual life has ceased and everything I am belongs to the state" (2001b, 43). Although she had already voluntarily interrupted her doctoral studies to serve as a nurse in a military hospital in Austria, and then as a teacher in Breslau, she continued to feel guilty about "doing nothing for the fatherland" (2001b, 40) after returning to Fribourg, where she was very busy with her work as Husserl's assistant. Immediately after the end of the war, she joined the German Democratic Party, founded in November 1918, and wrote to Ingarden: "Those who love their people naturally want to help create a new way of life for it and will not oppose a necessary development" (2001b, 114).

But her involvement with a party was short-lived. She soon became "disgusted with politics", in other words with the profession of *politician* and the lack of honesty she found there (2001b, 119). The end of the tens was also for her a time of intense inner questioning, the time of what she calls "[her] long search for the true faith" (2001a, 350), which led her to baptism on the 1st of January 1922. Her commitment then focused on education and teaching (Binggeli, 2022). She taught in the schools of the Dominican sisters in Speyer (1923-1931), gave many lectures on education from the end of the 1920s and trained future Christian teachers at the German Institute for Scientific Pedagogy in Münster, before being banned from teaching by the Third Reich in 1933. The rich educational vision she developed in the light of the Christian faith must also be understood in the light of her early political awareness and of the political thought she sketched out at the end of the twenties, in her strictly phenomenological period³. Central to this is her analysis of the concept of *community*, which led her to criticise the theories of the social contract.

³ Éric de Rus, specialist in Stein's thought, devoted his doctoral dissertation (2018) to her educational vision. In *Anthropologie phénoménologique et théorie de l'éducation dans l'œu-*

It will not be possible here to give a complete overview of her thinking on community. We would simply like to show the continuity between the political vision proposed by the young Edith Stein in her phenomenological period, and her vision of education, developed after her baptism and her immersion in the thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas. After outlining the determining role of the concept of community in her political thought, we will show how this concept is also essential for understanding her educational vision. The “educational mysticism” (De Rus, 2014, 30) that she developed in the 1930s thus appears to be what might be called a mysticism of community.

2. THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY IN EDITH STEIN’S POLITICAL VISION⁴

Edith Stein personally chose the subject of her doctoral thesis, *empathy*. While faithfully taking up the Husserlian starting point of the pure ego, she placed her entry into philosophy under the sign of the thought of alterity: empathy is the “experience of the consciousness of somebody else” (*Erfahrung von fremdem Bewusstsein*) (2008, 20), the “knowledge of the subjectivity of somebody else” (*Erkenntnis der fremden Subjektivität*) (2010, 125). Empathy is part of the path of the constitution of a supra-individual subject. Supra-individual

vre d’Edith Stein (2019) and many other publications on this subject, he explores the link between Stein’s educational vision and her analysis of the person. We would like to complement this approach by highlighting the link between Stein’s educational vision and her political theory.

⁴ In order to have a view of Stein’s political thought, we will refer to „*Individuum und Gemeinschaft*“ („Individual and community“), the second part of the *Beiträge zur philosophischen Begründung der Psychologie und der Geisteswissenschaften* (*Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*), published in 1922 (Stein, 2010), and to *Eine Untersuchung über den Staat* (*An Investigation Concerning the State*), published in 1925 (Stein, 2006). An important chapter is devoted to the “social being of the person” in the course on the person given in the winter semester of 1932-1933 in Münster (Stein, 2004). Elements of political reflection are scattered throughout her lectures on women (Stein, 2000c) and education (Stein, 2001c). We will concentrate on the conference entitled „*Die theoretischen Grundlagen der sozialen Bildungsarbeit*“ (“The theoretical foundations of social education work”), given in Nürnberg in April 1930 (2001c, 15-34), because of the decisive role played in it by the concept of community.

experience can lead to the formation of a community where there is “one life stream (*Lebenstrom*) in which all individuals participate” (2006, 19).

Following in the footsteps of Ferdinand Tönnies, the author of *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (*Community and Society*), first published in 1887 and republished in 1912, many thinkers gave pride of place to the concept of community. This was true of the phenomenologists who formed Stein. In his main work, *Die apriorischen Grundlagen des bürgerlichen Rechtes* (*The A Priori Foundations of Civil Law*), published in 1913, Reinach analysed the notion of “social act”, also used by Stein (2010, 51; 2006, 41). Social acts are certainly not enough to generate a community, but they are a necessary condition of community. Above all the concept of community was decisive in the thought of Scheler, especially in his *magnum opus*, *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik*, published in 1913. Stein met Scheler in Göttingen where she arrived in 1913, and repeated several times later that his thought influenced her decisively.

Stein’s interest in the concept of community was also deeply personal. Her friend Roman Ingarden testified, long after Stein’s death, how strong the question of community preoccupied her personally: “The question of clarifying the possibility of mutual understanding between people moved her most, that is, the question of the possibility of creating a human community, which was very necessary not only theoretically but also for her life, in a way for herself” (1979, 472).

Stein investigated the conditions under which a community could be formed in “Individual and Community”, the second part of *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*, written in 1919, and then in *An Investigation Concerning the State*, written between 1920 and 1924. In the introduction to “Individual and Community”, she refers to the distinction drawn by Tönnies, and taken up by Scheler, between two ways of living together: community and society.⁵ As a phenomenologist, she identifies their essential difference (*Wesensunterschied*), by describing the attitude of subjects in society and in community:

⁵ The other social type analysed by Stein, which we won’t go into here, is the *mass*. In a mass, individuals are together (*sind beisammen*), but without living together (*gemeinsam leben*).

Where one person faces the other as an *object*, investigates it and, on the basis of the knowledge gained, ‘handles’ it according to a plan [...], they live together in *society*. Where, on the other hand, one subject accepts the other as a *subject* and does not confront it but lives with it and is determined by its life impulses, they form a *community* with each other (2010, 111).

The characteristic attitude in society is the objectification of the other, who is observed so that he can be known and “handled”, just as the bullfighter “observes” the bull to identify its weak point. Conversely, the attitude in community consists in “naively giving oneself” to the other, welcoming him as another subject. I live with the other, I am open to him, his inner life and mine communicate and influence each other. We share common motives for action. The community is thus an “organism, a personality that lives out of a soul” (2010, 235). It presupposes a “community consciousness” (*Gemeinschaftsbewußtsein*) (2006, 20), the consciousness that a multitude of individuals, although they may be spatially and temporally distant, and may never meet, form a whole. This awareness of being parts of a whole and of living the same life as it must be present in at least some of the members of the community. The vitality of the community consciousness depends on what Stein calls “carriers” (*Träger*), supporting people, who are aware of being members of the community and of sharing its destiny, ready to give of themselves. The more such “carriers” a community has, the more solid, lively, and lasting it is (2010, 234-235).

The distinction between society and community is crucial to understanding Stein’s conception of the state and her critique of social contract theories. Whereas she associates the community with an “organism”, she compares society to “a machine that is ‘invented’, ‘constructed’ [...] for a specific purpose” (2010, 213). The “mechanical” character of the society goes hand in hand with its “rational” character: the grouping of the members of the society is “purely rational”, it is done for a precise, conscious, and thought-out purpose. The society is “founded” for this specific purpose. Its members join by an act of will. Conversely, the emergence of a community is described as a “*natural*” process (a concept that we will have to analyse further): “Community grows, society is founded. Forms of community emerge, forms of society are created” (2006, 7).

At the beginning of *An Investigation Concerning the State*, where Stein examines the ontic structure of the state, she asks whether the organisation of the state is a society or a community. She refers to the theory of the social contract, which in her view identifies the state with a society:

Those who –like the prevailing European doctrine of the state– subscribe to the conception of the contract, i.e., who regard the state as founded on a contract between the individuals belonging to it, have decided our question in favour of society; for they assume a purely rational origin, a creation by virtue of a voluntary act (2006, 8).

Stein mentions the theory of the social contract several times in *An Investigation Concerning the State* and offers a critical examination of it. She stresses that the merit of this theory is to see that “every free act of a community [...] requires the sanction of all those involved in it, in whatever form it may be given” (40). When the state lays down the law, each of its members must, in one way or another, be involved in it. The theory of the social contract recognises the fundamental freedom of individuals who are members of the state: “The state, in order to be able to set itself and its law, must make use of free persons and cannot strip the persons who belong to it of their freedom” (40). But Stein rejects the idea that the state owes its origin to a contract and is “constructed from the isolated individual” (83). This amounts to equating it with a society. She also rejects the idea, which goes hand in hand with that of contract, that the state owes its existence to a *self-alienation* of individuals, that recognition of the state consists in this self-alienation.⁶

She admits that the contract can be the basis of a state, but not the idea that it is the only possible basis. Fundamentally, this theory does not consider “clear phenomena of state formation and state life” (8). It is also possible that “states rise on the basis of a community life” (9). Stein often uses the expression “state community” (*staatliche Gemeinschaft*), defined as the “community formed by the individuals who live in the state” (9). Community is thus essential to the definition of the state as she sees it. “A state is not merely the prod-

⁶ See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du Contrat social* I, VI: the social contract consists of “the total alienation of each partner with all his rights to the whole community.”

uct of law-making acts (although it is the legal constitution that makes it a state in the full sense) but is linked to a preceding community development” (82). When Stein introduces the major concept of *sovereignty*, which according to her constitutes the specificity of the “state community”, she does so with a quotation from Aristotle, who describes the state in these terms: “a number of persons who have joined together in a community of life to form a self-sufficient whole” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, V, 1134a) (10). The term *Lebensgemeinschaft* (community of life) is crucial. For Stein, the individuals who belong to the state form a community. This is also the meaning of her reference to the Aristotelian concept of *philia*. It is *philia*, she explains, quoting Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics* VIII, 1155 a), which “keeps states together” (18). Justice alone is not enough to ensure the cohesion of the city. The city depends primarily on the friendship of its citizens. This friendship is the clear expression of the community consciousness.

The profound link that Stein sees between community and the state does not stem from the ontic structure of the state, from its essence, but from that of the individuals who constitute it: “It is not because of the structure of the state but because of the structure of spiritual persons that [...] a concrete state structure grows on the foundation of an existing community [...]; furthermore, that these community relations are necessary to ensure the existence of a state” (18). In line with the vision of the person that she had already begun to develop in *On the Problem of Empathy* and in *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*, she recalls: “We have said of the individual person that it is as originally a community member as an individual subject, or that it is its natural attitude of mind to be open to intercourse with others” (72). Stein does not deny that the state can exist without being founded on a community, but, in her view, such a state is not in accord with the spiritual nature of the individuals who constitute it. There is something empty (*hohl*) and ephemeral about it (22).

Stein calls the community state an “organism”. The community is like a living organism, which forms and grows naturally. In *An Investigation Concerning the State*, the concept of nature is present but not very developed. It does not have the scope that it would acquire in Stein’s writings from the late 1920s, after her immersion in the thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas, particu-

larly through her translation of the *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate*. Examining the question of the emergence of the state, she refers to Jellinek's critique of the idea of "natural creation of right and state". She then wonders what is meant by "natural creation". It does not refer to a "natural event", "in the strict sense in which it is opposed to a *spiritual* event" (83). Leaving aside this possible confusion, it is relevant to say that a community is formed in a *natural* way: "If one understands the 'natural' emergence not in contrast to the spiritual (*geistig*), but as not 'artificial' (*künstlich*), i.e., originating from arbitrary settings, then it represents the typical course of development of a community in general" (84).

For Stein, community life is not due to a decision, an act of will or a contract. It is what happens when people come into contact with each other, just as a living organism grows 'naturally' when its needs are met. This recalls the well-known Aristotelian thesis that "man is by nature a political animal" (*Politics*, I, 1253 a). The idea that there is something *natural* about community, which Stein arrived at in *An Investigation Concerning the State* through the phenomenological description of spiritual subjects, foreshadows something of the philosophical and theological anthropology she will develop in the 1930s, drawing on Aristotelian and Thomistic metaphysics, without, however, renouncing the phenomenological method.⁷ In the 1930s, the idea of the *natural* emergence of community life will be thus founded on the idea of a *created human nature*.

In her lecture from 1930, "The theoretical foundations of social education work" (ESGA 16, 2001), she writes that the social education work is possible because "man is by nature a community member" (18). She explains: "The human individual [...] is by nature in link with his peers, so that wherever people meet, an understanding is initiated and a commonality of life in which they grow together into specific, concrete social structures which we call communities" (24). The formation of communities is described here as a process

⁷ In her 1932-1933 course on the human person, she wrote: "In the choice of problems I shall be guided to a large extent by Thomas [...]. The method by which I seek a solution to the problems is the phenomenological method, that is, the method developed by Husserl" (Stein, 2004, 28).

that stems from human nature itself. In the 1930s, Stein thus unfolded what had only been sketched out in *An Investigation Concerning the State* : the social dimension is not added to the human being from outside, it is part of him: “this being integrated into a greater whole is part of the construction of the human being itself”, she wrote in the chapter devoted to the social being of man in the last course she taught on the human person at the German Institute for Scientific Pedagogy in Münster (2004, 134).

3. THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY IN STEIN’S EDUCATIONAL VISION

Stein points out several times in “The theoretical foundations of social education work” that the political vision, in the sense of the vision one has of the body politic, its origin and its aims, has a profound influence on the vision of education (2001c, 20, 22, 24, 30). Stein’s political theory, her vision of the link between the individual and the community, is essentially linked to her educational vision. In this lecture Stein emphasised that the first foundation for the possibility of educational work is man’s “member nature” (*Gliednatur*) (20). It is because man is by nature a member of a community, because humanity itself is a vast community of beings who share the same nature, that it is possible to educate him, in other words to “form him for community” (16). For the proponents of social contract theories, schools are essentially called upon to train rational agents, “enlightened” citizens, capable of deciding on the “common interest”, to use Rousseau’s terminology. Enlightened reasoning should enable future citizens to realise that their inclusion in the body politic is basically the least bad thing for them, making it possible to avoid the destruction of all by all.

For Stein, the most important thing about education is the sense of community. This is how “The theoretical foundations” opens: “It is the task of the school [...] to educate the children of the people in such a way that they participate in social life in its various forms - family, people, state, church, etc. - as capable and service-minded members” (16). Since man was made for life in a community, this participation to social life is not an obligation imposed on him from outside. It corresponds to the fulfilment of his nature.

The best way to awaken a sense of community in children is for the school itself to be a community. Stein insists: the school “must be a community” (29). The educator, or teacher, is at the service of the community he forms with his pupils (33). The knowledge he possesses does not give him a position of superiority but makes him a servant. She castigates “the megalomania of the schoolmaster, who exercises a brutal rule over the children and mistreats the souls instead of serving them” (30). Using one’s culture, however great it may be, to dominate one’s audience, is an abuse. The school - or any other place of genuine education - is not simply a place for the “diffusion” of knowledge, in the sense of its impersonal transmission from a teacher to a pupil. It must be a place of “a living contact between generations” (29). We know the difficulties encountered by some pupils and students when distance learning courses were recently introduced at the time of the pandemic. A “meeting” via the screen is not a real meeting, even if it can occasionally be useful. School is a place of community life, and therefore of friendship, a place of service, where everyone experiences responsibility towards everyone else. Vincent Aucante comments on these pages: “School as well as university, including the teachers and the pupils and students, must form a ‘community of education’, a community which becomes the place of solidarity between groups of friends who follow the same teaching, between members of the same class or the same course, and more broadly between all those who belong to the same school or university” (2006, 85).

The first reason why this “educational community” (*Erziehungsgemeinschaft*) (ESGA 16, 29) is necessary has to do with the fundamental mission of the school according to Stein: the transmission of culture (32). “The school is at the service of the people and of humanity, insofar as its mission is to transmit cultural goods, what the past and present have created, to the future” (29). And again: “The children should be brought to the point where they can participate in cultural life in an understanding and creative way” (32). Educators, who are involved in the life of culture, because they themselves create cultural works or because they have knowledge of existing works, open cultural life to young people and prepare them to participate in it. When Stein describes the transmission of cultural goods at school, the terms she uses refer to a circulation of *life* within the community formed by teachers and pupils. For Stein, transmitting culture is an experience of communion.

The community formed by teachers and students is necessary if the cultural goods of the teacher are to become those of the student, through a living contact between them. Conversely, the formation of a common culture within the educational community prepares future citizens to become part of a wider community. By educating pupils to a common culture, by bringing them into contact with works of art that they will come to know and admire, schools can help to forge a “cultural bond through which different communities can become one” and be a factor in integration (Aucante, 2006, 92).⁸

According to Stein, the state community requires “a cultural Kosmos” (2006, 21), “a Kosmos of cultural goods”, “be it independent objects such as the works of art and science, be it stylised forms of life emerging from the actual life of persons” (20). This “spiritual cosmos” (*geistiges Kosmos*) is inseparable from the “world of values” (25). The concept of “values”, inherited from Scheler and implemented by Stein as early as her doctoral thesis, is fundamental to her analysis of the human person. For Scheler, as for Stein, man is not the creator of values, they are given to him. Cultural goods, which most of the time have a material thing as the foundation of their being, are carriers of values. These values are spiritual. When people are in contact with these goods, they can perceive values, and, if they accept them, be nourished by them. The fulfilment of our personality depends on our relationship with values and our receptiveness to them. Each person has a personal specificity (*persönliche Eigenart*), which Stein also calls the *Kern* (core or nucleus), and therefore has a unique relationship with different values. We are not receptive to all values with the same intensity, and we give priority to some over others in our choices and actions. In a “cultural cosmos”, all value domains can be represented. Each person, or each association of people who devote themselves to a particular area of value, participates in the creation of this cosmos (2006, 26). None of the members is the unique creator of this cosmos, but everyone can identify with it, because it would not exist without the synergy of the members.⁹ The

⁸ Aucante also points out that the German Jewish community to which Edith Stein belonged was transformed precisely by various factors of social integration implemented by the state, including education. She herself attended state schools and then university (2006, note 18, 92).

⁹ Stein emphasises that a community which has one cultural cosmos can, in principle, be wider than the community of the people (*Volksgemeinschaft*). Several peoples can belong to the

state's educational policy, its cultural policy and the values it recognises, or does not recognise, are therefore decisive for the unity of the state community (Aucante, 2006, 91). For Stein, the sense of community and the sense of values go hand in hand. Educating people for community means awakening them to certain values. Conversely, the recognition of values and commitment to them can create communities (Lebech, 2010).

4. MYSTICISM OF EDUCATION AND MYSTICISM OF COMMUNITY

We can consider that a page was turned in Stein's work after the writing of *An Investigation Concerning the State* and that it was now the analysis of the person that occupied her most.¹⁰ But her political reflections, in particular on the concept of community, are far from disappearing from her writings or lectures. In the course on the human person given in Münster, at the time of the growing success of Nazi ideology and Hitler's rise to power, the penultimate chapter is devoted to *The Social Being of the Person*. Stein's reflections on education from the late 1920s onwards, in the context of lectures addressed to a Christian audience and written in the light of her faith, are therefore not only the fruit of her analysis of the human person, but also of her thinking about community.¹¹

same cultural circle (*Kulturkreis*). But only the community formed by the people has the essential characteristic of being a creator of culture (2006, 21). Stein's insistence on the link between *Volksgemeinschaft* and culture, in the sense of a spiritual treasure, provided her with the conceptual armament she needed to argue firmly against the Nazi ideology in her last lecture in Münster in the winter of 1932-1933: "Blood community is not sufficient as the basis of the community of people (*Volksgemeinschaft*) ; a spiritual (*geistige*) community of life must be added" (2004, 148).

¹⁰ *Einführung in die Philosophie (Introduction to Philosophy)*, which is made up of fragments from different periods that can be dated between 1916 and 1920, includes a text that Stein had entitled *The ontic structure of the person and its epistemological problems*. Stein's lectures in Münster also focused on the human person (*Der Aufbau der menschlichen Person*, 1932-1933, followed by *Was ist der Mensch? (What is man?)*) a course in theological anthropology, which she had prepared but could not give.

¹¹ According to Mette Lebech, *An Investigation Concerning the State* can be seen as "conclusive of a chapter in [Stein's] life", but she also stresses that "the phenomenological understand-

Stein's thinking on education is intricately linked to her theological and spiritual reflection. Éric de Rus describes it as "mystical". He uses this term because, in his view, Stein saw education as a process of "verticalising the human being in the direction of transcendence" (2014, 30). Stein's conviction is that true educational work, which puts people on the path to self-realisation, presupposes knowledge of the ultimate purpose of the person, revealed in Christ. As Éric de Rus points out, the "mystical" dimension of Stein's educational thinking, what she herself calls her "radical orientation towards the supernatural" (2000a, 142) has disconcerted some of her listeners, even though they were Christians, and sometimes provoked criticism, because it seemed too "foreign" to the concerns of the audience.¹² The "radical orientation towards the supernatural" of Stein's educational vision does not, however, mean a retreat. This is particularly apparent in "The theoretical foundations of social education work", where the concept of community plays a decisive role.

The analysis of this concept, whose philosophical importance we have seen in Stein's early works, takes on a particular emphasis here. In Germany, the Nazi party exalted the community, more specifically the *Volksgemeinschaft* (community of people) and we know what selection criteria on which it was based. Nürnberg, the city where the lecture was held in April 1930, was the venue for the Nazi party's annual congress from 1933 onwards. Two congresses had already been held there, in 1927 and 1929. Stein's lecture can be read as a philosophically and theologically grounded act of resistance to Nazi ideology.

After emphasising that the work of education consists in "forming individuals for the community", Stein immediately establishes a link between the need for community and the fulfilment of man's *ultimate aim*: "Community is necessary, without community, without social life and thus without the formation of individuals into community members, the ultimate goal of man cannot be achieved" (2001c, 16). It is not just a question of teaching individuals to be active and responsible members of their various life communities, such as

ding of our ability to affect the intersubjective constitution of the world is to underpin all her later philosophy" (2010, 152).

¹² See Stein's letter to Sister Callista Kopf (11.10.32), in which she returns with great finesse to a 1930 lecture that aroused strong opposition (2000a, 244-245).

“the family, the people, the state, the church, etc.”, but of having in view man’s ultimate purpose, which is also his origin, “community with God” (25, 28, 31). Mentioning this purpose at the very start of the lecture is a radical way of relativising any human community. It is necessary, but it is not man’s supreme goal, contrary to what Nazi ideology claims, by absolutizing the community.

That the community is necessary for man’s salvation is what Saint Benedict teaches us, as Stein emphasises from the very first lines of the lecture. Saint Benedict, “the greatest educator of the West” (17), proposed to the seekers of God who came to him that they form communities of life. Stein explains that this means that he saw community life as a sure way of seeking God. “1400 years of occidental religious life with all its fruits for the peoples of Europe guarantee that community leads to heaven” (17). She then argues, on the basis of the Christian faith, the necessity of community for salvation. The inspiration of Benedict, the father of so many communities, is nothing other than evangelical inspiration. Benedict is the humble “pupil of a greater master”, Christ, who himself founded, for the salvation of souls, the Church, “a community that envelops the world” (17). The mystery of redemption itself attests that “community is necessary in order to achieve salvation” (18): “No one comes to the Father except through Him, i.e., by entering into the community of the redeemed, by incorporation into the mystical body of Christ.”¹³ Even more profoundly, Stein bases the fact that man is by nature a member of a community on the mystery of the Trinity. In the Christian faith, God is both an *individual*, in the fullest sense of the term, and a *community*, in the fullest sense of the term. Man, if he is created in the image of God, cannot himself be anything other than an individual and, at the same time, a community member (18).

These theological analyses lead us to identify at the very heart of Stein’s “educational mysticism” a mysticism of community.¹⁴ Community is present-

¹³ While Husserl was dying, Stein wrote to Sister Adelgundis Jaegerschmid, who was at his side: “I have no worries about my dear Master. It has always been far from my mind to think that God’s mercy is bound to the limits of the visible Church. God is the truth. He who seeks the truth seeks God, whether it is clear to him or not” (2000b, 300).

¹⁴ The 1920s were the years of intense meditation on the Church as community (Gerl-Falkovitz, 2006, 31; Beckmann-Zöller, 2006, 115).

ed as the principle and the end of education.¹⁵ The community member nature of the human person is seen as the path to God, willed by God, who is himself community. But is the expression “mysticism of community”, as we propose, not inappropriate in the context of Nazism, which deifies community? The fact remains that Stein’s own words are strong: “man [...] is born from the community, in the community and for the community” (2001c, 18). In “The theoretical foundations of social education work”, which is composed of around twenty pages, the term “community” is used more than one hundred and twenty times and so appears to be omnipresent. Stein was perfectly aware of the ideology that was poisoning Germany and soon Europe. In her 1932-1933 course on the human person, she explicitly stated: “There is a widespread tendency today to see the human being as determined only by his membership in the social whole and to deny the individual personality” (2004, 134). Stein’s mysticism of community in no way threatens the individual.

While explaining to her audience the foundations of education work and after having defined community as the first foundation, Stein firmly insists that the community cannot take precedence over the individual. We need to bear in mind the analyses, developed at length in her philosophical works, of the singularity of the person. She recalls that man has a “double nature” (*Doppelnatur*) (2001c, 20), a nature of membership and an individual nature, his “personality”, which constitutes the second root of the possibility of educational work. The community is thus not everything: every human being is an “*individual*: unique in his own art and therefore [...] separate (*gesondert*) from all others. Man’s individuality sets limits to the community” (19). Men who form a community cannot therefore aspire to be perfectly one. “Everyone is something else apart from what he is as a member of the community, no one enters the community with his whole being” (19).

Stein thus criticises both *individualism* and *socialism*, two opposing theories which, in her view, have in common a complete misunderstanding of the

¹⁵ At the end of *La Vision éducative d’Edith Stein*, Eric de Rus notes that forming people with a view to their “universal destination”, with a concern for their “unique vocation”, is not an “individualistic” project: “it means honouring the close solidarity that binds each person to the whole of humanity” (2014, 140).

relationship between the individual and the community, and can only lead to failure when they inspire theories of education or “educational experimentation” (30). Individualism, of which Stein gives a striking description, claims the right to freedom to develop individually. It does not enable the development of communities, but only of societies: “It knows [...] only social associations which serve the benefit of individuals and are founded by them for their purposes according to their free choice and are dissolved again just as freely” (22). This description applies to the whole people, as well as to smaller associations, such as families. Conversely, socialism, according to Stein, subordinates the individual entirely to the community and stifles its personality: “It recognises no individuality, but only the human nature, which is the same everywhere, and it admits no life outside the community” (22). In the face of these two erroneous theories, Stein shows her ability to think the *harmony* between the individual and the community. An authentic education promotes this harmony: it sees community, both natural and supernatural, as man’s destination, and at the same time promotes each person’s unique specificity, at which “the commonality of feeling, thinking and acting finds a limit” (24).

5. CONCLUSION

The vision of the body politic has a profound influence on the vision of education. Conversely, schools condition future citizens for certain types of social behaviour. For proponents of social contract theories, education aims to produce “enlightened” citizens, who are capable of reasoning about the general interest and agree to cede some of their individual freedom to the body politic, in the expectation of the benefits it will bring them. Stein is far removed from this contractualist vision, which turns the life of the body politic into a *society*. For Stein, the body politic only lives, lasts and bears fruit if it is founded on a true *community*, where each person knows he or she is absolutely respected. For her, education is the place to learn how to live in a community, which presupposes an *educational community*, enabling each person to begin to discover something of the unique note that he or she brings to the harmony of the whole. As a teacher, I feel challenged by Stein to look for pedagogical means

to be able to form a community with my students and my colleagues, knowing that this community must not be a place of withdrawal, but a place of openness to others, to the whole of the body politic.

Analysing the concept of community in Stein's political and educational thought enables us to clarify the meaning of what some commentators call her "mysticism". Stein's "educational mysticism", her mysticism tout court, which she prefers to call her "radical orientation towards the supernatural", is not cut off from concrete realities. Her mysticism is not ethereal. It has a profoundly ethical and political dimension. In Stein's eyes, educating persons and teaching them that they are called to form a community with God means forming citizens who will be capable of loving and serving the communities to which they will belong. Stein's singular existential journey allows us to think that the *mystical* call she heard to a life of profound intimacy with God was not experienced by her as the ultimate fulfilment of her early *political* commitment.

Finally, Stein's "philosophy of community", present in her earliest works and which can be seen as the prelude to a political philosophy that remains unfinished (Aucante, 2022, 277), confronts us with a difficult methodological problem. In her early, strictly phenomenological works, Stein positions herself as the heir to her master, Husserl. We therefore expect her philosophical starting point to be rigorously Husserlian: the pure ego. But in the very first lines of *Zum Problem der Einfühlung* (*On the Problem of Empathy*) Stein wrote: "foreign subjects and their experience are given to us" (2008, 11). However, within the framework of "phenomenological reduction", others are not *given* to us. Would have Stein misunderstood the Husserlian method? This seems inconceivable from one of the Master's most brilliant students. Could we not consider that, perhaps without realising it, she introduced a methodological revolution in comparison with Husserlian orthodoxy? To verify this hypothesis, we would need to put Stein in dialogue with, among others, Emmanuel Levinas or, closer to us in time, Jean-Luc Marion. Such a dialogue could make the various possible meanings of the phenomenological method more accessible today, but also, and above all, deepen our understanding of the link between the individual and the community, and use this clear vision as a basis for effective action in the educational and political fields.

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