



## *Cuadernos de pensamiento 38*

Publicación del Seminario «Ángel González Álvarez»  
de la Fundación Universitaria Española  
Número monográfico sobre Edith Stein:  
Filosofía de la educación  
Año 2025

# Holistic Formation and/or One-Sided Excellence in Edith Stein's Philosophy of Education

## *Formación holística y/o excelencia unilateral en la filosofía de la educación de Edith Stein*

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Recibido: 05/04/2024 | Revisado: 05/06/2024  
Aceptado: 24/06/2024 | Publicado: 30/12/2025  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51743/cpe.483>

**ABSTRACT:** According to Edith Stein, the unfolding of one's essence is limited by one's lifepower so that it is impossible to actualise all the potential of one's personality. For education, one of the consequences of this assumption is that we must choose between either a holistic formation or a specialized formation focusing on excellency

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in one specific area. On one hand, Stein recognizes that “[t]he individual human being’s power is so limited that he or she has to pay for the highest accomplishments in one field by shortcomings or deficiencies in other fields” (Stein, 2002, 507 [424]). On the other hand, she tries to avoid an exclusive choice between the two options by arguing for a mutual dependency in which wholeness is not only the condition for in-depth specialization, but, inversely, specialization can open the door to what she calls “true humanity”. This *via media* is maintained and developed in her Christian worldview in which the vocation to communion with the Triune God is personal and as such unique, but consists in the unfolding of one’s ability to love in a way that involves all dimensions of one’s humanity.

**KEYWORDS:** Edith Stein, holistic formation, philosophical anthropology, philosophy of education, specialized formation, theological anthropology.

**RESUMEN:** Según Edith Stein, el desarrollo de la esencia propia está limitado por la fuerza vital de uno mismo, de tal modo que es imposible materializar todo el potencial de la personalidad propia. Para la educación, una de las consecuencias de este supuesto es que debemos elegir entre una formación holística o una formación especializada centrada en la excelencia en un área específica. Por un lado, Stein admite que “[t]he individual human being’s power is so limited that he or she has to pay for the highest accomplishments in one field by shortcomings or deficiencies in other fields” (Stein, 2002, 507 [424]). Por otro lado, intenta evitar una elección excluyente entre las dos opciones argumentando a favor de una dependencia mutua en la que la plenitud no solo es la condición para una especialización en profundidad, sino que, a la inversa, la especialización puede abrir la puerta a lo que ella denomina “verdadera humanidad”. Esta *vía media* se mantiene y desarrolla en su cosmovisión cristiana, en la que la vocación a la comunión con el Dios Trino es personal y, como tal, única, pero consiste en el despliegue de la capacidad propia de amar de un modo que implica todas las dimensiones de la humanidad propia.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** antropología filosófica, antropología teológica, Edith Stein, filosofía de la educación, formación especializada, formación holística.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Edith Stein’s philosophy of education has been the object of recent research. I think in particular of two doctoral studies, one by Eric de Rus (2019) and the other by Francesc Torralba Rosselló (2020). Both studies put

the accent on Stein's integral account of personal formation, i.e. *Bildung*, insisting on her vision of formation by freedom<sup>2</sup> and grace. In other words, her philosophy of education is not purely philosophical, but integrated in a Christian philosophy which implies for Stein to welcome revealed truths about God and about the human person as the starting point for new philosophical inquiry. This means concretely that every formative effort is ultimately founded in the consideration of the supernatural destination of every human person.

In this contribution<sup>3</sup>, I do not intend to elaborate a complete vision of Stein's theory of *Bildung* (formation), but I simply want to focus on one question: is a *ganzheitliche* (holistic) formation to be preferred to a sectoral formation or vice versa? To put it more precisely, should formation focus on the unfolding of the person as such or should it mostly focus on the unfolding of specific capacities? This question is closely related to Stein's conception of *Lebenskraft* (lifepower) which, for her, is essentially limited. This limitedness entails the limitedness of every human formation so that the question of the formative direction becomes a major issue. Is there a choice to be made between a holistic and a sectoral formation?

I will deal with this question in three steps: first, I will turn to phenomenological premises and in particular lifepower, an easily neglected element in Stein's conception of formation. Second, I will present two ways of conceiving one's formation, one more holistic and one more sectoral, with different inputs from Stein's writings. Thirdly and in conclusion, I will deal with the way her Christian philosophy may help to overcome what, at first hand, seems to be an exclusive alternative.

## 2. PHENOMENOLOGICAL PREMISES: THE UNFOLDING OF ONE'S ESSENCE AND LIFEPOWER

According to René Raschke, "[t]he questions: 'Who am I?', 'What can I do?' and 'What do I want?' are [...] starting and finishing points of practical edu-

<sup>2</sup> On the specific question of freedom, see Bur, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> I further develop a previous contribution (see Betschart, 2017).

cation within the process of entering relationships on the condition that the dignity of a human being is acknowledged.”<sup>4</sup> The questions refer to three distinct aspects of education: our essence or nature, motivation and freedom. Education requires that we deal with who we are as free and motivated beings, conditioned (but not determined) by our essence.

I start with the first question, i.e. our individual essence as a necessary starting point of every formation. In Stein’s view, *Bildung* does not only refer to the development (*Entwicklung*) of a human person, but to his or her unfolding (*Entfaltung*). If development indicates merely what a person becomes *de facto* in the context of external conditions and free acts, unfolding refers to what a person becomes from the inside out, i.e. what from one’s essence or personal core is lived out in one’s concrete and contingent life. Such an unfolding of the person according to her personal core is *per se* unlimited. However, there are necessary limits through lifetime, circumstances and lifepower.

This last element, lifepower, is what I want to consider more closely. In her contribution to the phenomenological foundation of psychology, Stein explores the idea of a specific, non-determinist type of causality, i.e. psychic causality which mainly relies on motivation and on lifepower. Motivation, according to Stein, is the law of spiritual life and indicates in a given circumstance what acting possibilities may understandably (*verständlich*) or reasonably (*vernünftig*) be realized. Motivation gives the formative direction, but its realization depends on a certain amount of lifepower: “Every single experience [...] costs a certain expenditure in lifepower” (Stein, 2000, 27 trans. mod.<sup>5</sup>), because every lived experience implies a conversion of indeterminate lifepower.<sup>6</sup> However, as Steins explains, our lifepower is limited and even individually different: “The lifepower of single individuals is different, and surely not only according to their respective supply, but to the extent that the

<sup>4</sup> Raschke, 2017, 283.

<sup>5</sup> German original ESGA 6, 25: “Ein jedes Erlebnis [...] kostet einen gewissen Aufwand an Lebenskraft”. I add references to the German original by using ESGA (Edith Stein Gesamtausgabe, published with Herder in Freiburg im Breisgau, Basel and Wien from 2000–2019) followed by the volume number and page indications.

<sup>6</sup> See Stein, 2000, 27 [ESGA 6, 23].

maximum of the one doesn't approach that of the other.” (Stein, 2000, 38<sup>7</sup>) In Stein's view this individual difference in lifepower is linked to the person's essence which she will consider later – in *Potency and Act* – as *quale* and *quid*. She insists on the individuality of the person's ultimate quality (*quale*) and suggests that it renders the *quid*, consisting in openness (*Erschlossenheit*) and force, individual as well<sup>8</sup>. *Prima facie*, it does not seem convincing to “spiritualize” or “singularize” one's force. Indeed, Stein speaks about lifepower as a quantum and as such it can be related with genetic, hormonal or physical features. However, the spiritual aspect is present when speaking about the manifestation (*Bekundung*) of lifepower in one's conscious lifesphere (*Lebenssphäre*) and in lived experience. Freshness or fatigue are not simply lived as a quantum of force, but in a personal manner related to what Stein calls the unique *quale* of the person.

If every lived experience means an expenditure of lifepower and if lifepower is limited, how then is lifepower renewed? According to Stein's *via media*, this renewal can be approached from a double point of view: firstly, with respect to one's psychophysical structure, i.e. taking into account sleep, food or medication. Secondly, with respect to one's lived experience, e.g. through contact with esthetical, ethical or religious values, through personal encounters and finally through an experience that Stein calls “resting in God [*Ruhen in Gott*]” (Stein, 2000, 84 [76]). The first point of view is related to what Stein calls the “natural” life, the second is related to “spiritual” life, because supplied through spiritual acts. Lifepower is to be considered as a kind of crossway between the psychophysical and the spiritual or in Stein's words: “it seems that you have to separate a ‘sensory’ [*sinnliche*] and a ‘spiritual’ [*geistige*] stratum, and correspondingly a sensory and a spiritual lifepower,

<sup>7</sup> German original ESGA 6, 34: “Die Lebenskraft der einzelnen Individuen ist eine verschiedene, und zwar nicht nur ihrem jeweiligen Stande nach, sondern derart, daß das Maximum der einen an das der andern evtl. nicht heranreicht.”

<sup>8</sup> “It is the *single* substance of the soul from which power, openness, and *quale* are abstracted. Not only are they really [*real*] inseparable, they are also one analogously in such wise that each *quale* will have its *own* specific openness and power. Hence if one element is absolutely unique, the others will also be unique.” (Stein, 2009, 401 [ESGA 10, 262]).

as different roots of the psyche.” (Stein, 2000, 81 trans. mod.<sup>9</sup>) Stein underlines that sensory lifepower is a condition for spiritual lifepower, but not vice versa. She will change later on her view on this unilateral relation, accounting in the context of the Eucharist for the possibility of a spiritual influx on sensory lifepower.

As such, lifepower is *one*, but this abstract consideration of a human person’s power is to be specified. The distinction between sensory and spiritual is the most fundamental one, knowable by experience, e.g. in the case of different types of physical or mental fatigue or freshness. Already in *Psychic Causality* and later in her *Philosophical Anthropology* she refers to power as a key concept in order to manifest the body-soul-spirit-unity of the human person<sup>10</sup>. Maybe the most important point for my purpose is to highlight the role of lifepower in her phenomenological account of *habitus*. Lifepower is not only spent in different kinds of acts, but at the same time contributes to the formation of different psychic properties. Stein writes about splitted lifepower used for their formation: “In the effortlessness of experiencing, it comes to light that receptivity has split off from lifepower as a freestanding property.” (Stein, 2000, 31<sup>11</sup>)

Given that lifepower is essentially limited from the point of view of the person’s essence and of circumstances, not all psychic properties can be formed and lead to an effortless experiencing. Stein gives an example: “if consciousness were given up in the same measure to colors and sounds, then the lifepower would have to occupy itself in a different direction and could not contribute as much for each single faculty as when only one of the two is being developed.” (Stein, 2000, 31<sup>12</sup>) The idea here is that limited lifepower

<sup>9</sup> German original ESGA 6, 70: “scheint es, daß man in der Lebenssphäre eine „sinnliche“ und eine „geistige“ Schicht trennen muß und entsprechend eine sinnliche und eine geistige Lebenskraft als verschiedene Wurzeln der Psyche.”

<sup>10</sup> See Stein, 2000, 79–87 [ESGA 6, 69–75] and Stein, 2004 [ESGA 14], 118–129. See McNamara, 2020, 656.

<sup>11</sup> German original ESGA 6, 28: “In der Mühelosigkeit des Erlebens tritt zutage, daß sich die Aufnahmefähigkeit als selbständige Eigenschaft von der Lebenskraft abgespalten hat.”

<sup>12</sup> German original ESGA 6, 29: “Wäre dagegen das Bewußtsein in gleichem Maße an Farben und Töne hingegeben, so müßte sich die Lebenskraft in verschiedener Richtung betätigen und könnte für jedes einzelne Vermögen nicht so viel hergeben, als wenn eines von beiden allein ausgebildet wird.”

means limited formation of different psychic properties. However, this formation should not be understood indifferently. Stein emphasizes the fact that every person's essence is singular and more or less receptive and open to the formation of certain (not all) properties. Be this as it may, the point is that personal formation requires discernment on what properties should be privileged in the person's formation.

Of course, Stein's conception of lifepower would need further inquiry<sup>13</sup>, especially the distinction between sensory and spiritual lifepower, but also the link between lifepower and the motivational direction of its use. However, we now turn more directly to the main question of this paper, i.e. how her theory of lifepower allows for two different conceptions of a person's formation.

### 3. DIFFERENT WAYS OF CONCEIVING ONE'S FORMATION

The focus on essentially limited lifepower enables us to address a major consequence: not all formative possibilities can unfold in the life of a person, so that it becomes necessary to think about what capacities are to be developed preferentially. Already in the introduction I suggested the alternative between a focus on a "*ganzheitliche*," i.e. a comprehensive, holistic and integral formation and one focusing mainly on excellence in a particular area. This alternative as such is a caricature, simply because it is not possible on the one hand to exercise all human capacities in an absolutely equal manner nor on the other hand to focus exclusively on one single capacity. The goal of this caricature is to indicate different tendencies and formative goals.

I will now explore the two tendencies with Stein. I suggest that her conception of an individual human essence leads her in her early works towards an accentuation of excellence of certain capacities, whereas later on she considers that a comprehensive formation is particularly important for the life of human communities and of human interpersonal fulfilment. However, even with such a shift, she still believes that specialization and excellence in certain fields remain of importance.

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<sup>13</sup> See Betschart, 2009 and Betschart, 2010.

I first suggest that Stein's early conception of the human essence as aprioristically individual and its likewise individual unfolding leads quite spontaneously to a focus on excellence. Indeed, in Stein's view, an individual essence includes predispositions for certain activities and this implies that not every human being has exactly the same possibilities. In her Münster philosophical anthropology, Stein writes in a very basic manner about persons with more physical or more mental predispositions: "There are people of exceptional physical strength who are completely incapable of higher mental performances, and there are people of extremely delicate constitution who live predominantly in intense mental activity. And this unequal distribution [between physical and mental] even seems to be typical."<sup>14</sup> Later on, particularly in *The Intellect and the Intellectuals*, she distinguishes different types of humans with different predispositions.<sup>15</sup>

In consequence, a major issue in formation is to know about the possibilities and tendencies of one's individual essence. Such knowledge, however, is not automatic and cannot be taken for granted. Stein herself considers in her doctoral dissertation that certain layers of one's personal structure can remain hidden simply because no lived experience reveals them: "To him who has never seen a work of art nor gone beyond the walls of the city may perhaps forever be closed the enjoyment of nature and art together with his receptivity for this enjoyment." (Stein, 1989, 111 trans. mod.<sup>16</sup>) This means, in other words, that in order to know what we are gifted for, a broad range of experience is helpful if not necessary. The knowledge of one's personal giftedness is not to be understood as "thinking" about personal possibilities and evaluating achievements in different areas, but much more as manifestation of predispositions and gifts through acts called "*ichlich*" (belonging to the I), i.e. acts of feeling and willing with different aspects such as depth, breadth, duration and intensity.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Stein, 2004 [ESGA 14], 124 trans. mine: "Es gibt Menschen von ungewöhnlicher Körperkraft, die zu höheren geistigen Leistungen völlig unfähig sind, und es gibt Menschen von außerordentlich zarter Konstitution, die überwiegend in intensiver Geistestätigkeit leben. Und dies ungleiche Verteilung scheint sogar typisch zu sein."

<sup>15</sup> See Stein, 2001a [ESGA 16], 143–156, here 149–150.

<sup>16</sup> German original ESGA 5, 129: "Wer nie ein Kunstwerk gesehen, wer nie aus den Mauern der Großstadt herausgekommen ist, dem bleiben Natur und Kunstgenuß und seine Empfänglichkeit dafür vielleicht für immer verschlossen."

<sup>17</sup> See Stein, 1989, 101–105 [ESGA 5, 119–123].



Although an insistence on personal giftedness and the unfolding of one's individual capacities may be in syntony with a contemporary approach to self-accomplishment, in Stein, the focus on the progressive knowledge of one's giftedness seems to be related to another topic, i.e. solidarity in a community, a people or even at the level of humanity as such. Stein insists on the responsibility to spend one's lifepower in activities that correspond to our predispositions, as she writes in *Life in a Jewish family*: "We are in the world to serve humanity... This is best accomplished when doing that for which one has the requisite talents." (Stein, 1986, 177<sup>18</sup>) The autobiographical context is her uncle David's opposition to her choice to study philosophy and at the same time her confidence in her ability to contribute in the field she felt attracted to and made for.<sup>19</sup>

As a young philosopher in Breslau and even more as a phenomenologist in Göttingen, she has the conviction that the progress of philosophy and – through philosophy – of humanity is not only related to single contributions, but to the common work of a scientific community of philosophers. Husserl's view on philosophy as science and as having a consistency outlasts individuals and generations.<sup>20</sup> Stein also expresses her confidence in the progress of the human quest for truth as an ambition to offer her own and unsubstitutable contribution. Given her understanding of the human person's individual essence, she has to consider that no one else can contribute in exactly the same manner as she can. From an existential point of view, this introduces a kind of pressure and leads to the consequences we know of through her autobiography: several experiences of depression or burnout.<sup>21</sup> Less dramatically, but still in a similar way, Stein as a Carmelite considers the division of tasks based

<sup>18</sup> German original ESGA 1, 134: "Wir sind auf der Welt, um der Menschheit zu dienen – das kann man am besten, wenn man das tut, wofür man die geeigneten Anlagen mitbringt."

<sup>19</sup> Stein speaks openly about herself as a dreaming girl: "In my dreams I always foresaw a brilliant future for myself. I dreamed about happiness and fame for I was convinced that I was destined for something great and that I did not belong at all in the narrow, bourgeois circumstances into which I had been born." (Stein, 1986, 77); German original ESGA 1, 50: "In meinen Träumen sah ich immer eine glänzende Zukunft vor mir. Ich träumte von Glück und Ruhm, denn ich war überzeugt, daß ich zu etwas Großem bestimmt sei und in die engen, bürgerlichen Verhältnisse, in denen ich geboren war, gar nicht hineingehörte."

<sup>20</sup> See Stein, 2002, 14–16 [ESGA 11/12, 23–24].

<sup>21</sup> See Stein, 1986, 216–217 and 277–278 [ESGA 1, 168–169 and 226–227].

on the variety of talents as important for the life of a community. As she writes to Ingarden: “In our community, it’s the same whether you peel potatoes, clean windows or write books. In general, however, people are used for what they are best suited for, and that is why I get to peel potatoes much less often than I get to write.”<sup>22</sup> The main point in the focus on excellence is that it allows to unfold what we are best made for and, by doing so, to contribute in a very personal manner to the different communities we are related to.

However, in a Carmelite community and more generally in professional life, the idea of an occupation in perfect correspondence to one’s giftedness is often difficult and leads us to wonder how it is possible to contribute when one doesn’t find an ideal context for the expression of one’s talents. Stein herself, before and after her baptism, was confronted with the fact that a strictly academic career was impossible for her. Various failed attempts to do a habilitation in different universities in Germany demonstrate this limitedness.<sup>23</sup>

However, there is another more objective problem in focusing uniquely on excellence, as Stein puts it in an early conference: “Through submission to a discipline, man [*Mann*] easily experiences a one-sided development.” (Stein, 1996, 255<sup>24</sup>) Dealing with educational issues, Stein becomes more and more acquainted with the negative consequences of a one-sided formation. From the point of view of one’s social life, it is more important to offer a complete and wide-ranging formation focusing not only on single, e.g. intellectual capacities, but on the formation of the human being as such. In her conference on the significance of woman’s intrinsic value in a people, Stein speaks about what she believes to be women’s generally more holistic approach:

In woman, there lives a natural drive towards wholeness and unity. And, again, this drive has a twofold direction: she herself would like to become a *complete human being*, one who is fully unfolded in every way; and she

<sup>22</sup> Trans. mine from Stein, 2001b [ESGA 4], 238 (Summer 1937): “An sich gilt es bei uns gleich, ob man Kartoffeln schält, Fenster putzt oder Bücher schreibt. Im allgemeinen verwendet man aber die Leute zu dem, wozu sie am ehesten taugen, und darum habe ich sehr viel seltener Kartoffeln zu schälen als zu schreiben.”

<sup>23</sup> See Lunghini, 2023 where he offers extensive research on the different habilitation essays.

<sup>24</sup> German original ESGA 13, 4: “Der Mann erfährt durch die Unterwerfung unter ein Sachgebiet leicht eine *einseitige Entwicklung*.”

would like to help others to become so, and by all means, she would like to do justice to the complete human being whenever she has to deal with persons (Stein, 1996, 255 trans. mod.<sup>25</sup>).

For Stein, the drive towards wholeness and unity [*Ganzheit und Geschlossenheit*] is related to the specificity of women, i.e. their personal attitude and the vocation for partnership and motherhood. Of course, both as partner and as mother, women need to have their own value and self-consistency. And of course, the drive towards wholeness is not exclusively for women, it simply seems to be tendentially stronger for them than for men.

Does Stein's insistence on wholeness mean that specialization or one-sided unfolding is a problem? The answer depends on the point of view: from the point of view of human achievements and work, specialization is necessary for the development of the sciences. As we already pointed out, for Stein, the best thing would be if every person could unfold his or her specific giftedness. But from the point of view of *personal* relationships, one-sided development becomes a problem, because it is not able to take into account the whole reality of a human person. In other terms, a holistic and integral approach to formation is needed for the construction of a human society. If we take the axiological priority of personal values over objective values (*sachliche Werte*) seriously, it is necessary to consider that a holistic formation is the condition for specialization and for the unfolding of one's giftedness.

At the same time, Stein is aware that the drive for wholeness has its problematic side too. There can be

a perverted desire for wholeness and unity, a mania to know everything and thereby to skim the surface of everything and to plunge deeply into nothing. However, such superficiality can never be true humanity. Whoever controls a matter thoroughly stands closer to true humanity than he who never stands on firm ground (Stein, 1996, 257<sup>26</sup>).

<sup>25</sup> German original ESGA 13, 4: "In der Frau lebt ein natürlicher Drang nach *Ganzheit und Geschlossenheit*, und das wieder in doppelter Richtung: sie möchte selbst ein *ganzer Mensch*, ein voll und allseitig entfalteter werden, und sie möchte andern dazu verhelfen es zu werden, und jedenfalls, wo sie mit Menschen zu tun hat, dem ganzen Menschen gerecht werden."

<sup>26</sup> German original ESGA 13, 5: "Mit dem falschen Streben nach Geltung hängt auch ein verkehrtes Verlangen nach *Ganzheit und Geschlossenheit* zusammen: eine Sucht, überall Bes-

In other words, the focus on wholeness is not only the condition for in-depth specialization, but, inversely, specialization can open the door to humanity. It is now obvious that in Stein's vision, the two ways of conceiving formation in a specialistic or holistic manner are not to be understood as an exclusive alternative. Indeed, true humanity seems to require a *via media* and an interaction between an integrative formation with some kind of specialization or unfolding of personal capacities. The expression "true humanity" can be a guideline for purely philosophical research, but in Stein's view especially after her baptism in the Catholic Church, this expression cannot be separated from her Christian perspective which will be the object of our last part as well as conclusion.

#### 4. A CHRISTIAN INPUT AND CORRECTION

How does Stein's Christian perspective influence her way to answer the question we are dealing with? Is there something to say about excellence and holism in this new perspective? A first aspect is linked to the question of knowledge already raised in the last paragraph. If Stein recognizes the possibility to know one's gifts, this doesn't mean that we are able to know them perfectly. Certain gifts are more manifest in a given context and do not (or not entirely) appear in others. Some gifts may remain hidden for a lifetime and again others might be fictitious. There might be different gifts and only one or some of them are known. Because of this necessarily limited self-knowledge, "the real educator is God, who alone knows each individual human being to the core [...]. Human educators are only instruments in the hand of God."<sup>27</sup>

Even more, the limitation of self-knowledge becomes evident when considering the goal of one's life. Stein distinguishes different aspects of one and

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cheid zu wissen und darum von allem etwas zu nippen und sich in nichts zu vertiefen. Solche Oberflächlichkeit kann aber niemals wahres Menschentum sein. Wer eine Sache gründlich beherrscht, der steht dem ganzen Menschentum näher, als wer nirgends Boden unter den Füßen hat."

<sup>27</sup> Trans. mine from Stein, 2004 [ESGA 14], 14: "Das alles mahnt daran, daß der eigentliche Erzieher Gott ist, der allein jeden einzelnen Menschen bis ins Innerste kennt [...]. Menschliche Erzieher sind nur Werkzeuge in der Hand Gottes."

the same goal, i.e. the general and individual aspects: “But what is destined for humans as humans and what is destined for the individual as a goal, that, fully recognised, stands before no one’s eye. Some of it is recognised, some of it is felt and guessed at [*geföhlt und geahnt*]. God alone sees it clearly and completely, who has determined the goal of every nature and placed the striving for this goal in him.”<sup>28</sup> Stein speaks not only about a general and an individual goal as in this passus, but also about a specific and even a typical goal. Between the lines we find the conviction that it is more difficult to know an individual goal than a general one. For Stein, the vocation and the goal of every human being is eternal communion with the triune God<sup>29</sup> and communion with our fellow human beings in the mystical body of Christ.<sup>30</sup> It is more difficult, then, to recognise an individual goal even if, according to Stein, it is possible to *feel* (within certain limits and with the possibility of error) what we are made for.

However, such an individual goal can be problematic. Does it imply a form of determinism: are we made for a predetermined goal so that our life context and our freedom would only have the negative role of possibly obstructing the predetermined individual goal? Stein seems to be aware of this problematic consideration of one’s goal and writes in a passage on education of children about a goal in the sense of a direction [*Zielrichtung*]: “To know the child is also to feel something of the direction [*Zielrichtung*] that is placed in its nature.”<sup>31</sup> Research on this question is to be continued, not only from the point of view of the Steinian corpus, but also as an open philosophical and theological question.

Here I more modestly suggest that Stein, in her last writings, helps to overcome the focus on single gifts or talents to be unfolded and accomplished in

<sup>28</sup> Trans. from Stein, 2001a [ESGA 16], 49 (Zur Idee der Bildung, 1930): “Was aber dem Menschen als Menschen und was dem einzelnen als Ziel bestimmt ist, das steht, vollkommen erkannt, vor keines Menschen Auge. Manches davon wird erkannt, manches darüber hinaus geföhlt und geahnt. Klar und vollständig schaut es Gott allein, der jeder Natur ihr Ziel bestimmt und das Streben nach diesem Ziel in ihn hineingelegt hat.”

<sup>29</sup> See Stein, 2002, 504 [ESGA 11/12, 422].

<sup>30</sup> See Stein, 2002, 527 [ESGA 11/12, 441].

<sup>31</sup> Trans. mine from Stein, 2004 [ESGA 14], 16: “Das Kind kennen heißt auch etwas von der Zielrichtung spüren, die in seine Natur gelegt ist.”

one's lifetime. The consideration of eternity implies a renewed consciousness of human finitude. In this perspective, Stein writes in the last chapter of *Finite and Eternal Being*:

The individual human being's power is so limited that he or she has to pay for the highest accomplishments in one field by shortcomings or deficiencies in other fields. We may therefore assume that the perfection of the individual human being in the state of glory will not only free each human being from the impurities of its corrupt nature but also unfold its as yet unfulfilled possibilities (Stein, 2002, 507<sup>32</sup>).

Stein deals again with the question of excellence through the idea of highest accomplishments and its necessary negative consequences in other fields. She integrates this into a view of eschatology and more specifically the doctrine of purgatory in Catholic theology. Purgatory means purification through love after death in order to realize one's full capacity of communion with the triune God. But purification is only the negative side; positively put, Stein considers death as the passage towards fulfilment of what has necessarily remained limited during one's lifetime.<sup>33</sup> It might be legitimate to say that Stein's early ambition and tension to bring the very best out of herself is changed in a confident attitude that full unfolding will be realized in eternal life and is not a merely human achievement.

Such a fulfilment is not to be considered as fulfilment of whatever the human essence is capable of, but of one's individual essence. This becomes relevant in the context of her conception of the mystical body of Christ in which the members are not only distinguished by different functions as in the Pauline theology<sup>34</sup>, but more fundamentally through their individual differ-

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<sup>32</sup> German original ESGA 11/12, 424–425: Stein thinks that the power of the human being is limited in such a way “daß er Höchstleistungen auf einem Gebiet mit Mängeln auf einem andern erkaufen muß. Darum dürfen wir annehmen, daß für jeden die Seinsvollendung in der Glorie nicht nur die Befreiung von den Schlacken der verderbten Natur, sondern auch die Entfaltung seiner unerfüllten Möglichkeiten bringen wird.”

<sup>33</sup> See de Rus, 2022, 385 trans. mine: “Education is founded precisely on this temporal unfinishedness of the finite being, which positively denotes it as perfectible, i.e. capable of progressing from one degree of being to a higher degree of being corresponding to the permanent actualisation of its potentialities.”

<sup>34</sup> See 1 Cor 12:12–27 and Rom 12:4–8.

ences, so that self-accomplishment in isolation is excluded. The idea of interdependence, solidarity, and communion is essential to a Christian view of fulfilment and it finally prioritizes holistic unfolding (related to individual essence) over excellence (related to a specific function and contribution). Of course, here again, the different focusses are not to be opposed. However, holistic unfolding takes a leading role.

In her now explicitly Christian perspective, holistic formation is not only to be understood as a balanced unfolding of all human faculties, but more fundamentally the unfolding of our capacity to love, as Stein puts it in *Finite and Eternal Being*:

It may justly be said that the finite spirit attains in love to its supreme fullness of life. If St. Augustine in his tripartite division (memory – intellect – will) no longer refers specifically to love, this omission can be justified in view of the fact that love must be regarded as the origin and end of this threefold spiritual activity (Stein, 2002, 454<sup>35</sup>).

The context of the quotation is Augustine's interpretation of the *imago Trinitatis*, but it is relevant as well to the question of my contribution. Love can be understood as the creational origin and as the redemptional end of every human being's life. It is essential to a Christian view that our final unfolding is possible only by grace which implies a participation in Christ's paschal mystery. More than an ambitious search for self-realization and -perfection, the gift of love is to be personally lived and realized and brings forth an unfolding in communion. In Avila<sup>36</sup>, where John of Cross spent several years as confessor of the nuns and especially of Teresa of Avila in the monastery of the Incarnation, I may quote his *Dicho de luz y amor* in the Spanish original: "A la tarde te examinarán en el amor" (John of the Cross, *Dichos de luz y amor*, n. 60). This means freely translated that the criterium of fulfilled life is love.

<sup>35</sup> German original ESGA 11/12, 382: "Man darf wohl sagen, daß der endliche Geist in der Liebe seine höchste Lebensfülle erreicht. Wenn Augustinus sie in der Dreiteilung Gedächtnis – Verstand – Willen nicht mehr nennt, so läßt sich das sachlich dadurch rechtfertigen, daß die Liebe als Grund und Ziel dieser dreifachen geistigen Leistung anzusehen ist."

<sup>36</sup> This paper was first presented at the 7th conference of the *International Association for the Study of the Philosophy of Edith Stein* (IASPES), Thinking about education: Edith Stein, at the Catholic University of Ávila, on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023.



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