

The Spiritual Dimension and the Complex Structure of the Human Person

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I. Introduction

Along her philosophical inquiry, Edith Stein focuses on several occasions on the issue of the human being's constitution. The method used is phenomenological and her speculation is influenced by master Edmund Husserl. Nevertheless, the philosopher embarks on an independent and entirely original path, through which she is able, with extraordinary acumen, to catch the *Aufbau* of the human being. The purpose of this article is firstly to explore the complexity of such structure and secondly dwell on the psychic-spiritual dimension of the subject. At the end, the anthropological theme is linked with the religious problem. An eye to the most inner and specific side of the human being – which she defines as *Kern* – reveals the possible relationship between human individual and Grace. The fulfillment of the identity¹ of each individual can be understood starting from its eternal fundament.

II. The human structure: body, psyche and spirit

The topic we are going to discuss originates from the phenomenological description of the person, who is seen by Edith Stein as a whole body-psyche-spirit individual. Such tripartition is nothing new in western philosophical speculation, as it already exists in the thought of Saint Paul². Nevertheless, the phenomenological method followed by Edith Stein is totally new³. Her thought concerning the issue of the

¹ See P. J. Schulz, "Toward the Subjectivity of the Human Person: Edith Stein's Contribution to the Theory of Identity", in: *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 82 (2008), 60–76.

² Cf. 1 Thess 5, 16–24.

³ See A. Ales Bello, "Edith Stein: lo spirito umano in cammino verso la santità", in: M. D'Ambra (ed.), *Edith Stein. Lo spirito e la santità*, Rome 2007, 9–35, here 33.

human being can be traced along the speculative path of a lifetime; by following each time multiple perspectives, she tries indeed to show the complexity represented by the subject.

At the beginning, the description of the corporeality: the organ of expression of our inner life. In particular, we will make reference to Edith Stein's Dissertation, discussed in 1916 and partly published in 1917, even though its theme is the subject study of other works⁴. The psychophysical constitution of the individual presumes a paradox which Husserl had already emphasized and which Edith Stein reasserts: the human subject can know itself from the inside as a living body or own body (*Leib*), and from the outside as a material body (*Körper*)⁵. In fact, any person can perceive itself from the inside as the subject of feelings and emotions and, at the same time, it can know itself as a material object endowed with a well-defined shape occupying a given space. My hand, for instance, perceives through touch a glass shelf as being cold, smooth and thin, and such feelings, through my tactile capacity, exist and *live* within me. However, I can see my hand also as an object having a clear position in space. Therefore, I may actually regard my body as a foreign object⁶, but I don't feel it in the same manner I perceive any external object. My outwardly perceived body (*äußerlich wahrgenommener Körper*) hides from my sight some of its parts and does not let me distance myself from it to observe it, as instead I can do with any other object. Therefore:

[...] jedes andere Objekt ist mir in einer unendlich variierbaren Mannigfaltigkeit von Erscheinungen und wechselnden Stellungen zu mir gegeben, und es treten auch Fälle ein, in denen es mir nicht gegeben ist. Dieses eine Objekt aber ist mir in Erscheinungsreihen gegeben, die nur in ganz engen Grenzen variierbar sind [...]. Es ist immer "hier", während alle anderen Objekte immer "dort" sind⁷.

Our body exists in its own *Leibhaftigkeit* and we are indissolubly unified to it. Such belonging to oneself through our own body is thoroughly examined by Edith Stein, so as to take this *neue Gegebenheit* into consideration: the *Leib*.

⁴ E. g. E. Stein, *Einführung in die Philosophie* (ESGA 8); *Der Aufbau der menschlichen Person* (ESGA 14).

⁵ See A. M. Pezzella, *L'antropologia filosofica di Edith Stein. Indagine fenomenologica della persona umana*, Rome 2003, 52 ff.

⁶ Cf. E. Stein, *Zum Problem der Einfühlung* (ESGA 5), 58.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

Then, the intention of providing a full picture of the person must be complemented by the description of the psyche (*Psyche*). As we have seen, the body is not just a physical fact, but it is also an expression of the inner dimension, with which it forms an indivisible whole. Such unity is described by the authoress through illustrative images:

Ich mache z. B. eine Erholungsreise, komme in eine sonnige, anmutige Landschaft und fühle, wie angesichts dieser Umgebung eine heitere Stimmung sich meiner bemächtigen will, aber nicht aufzukommen vermag, weil ich mich matt und abgESPANNT fühle. "Hier werde ich heiter sein, sobald ich mich ausgeruht habe".⁸

The psychophysical constitution of the human subject is evident from a number of lived experiences (*Erlebnisse*), the effects of which are visible on the own body. As a result of a great joy, for instance, we say that our heart stops, or that it wrings due to sorrow, and breathing becomes labored due to a waiting. Certainly, the causal relation between body and psyche cannot be understood just as positive sciences explain it, since as regards the psychophysical subject (*das psychophysische Subjekt*) we cannot speak of mechanical and predictable cause-effect relations⁹. Nevertheless, a causal relationship is however evident within the psychical sphere of the human individual. It's lived experiences, indeed, depend on the change of life states (*Lebenszustände*) which prove the presence of a persistent quality operating within the psychic process: the vital force (*Lebenskraft*).

Edith Stein writes in *Freiheit und Gnade*: "Das natürlich-native seelische Leben ist ein ständiges Wechselspiel von *Impressionen* und *Reaktionen*."¹⁰ Such instinctual action-reaction mechanism unites both man and animal and is part of its psychical structure; this issue would later be improved in *Beiträge zur philosophischen Begründung der Psychologie und der Geisteswissenschaften*, a work published in 1922. The psychical – studied by psychology – may be defined as all those particular characteristics (*psychische Eigenschaften*) that distinguish us singularly, as individuals in the world. Psychology, however,

[...] ist eine "natürliche" oder "dogmatische" Wissenschaft, theoretische Erforschung bestimmter Gegenstände, die wir in "der Welt" vorfinden, in un-

⁸ Ibid., 65 f.

⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 110.

¹⁰ E. Stein, "Freiheit und Gnade" und weitere Beiträge zu *Phänomenologie und Ontologie* (ESGA 9), 10.

serer Welt, in der wir leben und deren Existenz erstes Dogma und selbstverständlichste ungeprüfte Voraussetzung aller unserer Betrachtungen ist¹¹.

Edith Stein does not want to proceed from previously achieved data, but rather intends, on the wake of phenomenology, to start over again. Only in this manner it will be possible to outline the difference between psyche (*Psyche*) and consciousness (*Bewußtsein*): while the first is seen as a reality of the world, she describes the latter as a light illuminating the flow of lived experiences¹². By the tools of phenomenology, in fact, you can view the world in a different manner. Through the *epoche*¹³ – called also reduction – the look goes from the things in their spatiotemporal constitution back to the lived experience. Reduction has pure consciousness as an ineliminable phenomenological residue and it makes possible to enter the *noetic-noematic* dimension, namely the lived experiences (*Erlebnisse*) of consciousness. My being dropped in the world is analyzed by the phenomenological approach starting from my living in that world and thus from my act of perception as well as of remembrance, imagination etc., to which correspond certain contents, that is a perceived, a remembered or an imagined. Using the language of Husserl, we speak of *noesis* and *noema*. The study of consciousness – from which the original flow of lived experiences radiates – in its clear distinction with the psychological dimension, becomes a focal point in Edith Stein's anthropological analysis. The difference is clearly stated: "[...] daß Bewußtsein und Psychisches grundwesentlich voneinander unterschieden sind: Bewußtsein als Reich des 'bewußten' reinen Erlebens und das Psychische als ein Bereich der sich in Erlebnissen und Erlebnisgehalten bekundenden transzendenten Realität"¹⁴.

The development of a theory of the person is then completed by an investigation into its spiritual dimension. Indeed, at the moment

¹¹ E. Stein, *Beiträge zur philosophischen Begründung der Psychologie und der Geisteswissenschaften* (ESGA 6), 9.

¹² Cf. E. Stein, *Einführung in die Philosophie* (ESGA 8), 106f.: "Es ist überhaupt kein eigener Akt, sondern ein 'inneres Licht', das den Fluß des Erlebens durchleuchtet und im Abfließen selbst für das erlebende Ich erhellt, ohne daß es darauf 'gerichtet' wäre. Dieses ursprüngliche Bewußtsein vom ablaufenden Erleben, das ihm selbst zugehört, bleibt auch nach dem Ablauf 'retentional' erhalten und ermöglicht es, die kontinuierlich abfließenden 'Phasen' zur Einheit eines 'Erlebnisses' zusammenzufassen und sodann das Erlebnis, das in der Reflexion gegenständiglich wird, mit dem ursprünglich erlebten zur Deckung zu bringen, es als 'dasselbe' zu erfassen und eventuell Abweichungen festzustellen".

¹³ Cf. E. Husserl, *Die Idee der Phänomenologie. Fünf Vorlesungen* (Husserliana II), Den Haag 1950, III, 44.

¹⁴ E. Stein, *Beiträge zur philosophischen Begründung der Psychologie und der Geisteswissenschaften* (ESGA 6), 22.

when the subject's gaze is consciously directed towards that which comes opposite it – which thus becomes an object for the subject – its spiritual life (*geistiges Leben*)¹⁵ begins. Edith Stein maintains:

Das Ich, das bisher im Strom dahinlebte, im Ablauf der Daten, die es "hatte", ohne darauf "hinzusehen", tut seinen geistigen Blick auf und "richtet" sich auf etwas, etwas tritt ihm gegenüber – wird ihm zum "Gegenstand".¹⁶

The intentional act is what primarily characterizes the spiritual nature of man. Within the psychic life, it has been possible to find an early form of intentionality, even though merely outlined¹⁷. On the other hand, within the spiritual life there is a new kind of connection among the acts: motivation (*Motivation*)¹⁸ which allows the subject to an actual intentional turning towards the external object. Consciousness is directed at a specific entity and understands it according to a specific content of meaning (*Sinnesgehalt*). This is made possible by motivation¹⁹ which, by binding acts to one another, originates an intentional lived experience, namely an act of conscience.

Therefore, whereas in the psychic life it is merely possible to recognize the concatenation of the causal process, in the spiritual sphere, on the other hand, the mechanism does not have a passive structure. The doing that takes place in the concrete action or in the perception of the object is motivated; in this case, we speak of free acts (*freie*

¹⁵ The investigation into the spiritual dimension is of interest to Edith Stein, in keeping with her purely phenomenological studies, particularly in close conjunction with master Edmund Husserl's research, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie II* (Husserliana IV), Den Haag 1952, § 3, 3.

¹⁶ E. Stein, *Beiträge zur philosophischen Begründung der Psychologie und der Geisteswissenschaften* (ESGA 6), 35. In this approach described by the authoress, we find harmony with the pure looking peculiar to Husserl's phenomenology; cf. E. Husserl, *Die Idee der Phänomenologie. Fünf Vorlesungen* (Husserliana II), Den Haag 1950, III, 44.

¹⁷ See A. Ales Bello, *Edith Stein. La passione per la verità*, Padova 1998, 35 f.

¹⁸ For a comparison with the concept of motivation in the thought of Husserl, please refer to *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie II* (Husserliana IV), Den Haag 1952, § 56, 223 ff.

¹⁹ Cf. E. Stein, *Beiträge zur philosophischen Begründung der Psychologie und der Geisteswissenschaften* (ESGA 6), 35: "Richtet sich der Blick nacheinander auf eine Reihe kontinuierlich ablaufender Daten oder vielmehr durch sie hindurch auf äußere Gegenständlichkeiten, so haben wir nicht nur ein Nacheinander getrennter Auffassungen einzelner Bilder, sondern *eine durchgehende Auffassung*, ein *Hinzunehmen* des Späteren zum Früheren ('*Apperception*'), ein *Zusammenfassen* der Einzelauffassungen ('*Synthesis*') und ein *In-Bewegung-gesetzt-Werden* der späteren durch die frühere ('*Motivation*')."

Akte). Through the acts and their motives begins the realm of sense and reason: so, it will be possible to distinguish right from wrong, the obvious from the non-obvious etc.²⁰

III. *The freed spiritual life* (befreites Seelenleben)

In *Freiheit und Gnade*, the phenomenological investigation into the person is complemented, in an entirely original way, by the contribution of Christian philosophy. Edith Stein, in fact, even before her conversion, meets the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas, which would be particularly decisive in her next philosophical thought. In this work – probably written in 1921²¹ – the description of the natural-spontaneous life of the soul (*natürlich-natives seelisches Leben*), which could also be defined as psychic-spiritual, is opposed by Edith Stein to the so-called freed spiritual life (*befreites Seelenleben*). The former²² – previously analyzed also through the description contained in the *Beiträge zur philosophischen Begründung der Psychologie und der Geisteswissenschaften* – still lacks a direction (*Inszenierung*), that is an ultimate inner center (*letztes inneres Zentrum*):

Von einem tieferen Standort aber ist man berechtigt, dieses ganze Getriebe der natürlichen Stellungnahmen als ein passives zu bezeichnen. Zugleich auch als ein unfreies. Denn es mangelt all diesen Bewegungen die Inszenierung von einem letzten inneren Zentrum her.²³

At this stage, Edith Stein analyzes the issue of the *befreites Seelenleben*, namely the soul life which is not driven from the outside, but led from Above (*von oben geleitet*). “Das von oben ist zugleich ein *von innen*. Denn in das Reich der Höhe erhoben werden, bedeutet für die Seele, ganz in sich hineingesetzt werden”.²⁴ The drive leading the soul within itself (*bei sich selbst*) is, therefore, the same one that clings it to the Above. In such manner, the soul will no longer be abandoned defenseless to the impressions of the world, but can rather be said to be freed (*befreit*).

²⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

²¹ See B. Beckmann-Zöller/H. R. Sepp, Einführung der Bearbeiter zur ESGA 9, xxiii.

²² Cf. E. Stein, “*Freiheit und Gnade*” und weitere Beiträge zu *Phänomenologie und Ontologie* (ESGA 9), 10.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

The investigation into the psychic-spiritual subject is thus complemented by this new analysis, which shows the growing complexity of the human being. The life of the freed soul leads the subject within itself, in its *Zentrum*, namely in the original Principle that forms its foundation. The freed psychic subject, just as the natural-spontaneous one, captures the impressions arising from the world through the spirit. “Aber die Seele wird nicht durch diese Eindrücke unmittelbar bewegt. Sie nimmt sie von eben jenem Zentrum her entgegen, mit dem sie in der Höhe verankert ist; ihre Stellungnahmen gehen von diesem Zentrum aus und werden ihr von oben vorgeschrieben”.²⁵

As previously said, the spiritual life of the soul is characterized by free acts²⁶, but through a careful examination of the *befreites Seelenleben*, freedom is understood in a more complex and different way: “Sie ist Befreiheit von der Welt”.²⁷ The implementation of such *modus essendi*, peculiar to the Christian, inheres the most central location of the soul, precisely a place of freedom and activity. This kind of freedom, the highest possible, which has nothing to do with the one characteristic of the natural-spontaneous life, has however a passive constitution, since the soul is tense with its center upwards, where it receives its directives. Paradoxically, freedom is described with the characteristics of passivity, we speak of *passive Aktivität*²⁸. The reason why the highest form of freedom is defined as passive is linked to the issue of the original sin. Indeed, the man marked by sin can no longer enjoy freedom to the full. This is peculiar to angelic creatures only, who instead merely live in the realm of Grace. This absolute freedom

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Free acts are described by Edith Stein as independent lived experiences which, being intrinsic to the spiritual sphere of the subject, emerge from this last and move towards the outside. These explicitly imply a motive which, however, they are by no means forced to put into practice. Indeed, in order for them to be performed, they must be preceded by a *fiat* that will initiate a doing. In this regard, Edith Stein writes in *Beiträge zur philosophischen Begründung der Psychologie und der Geisteswissenschaften* (ESGA 6), 45: “Wenn Annahme oder Ablehnung einer Stellungnahme als selbständige Erlebnisse vollzogen werden, dann haben wir ‘freie Akte’ im echten Sinne, Akte, in denen das Ich nicht nur erlebt, sondern als Herr seines Erlebens auftritt. Sie können nicht, etwa erst im Hintergrund sich leise regend, allmählich von mir Besitz ergreifen, sondern ich muß sie aus mir heraus erzeugen, gleichsam geistig einen Streich führen.”

²⁷ E. Stein, “*Freiheit und Gnade*” und weitere Beiträge zu *Phänomenologie und Ontologie* (ESGA 9), 11 f.

²⁸ See H.-B. Gerl-Falkovitz, “Una pienza che viene da Altro. La costituzione della persona a partire dall’evento di senso in Edith Stein”, in: A. Ales Bello/F. Alfieri/M. Shahid (eds.), *Edith Stein, Hedwig Conrad-Martius, Gerda Walter. Fenomenologia della persona, della vita e della comunità*, Bari 2011, 80–92.

inherent in pure spirits implies no choice and, therefore, no privation; it does not require any prior free act, which, instead, is a requirement of the human subject. Nevertheless, freedom is granted to man as a gift and is expressed in the choice to implement the transition from the realm of nature to the realm of Grace, which cannot be performed without human cooperation. “Zwischen das Reich der Natur und das der Gnade schiebt sich das Reich der Freiheit.”²⁹

The center, which represents the access to the founding Principle, lies in the subject itself and, therefore, outside both realms. The free subject owns itself, but, precisely by virtue of the freedom that marks it, it is empty and still. The person, in order to achieve something through its freedom, will have to relinquish it and, in order to gain life and soul, it will have to bind itself to a realm. The Self (*Selbst*)³⁰ receives, in fact, its fullness from the realm which it chooses to freely bind itself to and the soul will thus acquire liveliness. The possibility that is expressed through a free act will determine its fate as a person³¹.

IV. The free self-realization

1. Opening to the Grace

At this stage, Edith Stein tries to penetrate even further the mystery of the relationship between the individual, who belongs to the natural world, and the realm of Grace. Such relation can be understood starting from the structure of the human person, which, indeed, is not merely governed by the laws of nature – which both animal and inan-

²⁹ E. Stein, “*Freiheit und Gnade*” und weitere Beiträge zu *Phänomenologie und Ontologie* (ESGA 9), 14.

³⁰ To investigate the difference between the Ego and the Self, the second paragraph of the sixth chapter of *Der Aufbau der menschlichen Person* (ESGA 14) – titled “Ich und Selbst” (80–90) – is interesting. In previous works, the authoress always refers, indeed, to the Ego, a more typical phenomenological term, while in this text she also introduces the Self, namely that something already existing in the human being all along, which the Ego must be able to form throughout its existence. Anna Maria Pezzella points out that the authoress probably refers to the psychology of Jung, since in a letter to Roman Ingarden – dated March 9, 1932 – she claims to be dealing at that time with the psychological and pedagogical literature, for preparing certain classes at the Higher Institute of Pedagogy in Münster, see A. M. Pezzella, *L'antropologia* (nt. 5), 64; E. Stein, *Selbstbildnis in Briefen III* (ESGA 4), letter 153.

³¹ Cf. Matth 16, 24–28.

imate world are part of as well – but, besides a psychic sphere (*Seele*)³², it also consists of a free spiritual dimension (*freie Geistigkeit*).

The spiritual being of man is what makes him open to the original principle and as such he dwells in the light.

Kein freies und geistiges Wesen aber ist im Reiche der Natur völlig beschlo-
sen. Die Freiheit, sich dem natürlichen Spiel der Reaktionen zu entziehen, gibt
ihm einen Standort außerhalb der Natur oder richtiger: legt davon Zeugnis ab.
Und die Offenheit des Geistes ist *prinzipiell* eine universale.³³

The subject can freely choose to go beyond its own natural foundation and, at the same time, the spirit of the new realm shall flow into the entirety of its soul which has freely opened up to the spirit, in the same way as to a gift of Grace. Only in that way the soul can be said to be to itself (*bei sich*). Indeed “[e]rst die geistig wache Seele ist so geöffnet, daß sie etwas in sich aufnehmen kann”³⁴. Human interiority, depicted as structurally open to the Principle which it is based upon, recalls the wisdom contained in the Gospel of John, which describes the life-giving power of the Spirit³⁵. The soul can be in peace to itself provided it is open to a relationship with the Other, since this is the only way it can be filled by the Holy Spirit. The change entailed in the rebirth from the spirit (*Wiedergeburt aus dem Geiste*), recalls the Pauline theme dear to Edith Stein:

Do not lie to each other, for you have taken off the old man along with his behaviour, and have put on the new one, who is renewed for a deeper knowledge in the image of his own Creator [...]³⁶.

For the fulfillment of a person’s individuality, the free opening to the spirit shall then be received as a gift of Grace.

Daß es ein *Geschenk* ist, das gehört wesentlich dazu. “Wer seine Seele bewahren will, der wird sie verlieren.” Also, die Seele kann nur zu sich selbst kommen, wenn es ihr gerade nicht um sich selbst zu tun ist – wie ist das zu verstehen?³⁷

³² *Seele* is the term used by the authoress to designate the soul *per se*, or its psychic dimension, which differs from the spiritual one. Here, the term is used in this last meaning and, therefore, as a synonym for *Psyche*.

³³ E. Stein, “*Freiheit und Gnade*” und weitere Beiträge zu *Phänomenologie und Ontologie* (ESGA 9), 20 f.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Cf. John 6, 63.

³⁶ Paul, Col. 3, 9–11.

³⁷ E. Stein, “*Freiheit und Gnade*” und weitere Beiträge zu *Phänomenologie und Ontologie* (ESGA 9), 27.

As to another biblical theme, Edith Stein refers to the awareness of the soul which, not yet been touched by Grace though, knows it can find peace and security in Grace alone. As noted by the Apostle Luke, the emptying of the soul is directed to a fulfillment in the kingdom of heaven³⁸.

The crucial role of freedom – peculiar to the soul's activity – is once again confirmed. A close-mindedness toward Grace, or an abandon without reserve, are the two basic options in which human action occurs. Total abandon is the highest act of freedom the human soul can do which, assisted by the free self-giving of Grace, leads the individual to seizing its core (*Kern*):

Das ist die entschlossenste Abkehr der Seele von sich selbst, das unbedingtste Sichloslassen. Aber um sich so loslassen zu können, muß sie sich so fest ergreifen, sich vom innersten Zentrum her so ganz umfassen, daß sie sich nicht mehr verlieren kann. Die Selbsthingabe ist die freieste Tat der Freiheit.³⁹

In this manner, Edith Stein attributes a fundamental role to human freedom within the work of Redemption. The free human behavior should, however, not be perceived as a limitation of the divine mercy which, indeed, can even reach a soul that has never inquired into the issue of its own salvation. “[...] Glaube kann uns sagen, daß es so ist. Die allerbarmende Liebe also kann sich zu jedem herabneigen”⁴⁰. Responsibility, indissolubly linked to freedom, distinguishes the human being from any other creature. Man alone can feel the metaphysical anxiety with awareness, the human being alone can name it and trace it back to the finitude that is experienced within the limit⁴¹. However, human freedom, which unfolds of necessity through choice⁴², can be ascribable right within the said limit. Accepting such limit means overcoming it. The time when man's will is no longer occupied in an

³⁸ Cf. Luke 17, 33; Matth 16, 24–26: “Then Jesus said to His disciples: If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life, will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake, will find it”

³⁹ E. Stein, “*Freiheit und Gnade*” und weitere Beiträge zu *Phänomenologie und Ontologie* (ESGA 9), 30.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴¹ See M. D’Ambra, “Edith Stein. Una fenomenologia dell’esistenza?”, in: A. Ales Bello/F. Alfieri/M. Shahid (eds.), *Edith Stein, Hedwig Conrad-Martius, Gerda Walther. Fenomenologia della persona, della vita e della comunità*, Bari 2011, 458–473.

⁴² As we have already mentioned, human freedom, unlike the angelic one, comes up against the limit of choice, for it has not been granted, *in statu viae*, possession of its essence. Cf. E. Stein, “*Freiheit und Gnade*” und weitere Beiträge zu *Phänomenologie und Ontologie* (ESGA 9), 11 ff.

effort of self-foundation – namely in the temptation to become self-possessed – but acknowledges a foundation Other, the soul shall then be filled by Grace. Man is aware thereof right from his inner center; it is, indeed, due to his structural openness to the Principle that he is capable of such an act of freedom. “[N]ur für ein freies Wesen [sei] der Durchbruch aus der Natur zur Gnade möglich [...]”⁴³.

2. Leib as expression of inner life

The impact of Grace on the individual’s psychic-spiritual life alone has been taken so far into consideration. The human being, however – as we saw – is body as well and by the appropriate German word, we shall say that man is *Leib*⁴⁴. Edith Stein states in this regard:

Was bisher über die Gnade gesagt war, betraf allein innerseelische Wirkungen. Der Mensch war lediglich als geistig-seelisches Wesen genommen, das mit Geist und Seele dem Licht zustreben und in dessen Seele das Licht wahrhaft eingehen kann. Der Leib blieb ganz unberücksichtigt. Dabei darf man nicht stehenbleiben. Daß die menschliche Seele eingesenkt ist in einen körperlichen Leib und rückwärts daran festgebunden, das ist kein gleichgültiges Faktum.⁴⁵

The link between body and soul is deep and Edith Stein certainly does not underestimate its importance. In describing the path of salvation, the human being is involved as a whole: its spirit (*Geist*), its soul or psyche (*Seele*) and its living body (*Leib*). The bond between man’s living corporeal dimension (*Leibliches*) and inner life (*inneres Leben*) is actually indissoluble. “Alles Leibliche hat eine ‘Innenseite’, wo Leib ist, da ist auch ein inneres Leben.”⁴⁶ The body that lives is not merely coordinated by a stimulus-response mechanism, through which it can perceive the outside and respond to it, but belongs to a spiritual subject with whom it forms an undistinguishable whole. The inner living (*inneres Leben*), which is inherent in the living body, is what distinguishes the human being from any other creature.

Within the frame of such ever deeper digging, that aims at an insight into human interiority, what is then the position assigned by

⁴³ Ibid., 43.

⁴⁴ The distinction between *Leib* and *Körper* – as we saw – is crucial in the phenomenological study of the individual and is confirmed by Edith Stein in the following quote: “Der Leib ist als solcher charakterisiert und von dem puren materiellen Körper, der ihn mitkonstituiert, dadurch abgehoben, daß alle seine Zustände und alles, was ihm widerfährt, gespürt wird oder doch gespürt werden kann.”, *ibid.*, 46.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Edith Stein to the body? She shows, once again, her extreme attention toward the human being's structure in its obvious complexity, without ignoring any of its parts.

Sache der Person ist es, was sie mit diesem natürlichen Fundament ihres Seins, dem sie in weitem Ausmaß frei gegenübersteht, anfängt. An verschiedenen Punkten kann ihre Aktivität ansetzen und durch Fehlgriffe oder Unterlassungen ein Abirren von dem vorgezeichneten Wege verschulden. [...] Der Mensch, dem sein Leib in die Hand gegeben ist, trägt auch die Verantwortung dafür.⁴⁷

Body care is therefore crucial to keep a healthy balance in the psychophysical subject; indeed, should the necessary for the human being's body side fail, then this last would tend to excessively draw the subject's attention to itself, thus causing an imbalance. The individual is, therefore, responsibly called to give due attention to its own psychophysical structure, in order to lean towards the achievement of what the individual originally is. The chance for a perfect freedom is not based on a claim of autarchic determination, but rather finds support in the cooperation of the Spirit⁴⁸. "Das Erringen der vollkommenen Freiheit ist selbst ein Werk der Freiheit. Allerdings wohl nicht der Freiheit allein."⁴⁹ The subject's ability to take hold of itself, in order to lean towards a full realization, is certainly under its own responsibility; however, every area of freedom draws its origin from the spiritual world which the soul takes part in. Such original source (*ursprüngliche Quelle*) – Edith Stein asserts – is a gift the soul has received in the same way it has been endowed with a material constitution.

Edith Stein thus confers the body as well an indispensable role in the fulfillment of our own individuality, since the body represents the material fundament that supports the psychic and spiritual life. We read in this regard:

Er ist nicht bloß das *Gefängnis* der Seele, das sie bindet und fesselt und am Aufstieg hemmt. Das ist nur der verdorbene Leib, nicht aber der seinen ursprünglichen Sinn erfüllende. Er ist [...] der Spiegel der Seele, auf dem sich ihr

⁴⁷ Ibid., 50.

⁴⁸ In this regard, we suggest a comparison with the thought of Maurice Blondel, and with the idea, expressed in *L'Azione. Saggio di una critica della vita e di una scienza della prassi*, Cinisello Balsamo 1998², of a necessary option in which human life resolves: the possibility to recognize transcendence in the immanence and, therefore, God as the foundation of human existence, or the denial of the Principle and the claim for a self-realization which, instead, relies upon itself (M. Blondel, *L'Action. Essai d'une critique de la vie et une science de la pratique*, Paris 1950).

⁴⁹ E. Stein, "Freiheit und Gnade" und weitere Beiträge zu *Phänomenologie und Ontologie* (ESGA 9), 51.

ganzes inneres Leben abmalt, mittels dessen sie in das Reich der Sichtbarkeit eintritt. Je weniger die Seele sich ihm hingibt, desto mehr nimmt er ihre Gestalt an.⁵⁰

The body element expresses the means by which the spiritual dimension can become visible. A filling from Light is not merely possible in the ascetic path of the soul's total detachment from the body, but through the very body as well: "Ein geheiligter Leib beschwert die Seele nicht."⁵¹ This is the reason why the Holy may have a thaumaturgical role⁵². The Sacraments, in this context, play a crucial role, since they sanctify the innermost dimension of the living subject through the body. They – affirms Edith Stein – should not be understood as miraculous signs of Grace, but rather as the means that make it possible to restore a proper balance between soul and living body. Obviously, such impact on the soul is only possible if it freely opens up to Grace and the role of human freedom is thus confirmed in a decisive manner. Edith Stein, the philosopher, quotes the same biblical words, in order to account for the sacraments function: "The Word became flesh"⁵³ so as to become visible to both man and his psychic and physical constitution. From the subject's structure alone, we can therefore study the effect of Grace through the sacraments.

V. Summary

We may conclude by emphasizing how the attention paid by the authoress to the understanding of human spiritual life allows to shed light on human beings' center (*Kern*) as well, which is construed as a chance for modernization of their spiritual life. The individual's specific potentials can find a relevant development; however, on the contrary, they may remain unexpressed. This allows to emphasize freedom's crucial role, which appears as an optional choice to human beings in their self-realization path. The religious issue is, therefore, part of the anthropological description; the drive leading the soul into itself is described as the same one that anchors it to the High. The subject, given any pretension to self-foundation up, freely acknowledges its own belonging to the Principle in its innermost center. It is therefore decisive to be able to understand how Edith Stein describes

⁵⁰ Ibid., 56.

⁵¹ Ibid., 54.

⁵² See A. Ales Bello, Edith Stein (nt. 3), 31 ff.

⁵³ John 1, 14.

the freedom of the human person. Not just as a freedom of doing, but rather as an openness to the Kingdom of Grace. So it's clear that the human being can find its fulfillment only through the free relationship with the Eternal Being.