

***Edith Stein: Comunità e mondo della vita—Società Diritto Religione* [Edith Stein: Community and the Lifeworld—Society, Law, Religion]**

**Eds. Angela Ales Bello and Anna Maria Pezzella**

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Angela Ales Bello and Anna Maria Pezzella have put together a timely and well-researched collection of essays that focus on Edith Stein's philosophy of community. It would not be an understatement to claim that Stein's social and political philosophy, though now becoming better known, has not been sufficiently explored by philosophers and scholars. While working with and under Husserl, Stein began to develop a phenomenology of the social-political world that was largely influential on thinkers like Husserl, Gerda Walther and Hedwig Conrad-Martius. Though Alfred Schutz is often recognised as the thinker that largely developed Husserl's phenomenology within the field of sociology, it is Stein that was the first phenomenologist to carry out and elaborate a systematic phenomenological account of social and political objectivities. This volume amply demonstrates this. Ales Bello's extensive body of scholarly work has already mined the work of Husserl and Stein to draw attention to the enormous riches and potential that lie within the phenomenological tradition. Along with the work of Pezzella, this volume extends this philosophical itinerary.

The primary focus of this work is twofold: first, there is an exploration of various questions that revolve around the nature and role of community within Stein's philosophy; second, the book shows how Stein's view of community evolves as she progresses in life. We see an early form of community that is described within the strict context of Husserlian phenomenology whose latter senses and constitutive analyses are thickened with religious meaning, especially understood as stemming from Stein's own turn to Roman Catholicism and medieval philosophy.

Ales Bello's introduction sets the stage for the essays. She points out that Stein works firmly within the German philosophical tradition, which places a high priority on understanding communal associative relationships. She also notes, for Stein, that community is not only about certain external structures and conventions but also an accompanying state of mind or consciousness. For Stein, community is described as foundational: —[N]o domain of human living can be separated from a communitarian perspective, neither the research of culture and science nor juridical and political structures.□ (8) In other words, all aspects of human existence imply an operative understanding of the nature and dynamics of community.

The first essay in the book is written by Francesca Brezzi. She draws upon the biography and person of Edith Stein in order to set out the importance of raising once again the question concerning that nature of community. Two significant features are highlighted. First, Stein's philosophy of woman is most important in trying to understand what Stein means by community because here there is an emphasis on sexual individuation that carries with it important constitutive features that condition human existence and women's existence in particular. Second, Stein's later writings on community, with their emphases on the role of the divine in community, challenge us to recognise the fact that religion plays a huge role in the social and political ordering of the life world. The subsequent essay by Michele D'Ambra focusses on Stein's person to investigate how she lived various levels or types of community, ultimately arguing that Stein's concepts of person and personhood are vital for comprehending the foundation of her view of community. D'Ambra examines Stein's views of family, motherhood, friendship and even the philosophical community as lived through her experience of her beloved Göttingen Philosophical Society.

The next two essays in the book form, in my view, the key and most philosophically rich essays of the whole work. Pezzella's essay, "Community and People," provides a detailed analysis of Stein's noteworthy contributions to the treatment of the phenomenological problem of intersubjectivity. In particular, Stein extends the treatment of empathy she developed while studying under Husserl by postulating a theory of a lived experience of community. Here, the distinction is made between one mind entering into and understanding the lived experience of another mind and the lived experience of sharing in and understanding a communal experience. For example, and Pezzella focusses her essay on this particular experience, the experience of belonging to a community of people. The reference here is to the German notion of *Volk*. The Germans are a people, a distinct people. They have many cultural, intellectual and social ways of expressing their being German.

Unlike many of her predecessors, Stein never claimed that belonging to a people necessarily resulted in an experience of community. Rather, quite the opposite is true: one could belong to a people and be very conscious of what it entails to do so, but one may never live the experience of community that Stein describes as one living within the experience of the other in solidarity. This being said, there is also the fact that belonging to a people may also result in a communal feeling. One can experience what it is to be a community of German people; this experience, however, is always lived in individuals. There is never a fusion or super-consciousness of community that somehow sublates, as in Hegel, individual consciousness. The super-individual world is always experienced within the mind of the individual person. (67) Pezzella highlights the fact that community implies a deep ethical relationship rooted in responsibility. Community is not only about consciousness but also about responsibility, one for the life of the other and vice versa. One of Pezzella's provocative claims is that the Nazi genocide can be accounted for as the degeneration of community into a mass, an unreflective, unthinking mass. But it should also be remarked that there can be communities of hate, a solidarity of hate that binds people in deep ways. These kinds of community are not ignorant or unreflective; rather, they are complex, developed and highly rational, as Victor Frankl rightly points out.

Throughout her essay, Pezzella focusses on Stein's *Introduction to Philosophy (Einführung in die Philosophie)*, an important text that has

received little scholarly attention. This text is important as it marks the culmination of Stein's early phenomenology just prior to her full encounter with Christian thought.

Luisa Avitabile's essay, —The Role of Community in Social, Political and Religious Life, is a remarkable piece because she treats the concepts of right and Stein's use of law in her political work. To my knowledge, this aspect of Stein's work has not been greatly explored other than from the traditional vantage points of putting it into relation with its sources, namely, the work of Adolf Reinach and Max Scheler. The great merit of this piece is the detailed and progressive analysis of law in Stein's political philosophy. Concepts like *a priori* versus positivist theories of law, collective will, sovereignty, formation of law, etc. are all addressed in this article. The author explains how law is vital for the formation and understanding of community. Successful is the rereading of empathy back into Stein's theory of law and the state. At one point, however, Avitabile claims that phenomenology can establish a non-utilitarian, non-economic and —impartial privileged starting point rooted in free acts that draw from the juridical nature of the person. (112) One wonders how this is really possible, especially given the critiques of thinkers like Adorno and Foucault. The last two essays by J. Turola Garcia (—Religious Community and the Formation of the Person) and P. Manganaro (—Religious Community and Mystical Communion) focus on the religious and mystical thought of Edith Stein. After her conversion to Roman Catholicism, Stein took up various teaching positions within the Catholic academic world. In 1933, after the promulgation of the Nazi anti-Jewish laws, Stein decided to pursue her religious vocation as an enclosed Carmelite nun. Both as an active lay person and a contemplative, she continued to write and meditate upon the nature of community. Garcia's essay concentrates on what Stein had to say about community within the context of religious life, whereas Manganaro's essay examines what it would mean for us to experience and understand mystical union. Here, mystical union is examined from two perspectives, namely, from the side of community between God and human beings and, from the other side, the union and community between the three persons of the Trinity, emblematically understood as a —We are.

This book makes a definite contribution to Steinian and Husserlian scholarship because it elucidates and contextualises very dense con-

cepts that one finds throughout the phenomenological tradition. Philosophically speaking, it challenges us to bring to the fore the meaning of community, especially from angles that are not readily accepted by mainstream philosophy, namely, the religious and feminist perspectives. Bello and Pezzella's work helps us greatly to think through the phenomenological sense or meaning of community from perspectives that can bear much fruit.

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