

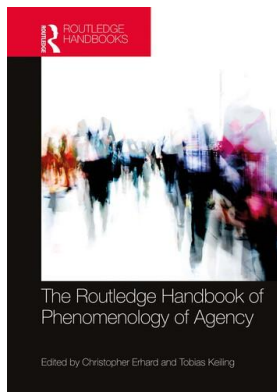
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9

EDITH STEIN

Psyche and action

Antonio Calcagno

A quick scan of the scholarly literature on the philosophy of Edith Stein (1891–1942) shows a larger body of work devoted to her later philosophy, which mainly focuses on a rapprochement between phenomenology and medieval and Christian philosophy (see, for example, Manganaro 2002; Sharkey 2006, 2009; Maskulak 2007). One notes, however, a growing interest in her early, more strictly phenomenological work, especially her account of communal mind and social ontology (Moran 2004; Zahavi 2010, 2015; Calcagno 2014; Moran and Parker 2015; Szanto 2015; Ferran Vendrell 2015). There exist, however, only few sustained studies of Stein’s understanding of psychology and the lived experience of psyche (Ales Bello 2007, 2010; Betschart 2009, 2010). Stein’s essay “Psychic Causality” (*Psychische Kausalität*) forms the first part of her monumental *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities* (Stein 1922/2000). The essay may be read as an attempt to curb Husserl’s transcendental idealism, as found in the first version of *Ideas I*, and it may also be interpreted as a concrete analysis of how psyche conditions sense-making (Calcagno 2018). Here, I wish to highlight another important aspect of Stein’s discussion of psyche, namely its relation to action. I consider action in two senses. First, psyche acts upon consciousness, influencing how consciousness experiences reality and makes sense of it. Hence, psyche is an important building block of the act of sense-making (*Sinngebung*): for Stein, *Sinngebung* is not a purely logical process, as the first version of Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* suggests (cf. Stein 2014: 38–43). Second, psyche conditions how we ethically act: psyche is part and parcel of valuing and, therefore, conditions our ethical decisions and actions. Though I cannot show how psyche, for Stein, conditions all aspects of the life of the human person, I shall argue that psyche is vital for her understanding of action, understood in the two aforementioned senses. In particular, a hierarchy of values and acts of valuing cannot exist without the constitutive structure of psyche.

Psyche: what it is and how it manifests itself

Generally, psyche must be understood as a constitutive aspect of the human person. The person, phenomenologically speaking, is defined as an I living through (*erleben*) a unity of body, psyche, and spirit (*Geist*):

We have at least outlined an account of what is meant by an individual “I,” or by individuals. It is a unified object inseparably joining together the conscious unity of an “I” and a physical body in such a way that each of them takes on a new character. The physical body occurs as a living body; consciousness occurs as the soul of the unified individual. The unity is documented by the fact that specific events are given as belonging to the living body and to the soul at the same time: sensations, general feelings. . . . The living body. . . is characterized by having fields of sensation, being located at the zero point of orientation of the spatial world, moving voluntarily and being constructed of moving organisms, being the field of expression of the experiences of its “I” and the instrument of the “I’s” will.

(Stein 1989: 56–57)

Psyche works together with and is not separate (though it is distinct) from body and spirit. The realm of psyche has as its proper elements: a capacity to experience and make sense of sensory impressions, for example, the pleasure of the experience of a pleasant smell or color, feelings/emotions or affectivity, causality, an I-ness and we-ness, and the life-force. Though each of these elements may be said to belong properly to the realm of psyche, they do work together with the body and the spirit, resulting in the lived experience of a personal unity.

Psyche comes to manifest itself in two primary modes: first, through an analysis of the structure of consciousness; second, through empathy (Stein 1989). In “Psychic Causality,” psyche first shows itself as an “influence” on consciousness: it acts upon and affects consciousness (Stein 2000: 14). Dialoguing with both Bergson and Husserl, Stein asserts that phenomenal consciousness must be understood as a continuous flow of pure becoming. One does not experience consciousness, she says, as a mere series of syntheses or as a serial connection of moments in the form of A + B + C + D (Stein 2000: 9–10). Though there are times in consciousness when, for example, consciousness can become aware of specific objects, they appear as a “living and dying” of content (Stein 2000: 9–10). Consciousness is experienced as a living flow (*Erlebnisstrom*) and it signals its existence by how we experience certain contents, for example, the sensation of color or of a tone – what Husserl calls a sensuous impression (e.g. the softness of a color). Sensory data can arrange themselves and be enclosed by a field of consciousness. For Stein, it is the association of content that is vital, because psyche first appears with the connection between objects of consciousness. She describes the living and dying of content in consciousness as association by contact:

The togetherness of different kinds of experiences in one momentary phase is the most original and premier kind of connection of experiences. Conversely, with the becoming of experiences out of phases continually overflowing one another, it makes no sense to talk about a connection. This togetherness is what phenomenally undergirds the term ‘association by contact’.

(Stein 2000: 13)

Consciousness is a complex (*Komplexbildung*) of togethernesses and successivenesses, and Stein (2000: 14) stresses that the pure becoming of consciousness is not produced as an effect. Finally, phenomenal consciousness presents its content in a unified fashion: it is a unifying consciousness. As consciousness gathers and organizes its content, it concomitantly tries to make sense of the whole and parts of the very content that it grasps.

Stein remarks that consciousness, at certain points, experiences an additional kind of association, which she calls an “operative influence” (Stein 2000: 14). Consciousness can experience itself as being influenced not only by content but by another kind of force; it may experience itself as weary, energized, and more or less alert. She notes that there are shifts in consciousness that are tied to life feelings, that is, feelings that stem from our physical, material living. For example, feeling tired makes our experience of colors less vivid, makes tones ring hollow. Stein identifies this shifting influence, which arises not from consciousness itself but from the vital force of life, as a causality that comes from the psyche. The causality of the psyche is described as being akin to natural, physical causality: a certain force or impetus, much like “mechanical production,” causes a reaction or produces an effect (Stein 2000: 15). Psychic causality, like any form of causality, is marked by an origin. Here we find the ancient and medieval notion of causality as an act that has a beginning and an end; it is understood as an originating event that carries with it a certain necessity. For example, fatigue causes consciousness to become dull.

In addition to describing the psyche as marked by a certain form of causality, understood as cause–effect, stimulus–response, Stein characterizes the psyche as being experienced as a particular form of tying-together of experiences. Unlike the vital becoming of consciousness, the psyche ties its experiences together in a cause–effect structure, but whereas consciousness can become aware of itself as a pure experiencing, the psyche itself is never experienced or accessed as directly as consciousness. We feel the effects of the psyche operating upon consciousness, but we never see, feel, or experience the psyche itself. Hence, Stein (2000: 24) describes the psyche as transcendent. For Stein (2000: 24), the psyche also manifests life and a “life force” (*Lebenskraft*), especially when we experience the effects of “life feelings” (*Lebensgefühle*), such as tiredness, on consciousness. Stein’s phenomenology of psyche is marked by a profound vitalism, a vitalism that can be found in Bergson’s thought and that is taken up by later phenomenologists such as Michel Henry. Like Bergson, Stein claims that psyche causes us to consciously experience reality in more or less intense ways. She notes that,

Differences of brightness for consciousness correspond to grades of tension for experiencing. The more intense the experiencing, the more luminous and alert is the consciousness of it. With that, it becomes quite clear that this being conscious, which we are claiming as a component of experiences, is not an experience itself, an act of conceiving reflection. For the more intense the experiencing is, the more ‘undivided’ [our absorption in it is likely to be,] and the less it tolerates the splitting off of reflection.

(Stein 2000: 18–19)

Finally, Stein (2000: 23) claims that, unlike the pure ego of consciousness that accompanies and organizes the contents of intentional consciousness, the psyche has a real ego – that is, when we experience the effects of the psyche, we become aware that there is a subjective bearer of properties and psychic states, who feels and lives them. The real ego manifests itself in immanent data, but, like the psyche itself, it never becomes manifestly immanent – that is, it never appears directly to consciousness (Stein 2000: 23).

Two questions arise from Stein’s account of the psyche. First, how does psychic causality differ from physical or natural causality, and second, how are psyche and consciousness related to one another? In response to the first question, Stein argues that psychic causality colors and affects the life of an individual, whereas natural causality is woven within a vast network of causal relations that extend throughout the physical world. She observes that

[s]ensate [read psychic] causality differs from physical causality in the following way. With the latter, the unity of the causal occurring permeates the entire network of material nature, and single things emerge from that network as centers of occurrence. With the former, we're confined to the sensate [read psychic] states of an individual, who as substrate of the causal occurring, corresponds to the totality of the matter while his or her properties emerge as single centers analogous to things.

(Stein 2000: 25)

For example, the introduction of bacteria may cause a certain infection to arise. In this case of physical causality, the bacteria and the resulting infection in a host are distinct realities that have broader connections to physical nature. In psychic causality, a certain event may cause a certain psychic disturbance, say the sudden loss of a loved one. Rather than a broader connection to nature, the individual person becomes the larger framework and his/her specific aspects, i.e. psyche and lived body, become the central focus of the lived experience of trauma. The trauma objectifies body and psyche as discrete things.

In response to the second question, Stein contends that the psyche, understood as a substrate of consciousness, affects the capacity of consciousness to experience reality in varying degrees. For Stein, as for Husserl, consciousness structurally consists of (a) the possession of content, the data of consciousness; (b) an experience of the becoming or unfolding of the sense of that content; and (c) the consciousness of that experiencing, which always accomplishes it (i.e. experiencing) – in a higher or lower degree – and for whose sake the experience itself is even designated as consciousness (Stein 2000: 16–17). To the noema (a) and noesis (b) structure, Stein introduces a third aspect (c) of consciousness, namely, the force of the psyche, which ultimately “influences” the very capacity of consciousness to grasp the sense of things. Given that the psyche only manifests its effects, one can become aware of the psyche’s influence as a causal relation. Consciousness grasps the operation of the psyche as causal. Stein remarks that the

real causality of the psyche manifests itself in the phenomenal causality of the experiential sphere. The enduring properties of the real ego, or sentient individual, appear as a substrate of the sensate (*psychischen*) causal occurrences which persists in a regulated changing of modes of those properties; so that a determinate power—lifepower—is singled out as both setting the mode of the others by its own momentary modes, and set in its own states by them in turn. The “effect” consists in the alteration of other sensate properties. There isn’t any direct causal dependence of other properties on one another without the mediation of lifepower. For example, receptivity for colors can be neither enhanced nor diminished by receptivity for sounds. Yet, the two can be enhanced together by an increase of lifepower that’s independent of both of them. Or, lifepower can be diminished by the activity of one, and in that way the other is diminished in turn.

(Stein 2000: 25)

To Husserl’s understanding of the foundational structures of phenomenology – namely, noesis and noema – Stein adds the psyche. It should be remarked that Husserl too, especially in his *Ideas II*, which Stein edited while she was his assistant in Freiburg, takes up the importance of psyche. But Husserl was very reluctant to publish this view while he was alive.

Empathy provides a second gateway to understanding psyche and its acts. Stein conceives of empathy as a *sui generis* act of mind that enables one to enter and bring into relief the mind of another person through analogically comparing ego and alter ego. In this way, one

takes up the perspective of the other. I cannot develop a full account of Steinian empathy, as this goes beyond the scope of this chapter, but I do wish to emphasize that empathy allows one to recognize unique aspects of the structure of psyche. It does so by drawing upon the senses or meanings achieved through inner perception and the act of empathy itself. In each of these acts, psyche influences human consciousness and our person. Inner perception is distinguished from external perception insofar as the latter has an object in flesh and blood before it that lies outside of the perceiver, whereas the former experiences and grasps realities or events that occur within the human person such as a mood, feeling, or the lived experience of one's own body. For example, I can perceive my own feeling of my sluggish body at the end of a long day. Careful study of inner perceptions helps me to grasp various aspects of my own personhood, including the various aspects of my lived body, psyche, spirit, and how they all work together as one. Again, it also allows me to grasp the various aspects described earlier through the study of conscious lived experience itself, including sensory impressions, feelings/emotions or affectivity, causality, and the life-force. Through its connection with the lived body, one can inwardly experience the effect of sense (taste, sight, sound) and sensory impressions (pleasure, intensity) on the psyche – for example, the feeling of intense vividness that comes from seeing the color red. But emotions also affect psyche. Joy or sadness affects our moods, and they come to express themselves in the lived body, but they are not reducible to the mere physical function of the lived body. What allows Stein not to reduce emotional experience to bodily functions is causality. The death of a beloved friend affects me and can produce a profound sadness. My face can certainly express my sadness, but the cause of the sadness is not certain bodily events, but rather the news of the event from the outside affecting my psyche. Understanding how causality works allows me not only to distinguish the lived body from psyche but also to understand the relation between distinct phenomena or aspects of myself and others. Finally, as mentioned earlier, one can perceive the operation of the unique effects of the life-force on our person.

What is unique about empathy and its relation to psyche is that one can carry out acts of empathy in order to understand the psyche of another as well as understand how psyche works in general. I can see the drawn countenance of the other, tears welling in her eyes. Her body expresses something about her psychic state. Drawing upon knowledge from my own inner perceptions, I analogously compare what presents itself with my own knowledge, and I come to the conclusion that the other before me is terribly sad and devastated. In empathy, I bring the other's state of mind to relief by comparing it with my own knowledge of myself. The other tells me that her brother has died. This is the final clue that allows me to confirm that she is sad. The act of empathy not only enables me to understand what the other is experiencing, namely, sadness and grief, but it also gives me insights into the nature of sadness itself, its psychic and bodily structure as it comes to express itself. Moreover, I also see how psyche is an important constituent of the personhood of the other. Empathy allows one to grasp the affective causal structure of ego and alter ego.

Empathy is the building block of another form of consciousness, which Stein calls *wel-consciousness* and which comes to manifest itself in the lived experience of community. The knowledge seized in empathy serves as material for a broader form of social cognition. In the lived experience of community, one grasps and lives in the experience of the community in solidarity. Stein gives the example of grief caused by the death of a beloved troop leader:

The army unit in which I'm serving is grieving over the loss of its leader. If we compare with that the grief that I feel over the loss of a personal friend, then we see that the two cases differ in several respects: (1) the subject of the experiencing is different; (2)

there's another composition to the experience; (3) there's a different kind of experiential current that the experience fits into. As to the first point, in place of the individual ego we've got a subject in our case that encompasses a plurality of individual egos. Certainly, I, the individual ego am filled up with grief. But I feel myself to be not alone with it. Rather, I feel it as our grief. The experience is essentially colored by the fact that others are taking part in it, or even more, by the fact that I take part in it only as a member of a community. We are affected by the loss, and we grieve over it. And this "we" embraces not only all those who feel the grief as I do, but all those who are included in the unity of the group: even the ones who perhaps do not know of the event, and even the members of the group who lived earlier or will live later. We, the we who feel the grief, do it in the name of the total group and of all who belong to it. We feel this subject affected within ourselves when we have an experience of community. I grieve as a member of the unit, and the unit grieves within me.

(Stein 2000: 134)

In the aforementioned example, psyche plays an important role. The emotion of sadness is what is experienced and grasped at the communal level, as a collective experience. Inner perception and empathy help us understand the nature of psyche and the role it plays for the affective and causal connection between me and other alter egos. But it is the lived experience of community that explains how affectivity and causality can help to establish a genuine *we-experience* by making us aware of the common cause of our collective grief, namely, the death of our beloved leader. In the end, the lived experience of community, the most powerful form of sociality for Stein, exemplifies the possibility that psyche can operate on a super-individual level. Stein discusses the example of a nation and argues that the force of the lifepower of certain individuals can act on other individuals by informing the life of the community as a whole. Stein remarks,

No matter how much of their power the members of a community devote to the whole, the accumulated reserve obviously also depends upon what lifepower they can draw upon as single members, taken absolutely. One person with a very intense aliveness can accomplish more for her community when she places at its disposal only a portion of her power than someone else who places herself in its service with all her power. Thus, the level of lifepower of a community depends upon these two factors: the lifepower that its components can draw upon, and the amount of the power at their disposal that they devote to the community. Therefore, the power of a community can be increased in two ways: by receiving new powerful individuals, and by demanding more from those who already belong to it. Accordingly, it can be weakened in two ways: if its components drift off, and if the individuals belonging to it slacken in their accomplishments for the community.

(Stein 2000: 206)

A personality with a strong, vivid life-force can affect the psyche of the collective. But the opposite is also true that a moribund or sickly life-force can negatively affect a community or group.

Psyche and ethical action

Thus far, we have examined how Stein conceives of psyche, how it acts upon consciousness, and how its actions affect the understanding of ourselves and psyche. In the foregoing

treatment, psyche largely comes to expression through the lived body, though it is not reducible to the body. The unity between body and psyche is intimate and both aspects mutually condition one another, but psyche also acts upon spirit, ultimately forming a constituent layer of all motivation. Ethical acts, for Stein, can be motivated, which means that they draw not only on psyche and motivation but also on reason and judgment. Spirit is defined as the lawful realm of human freedom (expressed in the *I can* of the will) and reason. The fullest or most meaningful kinds of human acts have their roots in spirit.

Motivation is an act, and Stein attributes two senses to it. The first and most common sense is connected to acts of free will. All freely chosen acts are constituted by some deliberation and reflection. The justification of willed action in reflection, through reason, can push an action into being; motivation is the “force” of any freely willed act. Second, motivation may be also understood as a form of connection between the different contents of lived experiences: motivation sets one lived experience in motion in relation to another, connecting them. Stein views acts as being experienced, always from the standpoint of consciousness, according to three constitutive moments: apperception, synthesis, and being-set-in motion:

In the realm of acts, we confront new means of connection that we haven't yet encountered up to now. If the gaze points itself successively at a series of continually subsiding data, or rather points through the data at “external” objectivities, then we have not only a succession of detached apprehensions of a single shape, but one continuous apprehension, an appending of the later to the earlier (“apperception”), a combination of single apprehensions (“synthesis”) and a being-set-in-motion of the later by the earlier (“motivation”). All this makes no sense outside the realm of egoic acts. You can't talk about taking, grasping, and moving in the sphere of pure passivity, which we were dealing with before. If we designate the connection of acts that we have in view here quite broadly as motivation, then we're aware of departing from the customary linguistic usage which restricts this expression to the area of “free acts,” especially of willing. However we believe that this broadening is warranted, that what we now have in view is a structure valid in general for the entire range of intentional experiences, a structure that simply undergoes various configurations according to the particularity of the acts that adapt themselves to it.

(Stein 2000: 40)

Motivation can be part of an act, and it is viewed as that which may launch an act or sets it in motion:

What is conventionally called motivation must be recognized as one such particular configuration. Motivation, in our general sense, is the connection that acts get into with one another: not a mere blending like that of simultaneously or sequentially ebbing phases of experiences, or the associative tying together of experiences, but an emerging of the one out of the other, a self fulfilling or being fulfilled of the one on the basis of the other for the sake of the other. The structure of experiences, which can enter into relationships of motivation all by themselves, is decisive throughout for the essence of those relations: that acts have their origin in the pure ego, emanate from it phenomenally and aim toward something objective. The “pivot” at which the motivation starts, so to speak, is always the ego. It executes the one act because it has executed the other. But the “execution” need not be taken in the sense of a genuine spontaneity. It's characteristic

of the relation of motivation that it can proceed in various forms. It can come to pass explicitly, but it can also be present only implicitly.

(Stein 2000: 40–41)

Stein maintains that the content of one moment of lived experience can directly and purposefully bring about the content of another moment of lived experience. The sense derived from the transition of the moment before to the moment after, explicitly or implicitly, is one of a “being set in motion.” Here, we do not have a more blending or spontaneous flow of one act into another. The egoic motivational acts stand in a specific temporal relation to one another in terms of before and after; there is a strong connectivity between them, and one produces in the other a certain related and meaningful content. The association between various contents in motivation is different from that of causality. In the latter, psyche, for example, may bring forward or express an emotion, but the emotion is an automatic, driven response over which the I has no choice or will. In the case of the former, an emotion may affect us, but then through the power of reason, judgment, and ultimately will, we can choose or deliberate upon whether we wish to act based on that emotion. In this case, the emotion may signal an underlying value we hold about a person or state of affairs, for example, love and/or hate. Motivation is central to value and acts of valuing:

The grasping of a value can motivate a disposition (for example, joy in beauty) and, accordingly, a wanting and doing (perhaps the realizing of a state of affairs recognized as morally right). Different kinds of acts. And yet something common to all of them: the ego executes the one experience – or the experience accrues to the ego – because the ego has the other, for the sake of the other. The commonality of the structure, as stated, isn’t altered even by the fact that motivating and motivated experience are, in a few cases, clearly set off as self-supporting acts following one after the other (like premises and conclusion, or grasping of value and will), and in other cases, bound in the unity of one concrete act (like self-grasping, and belief in perception). As motivating, here we always take the one experience for whose sake the other takes place.

(Stein 2000: 42–43)

Again, it is in valuing that psyche comes to expression. When we value something, we hold something to be dear or of worth to us. Values come to expression in loving, hating, in what we find beautiful and ugly. The values we have may come to manifest themselves within the realm of psyche. When we love someone or something, we become aware of the love through first being hit by certain emotions or feelings, which may also express themselves in the lived body. The love for one’s partner may, in various instances, induce certain psychic feelings and sensations that bring the objectivity of the love–value to presence. Love, understood as a value, may also motivate various possible free acts that I may carry out in the name of that love, for example, the decision to purchase a gift for the beloved or to write a poem. But values may, in turn, also inform certain feelings:

The specific coloring of the feeling is dependent upon the particular kind of value. The feeling is insightfully and rationally motivated only insofar as it corresponds in all its dimensions to the value. Accordingly, whatever there is about the feeling that is not ‘owing’ to the value (its greater or lesser strength, perhaps) is unmotivated, un insightful, and to be explained as merely the effect of the present life feeling.

(Stein 2000: 76)

Psyche, in its relation to motivation and valuing, manifests the constitutive, affective layer of all valuing acts.

Though a value may motivate a free act, which possesses a constitutive psychic layer, motivation alone does not fully determine the act. Motivation informs free will and the acts it undertakes. So, though my motivation may come to show itself, and though reason and judgment may come to deliberate on the motivation in question behind the act, the “I can” of free will can also reject what the motivation brings forward, hence confirming the freedom that is constitutive of the will. Stein observes:

Certainly, that is often the case: but if I’m stuck in the struggle of conflicting motives, if I’m placed before a decision, still I am the one to whom the decision falls. The decision does not impose itself automatically, as the tipping of the scales toward the side of the “weightier” motive indicates. Rather, I make up my mind in its favor because it is weightier. Even if more can be said for the doing than for the abstaining, the doing still requires my “*fiat!*.”

(Stein 2000: 55)

It is in Stein’s treatment of free will that one also finds her most extensive discussion of action. The body manifests both voluntary and involuntary movements: something may cause the body to move or express itself in a certain way, for example, pain, but one may also deploy the will to make the body act in a certain way, for example, I can will to move my feet at a certain time (Stein 1989: 54). In the case of the lived body, Stein thinks of bodily action (*körperliche Handlung*) in terms of physical movement or locomotion, and also in terms of expression (Stein 1989: 48). The unity of body and psyche, especially in emotions, can come into relation with motivation and even strivings (Stein 1989: 56). We saw earlier how psyche, motivation, and rational judgments relate to one another within the framework of values and acts of valuing.

The will, however, is identified by Stein as the source of action (*Handlung*). Stein defines action as being “always the creation of what is not” (Stein 1989: 56). She notes:

To act is always to produce what is not present. The “*fieri*” of what is willed conforms to the “*fiat!*” of the volitional decision and to the “*facere*” of the subject of the will in action. This action can be physical. I can decide to climb a mountain and carry out my decision. It seems that the action is called forth entirely by the will and is fulfilling the will. But the action as a whole is willed, not each step. I will to climb the mountain. What is “necessary,” for this takes care “of itself.” The will employs a psycho-physical mechanism to fulfill itself, to realize what is willed, just as feeling uses such a mechanism to realize its expression.

(Stein 1989: 55)

The action of the will is described as a kind of *creatio ex nihilo*. The will may make use of psycho-physical realities and relations, but it is distinct from them. The will is described as the master of its domain (Stein 1989: 55), and what it enacts is an extension of that self-mastery or self-possession, of the spiritual aspect of human persons:

The will is thus master of the soul as of the living body, even though not experienced absolutely nor without the soul refusing obedience. The world of objects disclosed in experience sets a limit to the will. The will can turn toward an object that is perceived, felt, or otherwise

given as being present, but it cannot comprehend an object not present. This does not mean that the world of objects itself is beyond the range of my will. I can bring about a change in the world of objects but I cannot deliberately bring about its perception if it itself is not present. The will is further limited by counter-reflective tendencies which are themselves in part body-bound (when they are caused by sensory feelings) and in part not.

(Stein 1989: 55)

The will is not to be understood in causal terms, though it can make use of causal relations, especially those between the psyche and the body, as was noted earlier in the case of motivation. The will may even be limited by certain psycho-physical processes, for example, fatigue. The fullest sense of an action, however, is that of a creative act of willing that brings something out of nothing:

Action is always the creation of what is not. This process can be carried out in causal succession, but the initiation of the process, the true intervention of the will is not experienced as causal but as a special effect. This does not mean that the will has nothing to do with causality. We find it causally conditioned when we feel how a tiredness of body prevents a volition from prevailing. The will is causally effective when we feel a victorious will overcome the tiredness, even making it disappear. The will's fulfillment is also linked to causal conditions, since it carries out all its effects through a causally regulated instrument. But what is truly creative about volition is not a causal effect. All these causal relationships are external to the essence of the will. The will disregards them as soon as it is no longer the will of a psychophysical individual and yet will. . . . Every creative act in the true sense is a volitional action.

(Stein 1989: 56)

For Stein, psyche is part of what it is to be a human person, to be living in the personal mode, so to speak. It is always acting, always within the unified working together of body and spirit, and it conditions the senses of ourselves as both body and spirit. Psyche must be viewed as acting within the flow of lived experience itself insofar as it is connected to motivation and valuing. It is in valuing, Stein says, that psyche can make us aware of values and we can reflect on the values that psyche manifests. But value, in turn, can affect how we live and experience certain values and even the flow of lived experiences. One of Stein's most important contributions to phenomenology, in addition to her rich social ontology, is to show how psyche acts upon the lived body and spirit to help form and build what she calls the person. If ethics ponders the values of our actions, be they good or evil, one cannot comprehend the structure of our motivated and/or free choices and decisions without the assistance of psyche, which transmits the layers of affective and causal sense constitutive of value and valuing.

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Further reading

- T. Burns (2015) "On Being a 'We': Edith Stein's Contribution to the Intentionalism Debate," in *Human Studies* 38/4, 529–547. (This article looks at the discussion of group action with Stein's social ontology.)
- F. Svenaeus (2016) "The Phenomenology of Empathy: A Steinian Emotional Account," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 15/2, 227–245. (Provides an updated account of and situates Steinian empathy within current discussions in cognitive science.)
- F. Svenaeus (2018) "Edith Stein's Phenomenology of Sensual and Emotional Empathy," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 17/4, 741–760. (This article provides a good descriptive analysis of the psycho-physical unity of a person.)