

ABSTRACT:

After her baptism at the age of 32, Stein engaged with Aquinas on several levels. Initially she compared his thought with that of Husserl, then proceeded to translate several of his works, and attempted to explore some of his fundamental concepts (potency and act) phenomenologically. She arrived finally in *Finite and Eternal Being* at a philosophical position inspired by his synthesis of Christian faith and philosophical tradition without abandoning her phenomenological starting point and method. Whether one would want to call this position Thomist depends on what one understands Thomism to be.

Introduction

It is generally known that Stein was a non-believing Jew before her conversion to Catholicism New Year's Day 1922.⁵⁵ She encountered Aquinas as a way into the Catholic tradition. Her translation of *De veritate*, which came out after many years of work in 1931 and 32,⁵⁶ afforded her the time to habituate herself to his thought world – and with it to the Catholic worldview. She 'became so absorbed by his thought that an inner clash between it and the phenomenological way of philosophising was inevitable.'⁵⁷ Her own first formation was as a phenomenologist, first studying with and later being the assistant of Husserl in Göttingen and Freiburg. During this time both Adolph Reinach and Max Scheler had a profound influence on her and each in their own way prepared her for the encounter with the thought of Thomas Aquinas.

Scheler and Reinach's version of phenomenology was, like that of Husserl's *Ideas*, marked by the exploration of the intuition of essences. They shared the understanding that an important task for the discipline of phenomenology is to enable such intuition,⁵⁸ which is not exhausted in the achievement of definitions, but rather commands a sustained effort at describing, discerning and clarifying, in order to look afresh and let the phenomena *show themselves forth* in their purity. The purpose is insight – *Wesensschau*. When Husserl's transcendental turn led him to practically support Heidegger as his successor, Reinach came, for the Bergzabern

⁵⁵ This article originates as a paper given to the *Centre for Thomistic Studies at St Thomas University*, Houston, Texas, 21 March 1913. I am grateful to Kathleen Haney for having organised it. It was later given at a Thomas Aquinas Society/Cairde Thomas Naofa conference in Dublin, 7 June 2013.

⁵⁶ Edith Stein: *Über die Wahrheit 1-2* (Edith Stein Gesamtausgabe = ESGA, vol. 23-24), (Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder, 2008).

⁵⁷ A fragmentary foreword to *Potency and Act* is found in 'German Editor's Introduction' in *Potency and Act* (Collected Works of Edith Stein = CWES vol. XI) trans. W. Redmond (Washington D.C.: ICS Publications, 2009), p. xxvi.

⁵⁸ See for example Adolph Reinach: 'Concerning Phenomenology', trans. Dallas Willard, *The Personalist* 50 (1969), p. 194-221, reprinted in *The Phenomenology Reader*, ed. Moran and Mooney (London and New York: Routledge, 2002) pp. 180-196.

phenomenologists, to 'stand for' – posthumously – the analysis of essences, Scheler having his mind on other things.⁵⁹

Stein, like Husserl, understood ultimate intuitability to be 'transcendental', and did not see that as conflicting with Reinach's designation of the realm as '*a priori*', a term she also sometimes herself used.⁶⁰ Her understanding of the transcendental I as a pole of experience, incontrovertibly linked with experience, is one she shared with all the phenomenologists. In so far as she analysed experience from this point of view she must be called a transcendental phenomenologist. We could, however, just as easily call her a realist phenomenologist, if we by that mean that she, like other early phenomenologists, insists on the importance of eidetic analysis for completing the phenomenological project. She understood the transcendental to be ultimate in relation to us and therefore to experientially reveal the being of the essences (reflecting what she, following Hering, calls 'essentialities'⁶¹).

A guiding question in Stein's approach to Thomas was in fact that of the transcendental dimension of knowledge (*Erkenntnis*). She had become habituated to the Cartesian starting point and was very familiar with the Kantian intuition of the synthetic *a priori* as structuring for knowledge. She had found in Husserl a methodical approach to take account of these modern insights, anchoring them in transcendental experience. She found it difficult to renounce an eidetic analysis of knowledge.⁶² Her reading of Aquinas was to find another way of approaching the transcendental dimension of knowledge, rooted in the necessity of affirming being as an intrinsic part of the scientific endeavour inherited from Aristotle and issuing in a full sketch of the dimensions of a *Seinslehre*.⁶³

We shall follow this question of the transcendental dimension of knowledge from its first formulation in the dialogue Stein wrote for the *Festschrift* marking Husserl's seventieth birthday (1), through her treatment of the First Question of *De veritate* (2) and her investigation of *Potency and Act* (3) to *Finite and Eternal Being's* transformative admittance of truth as the transcendental quality of being which reveals the Trinitarian analogy of being, articulated in natural being, finite spirit and infinite spirit (4).

As Stein progressed from phenomenology through ontology to metaphysics she had a very important fellow traveller, who became her Godmother when she was baptised in 1922: Hedwig Conrad-Martius. Conrad-Martius was not, however, a Catholic, but a protestant Christian, nor was she particularly interested in Thomas Aquinas, but she was, from the beginning of her career as President of the Göttingen

⁵⁹ The excellent work of Jean Hering, 'Bemerkungen über das Wesen, die Wesenheit und die Idee', *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung* 1921, pp. 495-543 clarifies how the terms were used among the (early) phenomenologists, and does so by application of the method of eidetic analysis itself. For a superb introduction to the Bergzabern Phenomenologists and their understanding of Heidegger's influence, see Joachim Feldes: 'A yet hidden story: Edith Stein and the Bergzabern Circle' in the proceedings of the first IASPES conference, ed. Haydn Gurmin and Mette Lebeck, Traugott Bautz, forthcoming.

⁶⁰ ESGA 6, p. 9, for her (very infrequent) use of the word 'transzendental', ESGA 5, p. 114 and ESGA 6 p. 200, for her use of 'a priori'.

⁶¹ *Wesenheiten*, ESGA 11-12, III, § 2-3.

⁶² ESGA 23, p. 3 ('Vorbemerkung' to the translation-commentary of *De veritate*).

⁶³ ESGA 11-12, p. 5 ('Vorwort' to *Endliches und ewiges Sein*).

Philosophy Society, profoundly interested in ontology, and in particular in the ontology of the real (as distinct from the ideal). Conrad-Martius insured that the question of a phenomenology of reality was always present to the minds of the early phenomenologists.⁶⁴ Stein's dialogue with Conrad-Martius was frank, serious and challenging. Their friendship accompanied Stein to maturity in a direction growing from the same root as herself: phenomenology.

Conrad-Martius survived the war, and published in 1957 an outstanding work called *Das Sein*,⁶⁵ (*Being*), in which she presented the fruits of her mature reflections.⁶⁶ The first part of *Das Sein* concerns categorical being, the being of states of affairs, something which had already interested Reinach in his theory of Negative Judgement. The insight common to both Conrad-Martius and Reinach is that the affirmation of being forms an integral part of the essence of judgement, such that no phenomenological analysis of the act of judging is possible without an inclusion of its correlate: being. Thus a phenomenological analysis of being should paradoxically be possible, and indeed necessary to complete the phenomenological project of founding the sciences.

Paradoxically Heidegger's way from phenomenology to fundamental ontology followed along a similar path. Conrad-Martius, however, was very critical of Heidegger's approach, which she, like Stein, understood to illegitimately reduce being to the human being (Stein thought it reduced it to the being of the unredeemed human being).⁶⁷ To Conrad-Martius being could not be thus arbitrarily limited to the human being because judgement concerns cosmic (natural) being and also infinite or eternal being besides that of the human being. Stein's criticism of Heidegger can be found in an appendix to *Finite and Eternal Being*, and proves that this impetus towards ontology stemming from within the phenomenological tradition already blew like a strong wind in the sails of Stein as she engaged with Thomas Aquinas' thought. She was convinced that the subjects with which he was dealing ultimately had to be the same as those of her times, and thus she read him not as a historian of philosophy would, but as a philosopher does: for the arguments he presents and in order to encounter a perspective to challenge her own.

Erich Przywara SJ, who in the years after her baptism had a mentoring function for Stein, was indeed, in contrast with Conrad-Martius, a Catholic. Stein takes pains in the foreword to *Finite and Eternal Being* to carefully explain the relationship between his *Analogia entis* (1932) and her own work, implying she has

⁶⁴ *Zur Ontologie und Erscheinungslehre der realen Aussenwelt*, in *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und Phaenomenologische Forschung*, 1916, pp. 345-542 and *Realontologie* equally in the *Jahrbuch*, but 1923, pp. 139-333. When one is crediting Heidegger with turning phenomenology towards ontology, one should not overlook that the immediate context into which he writes already deals extensively with ontology. For a discussion of Conrad-Martius' Heidegger-critique see Alexandra Pfeiffer: *Hedwig Conrad-Martius. Eine Phänomenologische Sicht auf Natur und Welt* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2005) pp. 43-8.

⁶⁵ München, Kösel Verlag.

⁶⁶ Stein responded to both *Metaphysische Gespräche* (1921) and *Realontologie* (1923) in *Potenz und Akt* and *Endliches und Ewiges Sein*.

⁶⁷ ESGA 11-12, Anhang I: Martin Heideggers Existentialphilosophie, p. 480. Transl. by Mette Lebeck as 'Martin Heidegger's Existential Philosophy', *Maynooth Philosophical Papers*, 2007, Maynooth, pp. 55-98, p. 81.

read it in great detail. The most important difference seems to be in their understanding of the role of theology for metaphysics, a topic discussed at length in the *Introduction to Finite and Eternal Being*, part 4, entitled 'The meaning and possibility of a Christian Philosophy'.

The most fundamental problem Stein would retain with Aquinas' thought through to *Finite and Eternal Being* was that matter should be the principle of individuation.⁶⁸ This problem is linked to our general problem of the transcendental structure of knowledge in that the Aristotelian view reserves a transcendental place for the non-intelligible (matter), something Stein would explain to be unnecessary for the redeemed world-view, in which everything is potentially intelligible in the Word.⁶⁹ Apart from such a structural commitment to an idea of pure matter as being in principle non-intelligible⁷⁰ there seems to be no teaching of Thomas she did not assimilate, but it must be stressed that that is exactly what she did: *assimilate* Aquinas' thought. Her world view was very much her own, and still very much that of a phenomenologist into her mature years. One would not be able to say that she is *not* (also) a Thomist – but whether one would actually want to call her one, would depend on what one understands by Thomism.⁷¹ One might understand Thomism as a doctrine in which Act and Potency, Form and Matter present definitive formative concepts, the foundation of which is beyond question. Or one could understand Thomism to be a doctrine, which relies on the best available philosophy for interpreting the world with the help of Revelation to form a view of the whole that allows for science to be a reality. On the first view, as we shall see, Stein is not a Thomist. On the second she is.⁷²

⁶⁸ Sarah Borden Sharkey: *Thine Own Self. Individuality in Edith Stein's Later Writings* (Washington D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010) also affirms this, but argues that what Stein puts in its stead, 'individual forms', has no advantages compared to Aquinas' solution, and maybe even disadvantages. Stein does think that the individual has an essence, and that essences have essential being, but form and essence are not synonyms for Stein (nor are they indeed for Aristotle). Some of Borden Sharkey's argument relies on an Aristotelian/Thomistic reading of Stein's concept of essence to which the *a priori* (transcendental) nature of essential being remains inaccessible. This is because the understanding of the transcendental realm of essences only can be accessed from within phenomenologically purified experience, as that which informs and structures it. Stein's focus is on the one hand on the individual, as Aristotle's focus was on *ousia*, because it is that without which the world remains unintelligible and on the other on essences of greater or lesser generality. This is another way of expressing what Borden Sharkey rightly affirms, that Stein's concern is not with *individuation*, but with *individuality* (p. 18). It seems to me that Borden Sharkey's placing of Stein into the discussion of individual form slightly dislodges Stein's project and may well generate the problems she sees in her account, in particular as regards the possible devaluation of what is common to human kind.

⁶⁹ ESGA 11-12, IV, §4, 5.

⁷⁰ One could say she reserves a place for understanding matter as unintelligible, namely as characteristic of the unredeemed world view.

⁷¹ See Borden Sharkey op. cit., pp. xvii-xx: 'Edith Stein and Thomism' for the various points of view that have been expressed on the matter.

⁷² It would be awkward to call Stein's philosophy 'scholastic', except if what one means by that is simply 'academic', i.e. conducted in the 'Schools', i.e. in or around the institutional setting of the University. But this would include most contemporary philosophy, which

1. The *Festschrift* Article

On the occasion of Husserl's seventieth birthday, a *Festschrift* was prepared for him by his students and associates. The first version of the article Stein contributed presents Aquinas in a dialogue with Husserl on the eve of the latter's birthday.⁷³ It was later rewritten at the instigation of the editor of the *Festschrift*, Martin Heidegger, to omit the dialogue form, but retain all the points. As Stein in the first version portrays the characters of her interlocutors as well as their philosophical divergences, this version is enriched by the wealth of information one gathers from an attitude displayed by a character.⁷⁴ Stein's familiarity with her characters is obtained from her engagement with the work of both authors, and in the case of Husserl, also through personal acquaintance. The characters present her understanding of their ideal selves engaging in a dialogue the basis of which lies outside time. Stein's Aquinas (SAquinas) has a clear grasp of what distinguishes his position from Husserl's, and moreover has the benefit of hindsight of more than 700 years. This allows him to explain his position to Husserl, and also at times to explain Husserl's position to Husserl. Since the article is addressed to Husserl as a gift, it is mostly Aquinas that Stein lets speak, possibly to avoid phrases Husserl would find alienating. The interpretation of his thought by his student Stein is thus put in the mouth of SAquinas, but whether a Thomist would find this Aquinas an accurate intellectual portrayal might be a subject of contention. Stein's Husserl (SHusserl), in contrast, sometimes will not discuss a point or loses himself in thought to the point where an answer is not forthcoming. Such foibles must have been clear enough to all and also to Husserl, for him not to be offended by their humoristic portrayal. Alternatively, Stein is making a point (which Heidegger as an editor might have wanted to mitigate). The impression is of two characters genuinely attempting to understand each other's view point in a highly complex but serene debate.

would jar with the implicit understanding that 'scholastic' refers to a type of philosophy conducted within a specific time period past (however one defines this period), which accepted faith as a source of knowledge. Stein does accept faith as a source of knowledge, but that seems nevertheless insufficient to characterise the thought as 'scholastic', except if one believes that the tradition of scholastic philosophy is not restricted to the past. See Borden Sharkey op. cit. p. 56-72: 'The Scholastic and Phenomenological Traditions'.

⁷³ The title of the published article was 'Husserl and Aquinas, a Comparison', 1929. The first version of the article, 'Was ist Philosophie? Ein Gespräch zwischen Edmund Husserl und Thomas von Aquino', was published first in Edith Stein: *Erkenntnis und Glaube*, Edith Steins Werke = ESW (the first Herder edition of Stein's works), Bd. XV (Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder, 1993). It will appear shortly in ESGA 9, as the last of the ESGA volumes. The two versions were translated into English and helpfully presented alongside each other for comparison by Walther Redmond, in Edith Stein: *Knowledge and Faith*, CWES 8 (Washington D.C.: ICS Publications, 2000) pp. 1-63.

⁷⁴ Erich Przywara also appreciated the 'artistic value' of this piece. 'Edith Stein. Zu ihrem zehnten Todestag' in *In und Gegen* (Nürnberg: Glock und Lutz, 1955), quoted in Andreas Speer und Francesco Tommasi: 'Einleitung' in *Thomas von Aquin, Über die Wahrheit 1* (ESGA 23), p. XXI.

The dialogue starts out by Aquinas affirming his accord with Husserl in philosophy having to be done 'as a rigorous science', as a 'serious, sober inquiry of reason'.⁷⁵ Then five important points of divergence are identified and the position of both thinkers on these points is discussed. The points are (1) the role of faith in philosophy, (2) the need for a starting point for philosophical inquiry, (3) the relationship between the I and the absolute I, (4) empirical and/or eidetic methods and (5) the nature of intuition.

(1) For SAquinas faith is necessary for the completion of the work of reason, such that philosophy as a rigorous science cannot be completed without it. SHusserl, in contrast, objects that a distinction between natural and supernatural reason would jar with the transcendentalism of philosophy, where such distinctions have no place. SAquinas, however, finding ways to understand and take SHusserl's perspective, reproaches SHusserl for not seeing the (essential) limits of human reasoning, which deems our philosophy to be fragmentary, and intimates that this fragmentation can be overcome only with the help of faith. SHusserl retorts he never intended to contest the right of faith for religion, but denies it can have a decisive role for philosophy. Thus the distinction between natural and supernatural reason is accepted by him and SAquinas is able to follow up by introducing a corresponding distinction between natural and supernatural philosophy: metaphysics relying on both. About metaphysics relying on both, he comments in a parenthesis:

(The loss of the appreciation for this fact accounts for the abstruse character of all modern philosophy and at the same time, quite consistently, for the mistrust of metaphysics felt by so many modern thinkers.)⁷⁶

It remains that the certitude of faith remains a question of faith, and thus that modern philosophy is justified in its mistrust if it does not want to rely on it. SAquinas clearly has an understanding for this, but he is equally insistent that metaphysics cannot achieve its goal without faith.

(2) Thus the question of whether there is a need for a starting-point in philosophy presents itself. To SAquinas it is clear that modern philosophers, who exclude faith and make do with natural knowledge must first search for a starting-point for their inquiry. He presents Husserl's quest for a realm of genuine immanence within the transcendentially purified consciousness as prolonging this quest for a knowledge that is absolutely certain, absolutely one with its object. But he does not think this quest can succeed without faith in God, who *is* this knowledge identical with its object. The quest is not fruitless, however. It led to a 'methodological purity, perhaps unknown before'.⁷⁷ As he contemplates it, SAquinas admits his dependence

⁷⁵ *Knowledge and Faith* op. cit. p. 8.

⁷⁶ This is SAquinas' explanatory comment. *Knowledge and Faith* op. cit. p. 19. He continues a bit later: 'I should add, by the way, that you will find scarcely anything of what I have just been saying about the relation of faith and reason in my writings. For me it was all a self-evident starting-point. I am speaking now from a later reflection on how I actually proceed, as it is needed today for a rapprochement with moderns' p. 20.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

on the methods of his time and confesses his ultimate intentions of serving truth and peoples' peace of mind. His is a 'philosophy for life'.⁷⁸

(3) It is thus on the issue of first truth, on the relation between the pure (or transcendental) I and the absolute I, that their philosophies must part ways. SAquinas explains how Husserl's transcendental phenomenology *is* general ontology, but 'with a radical shift of sign' and admits there is room in his own philosophy for accommodating constitutional analyses – i.e. analyses of how things are constituted for consciousness – but not as fundamental. SHusserl, however, does not wish to enter into discussion of the difference between the ego and God, but is far from admitting defeat.⁷⁹

(4) Instead he changes the topic and wishes to ask how SAquinas views the distinction between essence and fact, since it is fundamental to ontology as SHusserl understands it (material and regional ontologies investigating the essence of the various subjects of the sciences, under which the facts sort). SAquinas admits he 'did not distinguish them as a matter of methodological principle'.⁸⁰ What he was after was the broadest possible picture of *this* world and indeed of it as the basis for the best action (a motive SAquinas also explicitly ascribes to SHusserl). But he did distinguish between essence and accident and considered that which applies to things according to their essence as the 'basic scaffolding of the world'.⁸¹ Although the play of free possibilities was not his concern, eidetic analyses conducted through such variation were granted by SHusserl's students to scholastic enquiries according to SAquinas, and it allowed them to access these latter.

(5) And thus we come to the last discussion concerning intuition or essence-viewing (*Wesensschau*), which is the longest of them all. An immediate vision of essence seems to be available to Husserl as *a priori*. About it SAquinas states that *Wesensschau* 'may well have been the greatest stumbling block in your philosophy for Kantians and neo-scholastics' alike.⁸² Such immediacy as regards the knowledge of essences obtains only for the blessed in Heaven or indeed for God, according to SAquinas. On the other hand, it also obtains for our knowledge of principles.⁸³ SAquinas is not keen to admit such immediate (*a priori*) knowledge to essences in *statu via*, but admits they may be obtained through reasoning, such as for example eidetic variation. But the knowledge of them is mediate in another sense, it is mediated through *species*. 'Knowledge of the species themselves, on the other hand, is not knowledge through species. But it is still mediate in the first sense of being acquired actively.'⁸⁴ Thus SAquinas is open for the possibility of phenomenological essences being equivalent to the species through which we gain knowledge of things, and as knowledge of the species is reflexive, it is immediate in that it is not mediated through species. Only the blessed can intuit this fully, as they do so in the Word whom they see face to face (and see the world through). For us in *statu via*, the

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 27-8.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 32-3.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 34.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 36.

⁸² Ibid., p. 39.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 50.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 56.

intuition of essence is never completely fulfilled, although it helps us clarify our understanding. It remains that for us the intuition of essence is immediate in two senses (only): it is *not* known through effects, and it is *not* empty. This is very little in comparison to the intuition of essence completely fulfilled.

It may well be that this last question concerning intuition is what allows for the most fruitful interaction between phenomenologists and Thomists. It possibly is the fundamental one involving the rest, as it also touches on the relationship between the essences and the Ideas, and therefore also on the relationship between the human I and God.

2. The Translation-Commentary of *De veritate*

Stein had thus outlined the differences between the two standpoints she set out to bridge and integrate.⁸⁵ She continues this integration in a new key in her translation-commentary of *De veritate*, which also bears the title: ‘Aquinas’ teaching on Knowledge according to the *Quaestiones de veritate*⁸⁶ – a systematic title true to her intentions to penetrate to the meaning of what Aquinas says by means of her ‘translation’. To this end Thomas’ text is restructured, abbreviated and provided with succinct and insightful resumés and critical comments, attempting to penetrate – as always – to the matters under discussion and not only to what Thomas says.

This way of proceeding – successful only because of its meticulous precision – highlights the epochal difference between the presuppositions of classical and modern philosophy.⁸⁷ The thoroughness lets Stein ‘discover’ things obvious to the careful and persistent reader, which easily evaporates when doctrinal consistency takes precedence. Aquinas, for instance, taught in fact that God and angels have knowledge of the individual, something which reveals that he thought that individuation by matter (by the principle of non-intelligibility) did not matter to them.⁸⁸ Thus individuality as such cannot be unintelligible (and he could not reasonably have thought it was), since it is not unintelligible to superior intellects. In so far as he thought that the true is what being is in relation to knowledge, and that being is the

⁸⁵ ‘Wenn es nur ein Kern von Wahrheit hier und dort ist, so muss es auch eine Brücke geben’. ESGA 23, p. 4. The ‘Vorbemerkung’ is found in Stein’s *Handexemplar*, where she has inserted it in her own handwriting, and reconstructed carefully by the editors.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁸⁷ A publication of the work as a translation has occurred (Wiesbaden: Marixverlag 2013 (Kindle)) with a foreword of Bruno Kern. He presents the work in the introduction (‘Von der Vollkommenheit der Geschöpfe gering denken heißt die Vollkommenheit der göttlichen Macht herabmindern’) in the following manner: ‘Die Textabschnitte der einzelnen Artikel sind so zusammengestellt, dass der Grundgedanke und die wesentlichen Argumentationsschritte leicht nachvollziehbar werden und die Leser und Leserinnen sich nicht in einem Labyrinth unterschiedlicher Argumentationsketten verlieren. Mit guten Überleitungen fügt sie die Texte so aneinander, dass der Hauptgedanke klar hervortritt. Jede *Questio* wird mit einer äußerst erhellenden Zusammenfassung der wesentlichen Gedanken beschlossen.’ This edition might well allow the work to be read in the manner in which it was intended, as an introduction to Aquinas’ own thought.

⁸⁸ ESGA 23, Q. VIII, a. 11. Aquinas: *De veritate* Q. VIII, a. 11.

first object of the intellect (i.e. that which it primarily knows), no being can in fact be in principle unintelligible.⁸⁹ This transcendental insight about knowledge and about being remains the stepping stone for Stein from phenomenology to Thomist ontology, since it constitutes the transcendental core of being, knowledge and truth.

3. *Potency and Act*

Because we know that *Finite and Eternal Being* resulted from Stein's rewriting of *Potency and Act* for publication, we are tempted to read the latter as an earlier version of the former. That is helpful in so far as the latter work is, according to the subtitle, 'studies toward a philosophy of being' and seeks, like *Finite and Eternal Being*, to ascend to the meaning of being. The two works are, however, profoundly different. The concept of matter as a structural feature present in the first work has been superseded in the second and no longer serves as an opposite to pure act to account for order in the universe, or for the difference between regional (material) and formal ontology.

Potency and Act is an attempt to clarify what potency and act mean, from within experience (i.e., phenomenologically), and in accordance with both Aquinas' and Husserl's use of the terms. Apart from understanding what those terms mean (i.e. conducting an eidetic analysis of them), Stein is exploring their role for Thomas' and Husserl's understanding of the whole, of all there is to know, of being. She says herself that her work issues from an attempt to understand the 'method' of Aquinas, to expose the *Organon* of his fundamental concepts, something she also struggled with in her early comparison/dialogue.⁹⁰ She finds it necessary to do so because Thomas does not explore his own method, and because she as a philosopher must find out whether the reliance on these terms is justified or not. Her own method is thus an 'objective' (*sachlichen*) analysis of Aquinas' fundamental concepts, i.e. an investigation of the realities expressed in the concepts, a penetration towards their meaning, towards 'the things themselves' in order to assess the validity of the concepts.⁹¹ As potency and act divide and concern being in its entirety, penetration towards their meaning is likewise a way of approaching the whole of being, as indeed Aquinas did with the help of this distinction, following a well-established tradition.

In the work we see being occurring under three forms – the internal world, the external world and the beyond of the world – spirit in persons and ideas, nature in material things, and the absolute in that towards which both of these point for the explanation of their existence. Both of the latter announce themselves in the former in virtue of their transcendence, their reality or material fullness (*Fülle*), and all admit of a meaning to potency and act. This meaning, however, cannot be investigated in a purely formal manner, as act and potency concerns the *content* of being. This is why Stein's analysis of potency and act must take the form of a presentation of the analogy of being, of act and potency as bearing on spirit, nature and their presupposition in absolute being. The formal ontology of potency and act cannot be

⁸⁹ *De ver.*, Q.1 a.1.

⁹⁰ *Potenz und Akt*, ESGA 10, p. 4 (Vorwort), CWES XI p. 1.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5. CWES XI pp. 9-11.

investigated in isolation and thus the transcendental investigation of knowledge (of what these terms *mean*) leads over into an investigation of reality in its basic articulations (of what these terms *refer to*).⁹²

In *Potency and Act* Stein works with several of her characteristic ideas: the ontological status of ideal or essential being, knowledge of the individual, in particular of the human individual, the nature of matter, the core of the person, evolution and life. The contrasting of the scholastic and the phenomenological approach already yields significant results. On the one hand the phenomenologically experienced unity of the I makes Aquinas' understanding of the immateriality of the soul show up as being in contrast with the idea that what individuates everything, and thus also the soul, should be matter. On the other hand the incontrovertible being of the I, as underlined by Husserl, makes it impossible to avoid the ontological investigation (of the *being* of the I) to which Aquinas' contributes.

4. *Finite and Eternal Being*

The novice mistress and subprior at St Maria *des Friedens*, Sr Teresia Renata, somewhat unexpectedly encouraged Stein to finish *Potency and Act* for publication, having a high regard for Stein's abilities and for what she must have seen as Stein's special mission. As Stein undertook this work, her external circumstances had changed: she no longer was under an economic obligation to teach or to pursue a career, time was regularly given over to writing and the quiet disengagement from the world left her room to think and study within the safe, but austere, haven of a religious community, hidden in a world marked by terror and violence.

Finite and Eternal Being takes, compared to *Potency and Act*, a different direction already in the first chapter, where Stein reflects on the possibility of (or indeed the necessity for) a Christian philosophy to account for the structure of reality. Maritain had claimed for moral philosophy the need to be supported by Christian principles for the moral philosopher to accede to moral truth, not only because grace would strengthen his intellectual powers, but because Christian doctrine underpins it (the dignity and equality of all human beings as children of God, love as their vocation). Stein claims this support for philosophy as such – not only anthropology, but also ontology, as indeed the revelation in the Word of God is of a God that *wants* relation and *is* relation, in which all relations find their ultimate meaning as the meaning of being. The idea that philosophy could achieve its goal (*perfectum opus rationis*) without recourse to Revelation was still – if only implicitly – affirmed in *Potency and Act*. Now it is denied: philosophy achieves its purpose through theology, but not *as* theology.

The consideration of formal ontology is now replaced by a phenomenological analysis of essence and essentiality.⁹³ This is due to the fact that *form* along with *matter* now seems secondary compared to essence to Stein (and with form and matter

⁹² ESGA 10, III, §4.

⁹³ Stein conducts this inquiry in dialogue with Jean Hering, op. cit.

the distinction between formal and material ontology⁹⁴). A close discussion of Aristotle has the purpose of determining the relationship between his concept of essence (*to ti en einai*) and the phenomenological one. In the course of this investigation the concepts of substance and form are equally discussed to determine their relevance for the phenomenological concept of essence, and the ideas of matter, mass and material (*Stoff*) are compared, so as to clarify the Aristotelian concept of matter on the one hand and penetrate towards an adequate understanding of concreteness, and of the bearer (*hypostasis, Träger*) of the being and its essence on the other.

Having discussed essence in relation to concreteness, Stein turns in chapter V towards being as such, i.e. towards the transcendentals: the being something, one, true, good and beautiful of everything. The divisions of being into spirit, nature and infinite being has revealed all being, transcendent and immanent, as standing in a potential (or real) relationship with spirit (everything stands in a relationship with the divine spirit), and hence opened up the possibility of everything being true and good, i.e. of everything being known and being appreciated for what it is. Knowledge, in so far as it is a relationship to the object, 'helps to build up the *what* of knowledge and is the condition of its reality'.⁹⁵ It belongs to all being to be open to be the object of such knowledge: that is what is meant by characterising truth as a transcendental. 'Being is (even if its full meaning is not exhausted by this) being revealed to the spirit'.⁹⁶

The meaning of being treated in chapter VI relies on this division internal to being between nature and spirit, which allows being a meaning, i.e. a 'being for', a 'being revealed'. This meaning amounts to being as such standing in a definite relationship with a certain type of being, namely spirit, and thus it amounts to a relationship internal to being, which is itself intelligible, like being, and intelligible because it is.

What is common to the meaning of (all finite) being (where essence and being differ) is that it is the:

*unfolding of a meaning; essential being is timeless unfolding beyond the difference between potency and act; real being is unfolding out of an essential form, from potency to act, in time and space; the being of thought is unfolding in several senses (..).*⁹⁷

⁹⁴ The distinction between form and content, empty form and fulfilment or 'filling' now moves to the forefront to account for the family likenesses of things. Form and content are distinct through the type of understanding (*Anschauung*) we can have of them: The content when contemplated allows the spirit to come to rest in the ultimate essentialities, the abstracted form refers beyond itself because of its emptiness and hence does not allow the spirit to rest in the same way. *Endliches und ewiges Sein* (ESGA 11-12) V, § 2, p. 242. This, however, does not cancel the idea of formal ontology but rather completes it as metaphysics: 'Alles Seiende ist Fülle in einer Form. Die Formen des Seienden herauszustellen ist die Aufgabe der Wissenschaft, die Husserl als 'formale Ontologie' bezeichnet hat.' Ibid., p. 243.

⁹⁵ *Endliches und ewiges Sein* (ESGA 11-12), V, § 10, p. 254. My translation.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 258. My translation.

⁹⁷ Ibid., VI, § 1, pp. 284-5. My translation; corresponding passage CWES IX p. 331.

Apart from unfolding, being also is, in accordance with its transcendental characteristics, one, true, good, beautiful and something, something with content (*erfülltes*). 'We mean this complete fullness, when we talk of "being". But a finite spirit cannot comprehend this fullness fully. It is the infinite task of insight.'⁹⁸

The contrast between formal and material ontology – between form and content as understood by Husserl⁹⁹ – is replaced by one of ideal and real being, while essence moves to the foreground to replace form and matter as basic concepts. The idea of being as a hierarchy involving various degrees of actuality – as taken from Aquinas – is abandoned, and being is seen as instead reflecting a circular movement of mutual implication (that of the Trinity) in spirit, nature and absolute being. The meaning of being is approached as the happening and valuing of this reflection as experienced. The struggle with the principle of individuation turns into praise of the meaning of each individual being, and in particular of the individual human being. The thinking through act and potency to finite and eternal being has made the analogy of being unfold, with leftovers from both the phenomenological and the scholastic tradition falling away. This is an attempt to ascend to the meaning of being, as the subtitle indicates, no longer by penetrating to the meaning of act and potency (as in *Potency and Act*), but by penetrating experience to the meaning of being itself. The rewriting of *Potency and Act* made Stein accomplish a shift in presuppositions: as the concepts of form and matter were replaced, a new phenomenological ontology became possible on a Christian foundation, i.e. in the *Logos*. The transcendental structure of knowledge now takes its place at the heart of ontology, opening up the distinction between nature and spirit and leaving room for an infinite spirit whose correspondence with being in truth is identical to itself, and has revealed itself in Christ.

Conclusion

In so far as the idea that matter is the principle of individuation is not essential to Thomism, and in so far as form and matter, and act and potency can be investigated for their adequacy as concepts to deal with being, whether ideal or real, one can call Stein's ontology Thomist or Thomistic. More importantly however, Stein's ontology is an attempt to advance Christian philosophy in the tradition of the *philosophia perennis*, to which also Aquinas wanted to contribute. It may be more fruitful to see them both as parallel endeavours of the same species, instead of trying to place Stein's as a subspecies of the species to which Aquinas' philosophy belongs.

The fact that she is a Thomist and a phenomenologist (only) in so far as she is both, challenges us to cross categories established by major events in the history of ideas. This challenge was one she was aware of having a special vocation to meet, but also one which she considered to belong to the philosophical discipline as such. To her philosophy remained first and foremost systematic, the history of ideas would

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 286: 'We mean this total fullness when we speak of 'being'. But a finite spirit is never able to apprehend this fullness in the unity of a fulfilling intuition. It is the infinite task of our knowing.' My translation; corresponding passage CWES IX, p. 332.

⁹⁹ *Logical Investigations* V, 2, § 14-15.

have to be, and here she is again in agreement with both Aquinas and Husserl, a discipline enabling eidetic variation as much as relying on it.