

“She Will Crush Thy Head”: Edith Stein’s Emancipative Empathy as a Critical Voice against Neoliberalism in Education

Blaise D. Ringor
University of St. Tomas
blaiseringor2397@gmail.com

Abstract

The political thoughts of Edith Stein augment her phenomenology of empathy which is a creative retrieval of the dignity and worth of the human person. In a neoliberal method of education, a person’s value is set aside, and thus education loses sight of the person by placing an over-emphasis on profit-making and/or institutional rankings. Eventually, a person becomes apathetic to the point that education loses touch with the person’s life. I argue in this essay that through the phenomenology of empathy of Edith Stein, one can expect to see a possible resolution, the "feet that will crush the serpent's head." I show how Edith Stein's phenomenology of empathy serves as an emancipative voice against the threats posed by the tyrannical neoliberal methods and ideologies in education. I answer the problem: How can Edith Stein's notion of empathy serve as a critical voice against neoliberal ideologies and methods in education?

Keywords: Education, Emancipative Empathy, Neoliberalism, Person, Woman

Introduction

In the hostile¹ neoliberal trend, education is one of the most susceptible victims. Elitist education is one of the results of this process, which has been accelerated by the corporatization of educational institutions. To prioritize profit above the human being is a war cry that encapsulates this movement born out of capitalism. Education's objective is to monetize education exponentially through its commodification. Education is, in fact, being weaponized to serve as an enabler of capitalism. For example, rankings mislead many instructors to the truth² and coerce them into conforming without criticism for the sake of monetary benefit. This reality is devastating because educational institutions progressively devolve into usurpers and manipulators of truth rather than leaders and martyrs of it.³ Once education gets commodified, truth is compromised, and in turn, it becomes susceptible. Henry Giroux expressed this disgust on neoliberalism by saying:

Beholden to corporate interests, career building, and the insular discourses that accompany specialized scholarship, too many academics have become overly comfortable with the corporatization of the university and the new regimes of neoliberal governance. Chasing after grants, promotions, and conventional research outlets, many academics have retreated from larger

¹ This hostility takes form when the *extreme application* of ideology extends itself even at the cost of violation of the dignity of the human person.

² I take truth as something that is anchored to the *absolute truth* verified by facts and evidence. In any case, it does not stop simply with *epistemological truth* but must ultimately transcend to the metaphysical truth. In that way, education will not simply serve that which is *sensible* but also it will ground its intention of forming the minds to that which is eternal and *immutable*. This is the same truth that Stein expresses as "truth which prompts the searching human spirit into endless pursuit." Edith Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*, trans. Waltraut Stein (Washington D.C., U.S.A.: ICS Publications, 1989), 47.

³ Cf. Michael A. Peters, "Neoliberalism as Political Discourse: The Political Arithmetic of *Homo Oeconomicus*" in *The Impacts of Neoliberal Discourse and Language in Education: Critical Perspectives on a Rhetoric of Quality, Well-Being, and Justice*, ed. Mitja Sardoc (New York, U.S.A.: Routledge, 2021), 70. He argues here that educational institutions are either subscribing to the idea of *Public Choice Theory* or are being compelled to adhere to that kind of move with the vision of *taking profits* via commodification of education.

public debates and refused to address urgent social problems. Assuming the role of the disinterested academic or the clever faculty star on the make, endlessly chasing theory for its own sake, these so-called academic entrepreneurs simply reinforce the public’s perception that they have become largely irrelevant. Incapable, if not unwilling, to defend the university as a crucial site for learning how to think critically and act with civic courage, many academics have disappeared into a disciplinary apparatus that views the university not as a place to think but as a place to prepare students to be competitive in the global marketplace.⁴

As a result, education’s critical voice is being choked as neoliberalism consolidates its hold on this institutional pillar of society. Hegemony is enabled through standardization, ranking, and the elimination of superfluous activities. Consequently, they lose sight of what education is all about: guiding students toward *truth* rather than being too concerned with certification requirements alone. To consider learners as individuals, not as assets or customers whose monetary payment must be accompanied by a product, in this instance, it comes in the form of a certificate or a diploma. Hence, indifference becomes socially acceptable, impeding the critical experience of becoming necessary for genuine learning. This is predictable in an era where metrics have become the gold standard for determining academic excellence, to the point that they have substituted the individual’s worth. Contrary to expectations, the more quantifiable the academic quality, the more impoverished and infantile it becomes. In education, neoliberalism usurps the dignity that education and individuals should possess. It misses the educational opportunity to teach the individual how to be a human being. The numerical figures it displays are comparable to the serpent’s⁵ head, which must be severed due to its

⁴ Henry A. Giroux, *Higher Education After Neoliberalism*, (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2014), 17.

⁵ I refer to the neoliberal ideology in education as the “serpent’s head” because it is the one that halts truth to flourish further. Nevertheless, I recognize the fact that some of its instruments—especially measurements— are helpful. Nevertheless, it cannot be taken absolutely and be forced as the sole standard of truth. This symbolism of serpent is taken from the Book of Genesis and was inspired by the Protoevangelium. These two are based on Catholic teachings which strongly influenced Edith Stein.

abundance of deceit and falsehoods. In this perspective, the exaltation of rankings and metrics seems to be the only yardstick for success. This misleading and exploitative weapon should be eliminated—the head of the deceiving serpent—unless one is still not weary of witnessing a dehumanized society controlled by dictators and corrupt people who graduated from respectable and top-ranking institutions.⁶

I argue in this essay that through the philosophy of education of Edith Stein, one can expect to see "the feet that will crush the head of this serpent." Stein's philosophy of education is instructive in critiquing neoliberal principles, as this has a basis on her notion of empathy, which I argue as having an emancipatory character. It is not immediately apparent, however, that her phenomenology of empathy is emancipatory in nature since it is not devoid of reason.⁷ Simultaneously, it is important since Stein did not give emotion the upper hand in terms of empathy, rather, she is convinced that empathy should be grounded in reality, that is, on being itself, and with the aid of a realist phenomenology. Additionally, I contend that her notion of a woman is a protest against exploitative systems. I also argue that women are excellent instructors of both the mind and soul. Tyranny is one of the characteristics of neoliberal education, and apathy develops thereafter. Therefore, I argue that Stein's concept of empathy is a crucial voice in this conversation. I am not arguing that neoliberal methodologies are absolutely wrong though; but rather, I argue that the type of system should be criticized, so that it may be implemented and modified with perfect moderation. Without being critical of the methods of neoliberal education and its sympathizers, results would be narrow-mindedness, numbness and deafness to criticism and dialogue.

This essay attempts to show how Edith Stein's phenomenology of empathy serves as an emancipative voice against the threats posed by the tyrannical neoliberal methods and ideologies in education. What is unique is that this voice comes from a woman who has experienced tyranny and indifference in her society which even cost her own life. In addition to that, the concept of "emancipative empathy" was never used by the reputable scholars of Stein to date—at least in the English-

⁶ Cf. Mitja Sardoc, *The Impacts of Neoliberal Discourse and Language in Education: Critical Perspectives on a Rhetoric of Quality, Well-Being, and Justice*, (New York, U.S.A.: Routledge, 2021).

⁷ Edith Stein's phenomenology of empathy is not totally composed of *emotions* alone. It is infused with reason, consciousness, and subjectivity to name the least. This will be seen on the subsequent section.

speaking world. Nevertheless, I argue that this thought is in her works. This is also a loving struggle to humbly offer fulfillment to this lacuna. Furthermore, there is no work that attempts to show how Stein’s notion of empathy is a relevant philosophical contention in the context of neoliberalism in education. This essay, thus, humbly wishes to answer the problem: How can Edith Stein’s notion of empathy serve as a critical voice against neoliberal ideologies and methods in education?

To be able to address the aforementioned question, the essay is divided into three parts. First, I present an evaluation of the effects of the neoliberal method in education, specifically the over-reliance on measurable data. I argue that doing so not only depersonalizes the human person but also degrades the dignity of education in its very essence. In effect, education becomes *apathetic*. Second, I show how Stein’s notion of empathy is emancipative in character. As such, her thoughts can serve as an effective response and criticism to apathy caused by such neoliberalist methods. Further, I also argue that her concept of a woman is revolutionary against tyranny, which in principle, perfectly complements her thoughts on empathy and politics. Finally, I conclude that Stein’s notion of empathy is a critical voice in conducting a dialogue with the neoliberalist methods in education since her concept of empathy retrieves the value of the person and renews the dignity of education.

Neoliberalism in Education

Neoliberalism is not completely wrong in what it contributes to the body of knowledge. For instance, a neoliberalist approach pushes faculty members to maximize their potentiality in terms of research and other aspects that would benefit their careers.⁸ The support in terms of budget allocation, time given to complete the research, and additional compensation for faculty members conducting research are things that are worthy of gratitude. To the learners, the effect can be seen when they persevere in terms of achieving a favorable grade and doing exercises that will sharpen their minds, enabling them to become job-worthy. Thus, becoming faithful to its mandate to cherish and bolster, as Adam Smith puts it in the *Wealth of the Nations*.⁹ The fundamental

⁸ Cf. Henry A. Giroux, *Higher Education After Neoliberalism*, (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2014).

⁹ See. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations*. (USA: Penguin Classics, 1982).

concern of Adam Smith here is the material wealth, but “Man shall not live on bread alone....”¹⁰ While all of these are desirable, the ultimate goal of the neoliberal ideology makes it problematic. This can be seen in the following ways: first, faculty research outputs are treated as products of exchange¹¹; most of the students are getting fixated on the idea that the good of learning is solely reflected by achieving the highest grades possible.¹² Second, the neoliberal approach intends to use the person in ways that are beneficial to institutions, given the vision is to gain profits. While it can be said that there are perks and benefits, it all leads to a self-serving purpose: profit and competitiveness. Research is taken as a product to be marketed and an apparatus for measuring qualities. In effect, the researcher might do the research in vain and not in service of truth.¹³ Finally, the person, in the eyes of the neoliberal, is devoid of soul. The neoliberal only stresses the value of output over the value of the person.¹⁴ Hence, one should seek the *Wealth of the*

¹⁰ Mt. 4:4. (NIV).

¹¹ This becomes dangerous if the faculty thinks that the achievement is done in *vain* and not in service of truth. As Stein reminds that “Self-satisfied joy in one’s own works is an injustice and a denial of God who initiates every single good work. Souls like these make no progress in perfection. When they no longer find satisfaction in their practices because God is offering them the dry bread of the strong, they become discouraged and are not capable of eating it.” Edith Stein, *The Science of the Cross*, trans. Kosephine Koepfel, O.C.D. (Washington, D.C., U.S.A.: ICS Publications, 2002) 100.

¹² Fr. Jesus Jay Miranda, O.P. cited an example where this instance is reflected in our society, he observes that “students have been made to comply with requirements and get good grades. When they do, they get rewarded. Thus, their learning is reduced to being a byproduct of laboring for incentives. The education sector has tolerated this kind of system, as it has kowtowed to the illusion that everything can be objectively measured. Ironically though, this obsession for objectivity also reveals its own prejudice. Its paradigm is brutally frank: you adjust to the requirement.” Fr. Jesus Jay Miranda O.P., “Caring, not conforming, is what schools need now,” *The Manila Times*, April 18, 2021, <https://www.manilatimes.net/2021/04/18/opinion/columnists/caring-not-conforming-is-what-schools-need-now/865077>.

¹³ Cf. Henry A. Giroux, *Higher Education After Neoliberalism*, (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2014).

¹⁴ During the presentation of this paper one of the questions that was raised was: “whether there can be no truth coming from a neoliberalist perspective or at least can numbers not be relevant at all?” I answered that the neoliberal approach can still help us reach the truth but only partially, since their approach, method, and intention are leaning toward profit. In this sense, one simply stops on what is merely sensible, whereas *truth* is not limited within the bounds of materiality and measurability alone. It should *form the person* and emphasize the *value of the person* more than just the profitability out of the education of the person.

Persons.¹⁵ How can these two opposing extremes be balanced then, and how can emancipative empathy be a possible resolution given the issues of neoliberal education?

Education is the lifeblood of a well-ordered society. In every society and educational system, a person may be considered either educated or miseducated. However, belonging to a university and having formal studies cannot guarantee that one is educated. Unfortunately, capitalists see educational institutions as an investment opportunity to take advantage of their capital growth. They see that the vulnerable education sector can be weaponized by using it as a factory of students who may eventually be useful for exponential growth of their company’s profits. It was then unsurprising when I encountered a University Professor orienting new faculty members, categorically stating that we should “treat our student(s) as our client.”¹⁶ With this statement, we see how students are being reduced to mere objects of profit, or assets that contribute to the financial growth of the University. Instead of seeing them as learners in need of guidance through knowledge of truth and virtue, students are seen as mere business associates. Although it is true that students are stakeholders and that they are the very reason why the University is economically afloat, it should not come to a point wherein we simply become sellers of knowledge with the diploma serving as a transaction receipt, and with marketing taglines emboldened by QS rankings. Otherwise, we defeat the very purpose of education because one reduces the knowledge of truth into a mere numerical figure.

¹⁵ This is in sharp contrast to Adam Smith’s *Wealth of the Nations* that emphasizes the value of exponential capital growth realized by profit. See. John McNerny, *Wealth of Persons: Economics with A Human Face*, (U.S.A.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016).

¹⁶ This is not a surprising phenomenon in a University or Educational Institution that is tied with neoliberal ideologies, as illustrated by Les Levidow “... universities themselves are increasingly acting like businesses. Their marketisation agendas link two neoliberal meanings of flexibility. First, student–customers (or their business sponsors) seek learning for flexible adaptation to labour-market needs. Second, global competitors flexibly design and sell courses according to consumer demand, so universities must anticipate and counter such competition. Such language can operate as a self-fulfilling prophecy by helping to create market relations.” Les Levidow, “Neoliberal Agendas for Higher Education,” in *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader*, eds. Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston (London: Pluto Pres, 2005), 160.

Relying too much on metrics betrays the purpose of the authentic learning processes.¹⁷ This is true across disciplines, although the humanities and liberal arts take the hard blow.¹⁸ This is because the humanities and the liberal arts seek to free the person from binding chains that are being stitched together by neoliberal ideologies. These disciplines seek to open the minds of students to the truth and reality, and that people must never be oppressed and be used as means toward ends. Thus, one dares to ask, “where did neoliberalism begin?” Spyros Themelis reports that

The origins of neoliberalism lie in liberalism, which was influenced by Adam Smith’s (1776/1982) seminal work ‘An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations.’ Smith’s thesis, encapsulated in the *laissez-faire* proposition, was simple and attractive: any regulations

¹⁷ Reliance on metrics is absolutely understandable in fields of *positive sciences* since it will really help them verify the validity of their research. However, in the humanities, it is a different case. Fr. Jesus Jay Miranda, O.P. points out that “The Total Quality Management-Quality Assurance, or TQM-QA, the strict audit on curriculums, the university rankings, the bibliometrics and the indexing of research are but a sign of a healthy governance in the university, especially if these are met with efficiency, quality and a genuine drive for excellence. But a sign is not equivalent to what it needs to symbolize. In this case, perhaps over the compliance with the market, what has to be visible in the university is its true commitment to education... It is easier for those in the fields of science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and health to deliver the market requirements. They clearly sync in with the metrics, which their industry or field has set for them. But the situation is different in the humanities, which in most cases resist the commodification of education. Hence, a clear problem on standardization. The university thrives because of the co-existence of the sciences and the humanities. The findings of science validate the theories of the humanities. Also, the humanities provide depth and direction to the understanding of science. Each of them must not lose their integrity. This is why it is iniquitous to have a uniform standard applicable to all disciplines. The metric for excellence in the humanities is surely not the same with science and technology.” Fr. Jesus Jay Miranda, O.P., “Rethinking standardization in the university,” *The Manila Times*, February 28, 2021, <https://www.manilatimes.net/2021/02/28/opinion/columnists/rethinking-standardization-in-the-university/846094>.

¹⁸ For instance, in an article published by Cynthia Nazarian entitled “When you cut humanities, what you lose is the human” she narrated how her specialization in literature is being belittled by others, she clamors: “Because I am a professor of Renaissance literature, many ask me what the use is of studying literature, and how it can possibly lead to a job.” Cynthia Nazarian, “When you cut humanities, what you lose is the human” in *The Hill*, April 05, 2018. <https://thehill.com/opinion/education/381677-when-you-cut-the-humanities-what-you-lose-is-the-human> Accessed on May 20, 2021.

on the economic activity of individuals or trade are unnecessary. A classical interpretation of liberalism was associated with John Stuart Mill (1859/2001), who argued for individual freedom as the foundation for individual and societal progress. Since then, the meaning of liberalism has expanded to combine a focus on natural and property rights with considerations of fairness and equality (see, for example, Rawls, 1993). These conceptions of freedom were embraced by the so-called liberal democratic countries in the Western hemisphere, but also elsewhere, and led to the embeddedness and expansion of capitalism as the only system that could guarantee individual freedom and national prosperity. For the best part of the 20th century, the partnership between liberalism and capitalism seemed to be the best of all possible worlds¹⁹

In other words, applying neoliberal principles in education is tantamount to saying that education should become in favor of capitalism. It must form students to be obedient and high achievers because these students would become an asset in the business circle. This is a new form of sophistry, and the University is one of its enablers as soon as it implements neoliberal principles without any critical assessment. In this light, the neoliberal becomes successful in corporatizing the University and turning it into a breeding ground for those who will eventually become submissive employees. As a result, many graduates of this particular university become oppressors in society. They were brainwashed with the propaganda that the higher grades that you have, the more rewarding you can be. You are greater than anyone else. You have dominated them because you have this reward.²⁰ Thus, the process of neoliberalism of giving rewards to those who are useful for capital growth begins in school. As Muller points out, “A frequent feature of metric fixation is paying for performance, that is,

¹⁹ Spyros Themelis, “Neoliberal Globalization” in *Critical Reflections on the Language of the Neoliberalism in Education: Dangerous Words and Discourses of Possibility*, ed. Spyros Themelis (New York, U.S.A.: Routledge, 2021), 22.

²⁰ Muller observes that in a metrically fixated condition, which is the case with neoliberalism, reward serves as a form of validation of whatever effort one exerted to gain that specific end. Here, the cause that drives towards fulfilling the end is nothing else but reward. See Jerry Z. Muller, *The Tyranny of Metrics*, (U.S.A.: Princeton University Press, 2018), 4.

offering individuals or organizations financial incentives to meet quantifiable criteria.”²¹ One should not be surprised when students are very conscious of their grades. They become obsessed with numbers instead of personal values and virtues. Same thing is true with professors who are treating their students without any consideration that they are humans, too. These are the professors who are apathetic because they measure students on the basis of their outputs alone. Their rigid method of looking at the rubrics alone as the basis of judging the student drives them into illusion and superficiality.²² Edith Stein obviously opposes this kind of educational system as it is devoid of individuality and personhood. Allow me to begin with her notion of empathy, as it is the character that neoliberalism rejects.

The Emancipative Character of Empathy

Edith Stein’s notion of empathy springs from her disagreement with her mentor Edmund Husserl over transcendental reduction, which has a presupposition coming both from Cartesian solipsism and Kantian rationalism. This is the error which Husserl committed in his *Ideas I*. Stein took the stand of following a realist phenomenology, a movement that rejects transcendental reduction and its bracketing of existence.²³

Boden explains that:

Husserlian phenomenology begins with that which is immediate and certain, our own consciousness; however, viewing ourselves as monadic centers isolated from others is simply not an adequate description of our experience. We do not find ourselves isolated, solipsistic centers of consciousness, but involved in a world filled with other people and other centers of consciousness.²⁴

As a response to this problem, Stein asks the crucial question, “should we understand experience as my experience of the world or as our encounter with the world?”²⁵ Stein begins with a clear statement of

²¹ Ibid., 19.

²² Cf. Giroux, *Higher Education After Neoliberalism*, 17.

²³ Sarah Boden, *Edith Stein* (New York, U.S.A.: Continuum, 2003), 26-27.

²⁴ Boden, *Edith Stein* 27.

²⁵ Ibid.

what she means by empathy. She tells us that the empathy that she wants to teach us is *phenomenological*. In effect, she considered first the subject, consciousness, and the phenomenon of life. Stein believes that empathy is a unique experience of a person. This experience reveals persons to themselves and makes them realize that they are spiritual persons. Stein says that “The subject of the empathized experience, however, is not the subject empathizing but another. This is fundamentally new in contrast with the memory, expectation, or the fantasy of our own experiences.”²⁶ The person who empathizes with another person directs that empathic act to the person other than themselves. In doing so, that empathic act returns to them without any ulterior motive that it will turn back again. It is just that this is a characteristic of reflective consciousness, and so the empathizing person experiences as well the struggles of the persons that they are empathizing with. Thus, Stein remarks that “empathy is a kind of act of perceiving *sui generis*...[it] is the experience of foreign consciousness in general, irrespective of the kind of the experiencing subject or of the subject whose consciousness is experienced.”²⁷ This empathic act makes one understand the other person. It makes the person become a person by virtue of the fact that they experience the value of the other as well.²⁸

I can remember a memory, expect an expectation, fantasy a fantasy. And so I can also empathize the empathized, i.e., among the acts of another that I comprehend empathically there can be empathic acts in which the other comprehends another’s acts. This ‘other’ can be a third person or me myself. In the second case, we have ‘reflexive sympathy’ where my original experience returns to me as an empathized one.²⁹

Another kind of empathy for Stein is sensual empathy. She states that, “the possibility of sensual empathy (‘a sensing-in,’ to be exact) is warranted by the interpretation of our own living body as a physical body and our own physical body as a living body because of the

²⁶ Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*, 10.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁸ Cf. Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*, 91-117. It is in this chapter where Stein discusses *Empathy as the Understanding of Spiritual Persons*.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

fusion of outer and bodily perception...I can only empathize with physical bodies of this type; only them can I interpret as living bodies.”³⁰ With this, I can say that the neoliberal is apathetic because it is not possible for them to empathize if, in the first place, they reduced the living bodies into metrics. They can only show pseudo-empathy—never a real one—a tool of deception in order to conceal their actual intention. Indeed, the neoliberal detests real empathy because, in their eyes, it hinders profit. As such, the more one understands what empathy is for Stein, the more they become aware of the dangers of being infected with the neoliberal principles in education. Elsewhere, Stein implicitly condemns the use of persons as objects. She argues that empathy is only possible when we recognize the fact that we are empathizing with a person with a living body. “In order to empathize alive movement in this physical body, we must already have interpreted it as a living body.”³¹ Indeed, a neoliberal can never empathize insofar as they can only see the value of the student and faculty member based only on their quantifiable outputs. In their eyes, the more output that their students and faculty produce, the more that they are useful in generating income for the University. In short, the person has been reduced into a mere object of use, oppressed for the sake of profit, and exploited to the point of alienation. Thus, one should ask whether there is a way for the neoliberalist to be empathic since their method itself is apathetic. Stein says that “our empathy is unjustified if we believe that we are inflicting pain on a tree by cutting it down with an ax.”³² In a similar vein, our empathy is unjustified if we believe that we are showing compassion and consideration to the students and teachers but are demanding them to be productive. It is as if their outputs are products that are being sold in the marketplace. That their curriculum vitae actually speak for their credibility and personhood. That the overwhelming titles at the end of their names could exhaust the virtues and truth that they can teach the students.

As such, one should be reminded that empathy awakens the being of the person. Indeed, unique to empathy as to how Stein

³⁰ Boden, *Edith Stein* 58.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 67-68. To put it more clearly Stein argues that “rigid immobility conflicts with the phenomenon of the sensitive living body and the living organism in general...This abolishes the possibility of transference into the foreign living body and so of a fulfilling empathy and the gaining of his orientation.” Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*, 68.

³² *Ibid.*, 69.

conceives it is the openness to correction, as there could be a possibility of deception caused by the self. It is against any superficial impression of uniformity. One could have a wrong interpretation of the other and may empathize in a deceptive manner. However, this deception could be corrected if we allow others to speak about it. If we allow our neighbors to correct us. She says that “Empathy now offers itself to us as a corrective for such deceptions along with further corroboratory or contradictory perceptual acts. It is possible for another to ‘judge me more accurately’ than I judge myself and give me clarity about myself.”³³ Hence, it is emancipative of any monopoly of truth³⁴ because it seeks the truth and recognizes any mistakes along the way to the truth.

The Unique Value of Women in Education

Stein is a lover of truth, as such, she values education and even embraced the teaching profession before she entered the Carmelite monastery. Under the mentorship of Husserl, she taught “phenomenological kindergarten,” which serves as a primer to the new students of Husserl to explain the complexity of his lectures. Even after she quit in 1918 because of her frustration with her mentor Edmund Husserl, she still continued tutoring students in phenomenology.³⁵ In 1932, Stein continued teaching at Speyer at a “girls’ high school and teachers’ training institute of the Dominican nuns of St. Magdalena...Stein taught Latin, Greek, and German history. Although

³³ Ibid., 89.

³⁴ I take *monopoly of truth* in the sense that the neoliberal coerces academics to limit the content of their lectures to something that is *favorable* to the *capital* in order to secure the *profit*. Giroux observed this kind of *monopoly of truth* in a neoliberal setting, he says, “As faculty are demoted to contingency forms of labor, they lose their power to influence the conditions of their work; they see their work load increase; they are paid poorly, deprived of office space and supplies, and refused travel money; and, most significantly, they are subject to policies that allow them to be fired at another’s will. The latter is particularly egregious because, when coupled with an ongoing series of attacks by rightwing ideologues against left-oriented and progressive academics, many non-tenured faculty, begin to censor themselves in their classes. At a time when critical faculty might be fired for their political beliefs, have their names posted on right wing web sites, be forced to turn over their e-mail correspondence to right-wing groups, or face harassment by the conservative press, it is crucial that protections be put in place that safeguard their positions and enable them to exercise the right of academic freedom.” Giroux, *Higher Education After Neoliberalism*, 60-61.

³⁵ Boden, *Edith Stein*, 5-8.

she was a rigorous teacher, she was well-liked. Furthermore, she introduced political topics, social problems, and sex education which was quite unusual for an exclusive all-girls' school teacher in the 1920s."³⁶ We can see that Stein did not show any fear in leading her students to the truth regardless if it was unpopular during her time. She love education by being a teacher and a student.³⁷

To start the discussion on the value of women in education,³⁸ I wish to begin with Stein's reminder on the stereotype against women as incapable of things that men do, such as the case of education which in her time, was extremely misogynistic and patriarchal.³⁹ She states that "only subjective delusion could deny that women are capable of practicing vocations other than that of spouse and mother."⁴⁰ Furthermore, she also states that men and women are equal in dignity, and both possess unique individuality. "Indeed," Stein remarks, "no woman is an only woman; like a man, each has her individual specialty and talent, and this talent gives her the capability of doing professional work, be it artistic, scientific, technical, or other types of work. Essentially, individual talent can enable her to embark on any

³⁶ Ibid., 8.

³⁷ "In addition to her teaching duties, Stein was enlisted in several academic projects. She had begun translating Henry Cardinal Newman's *The Idea of a University*, but rather than finishing that, Fr Pryzwara asked her to translate a volume of Newman's diaries and papers. She completed the volume written between 1801 and Newman's conversion to Catholicism." Boden, *Edith Stein*, 8.

³⁸ In this specific work, I set the limit to the value of woman in education according to Edith Stein, however, the inherent lessons coming from the philosophical stance of Stein is universally applicable, hence it includes at the same time the value of *man* in education.

³⁹ Boden reports an instance where Stein experienced discrimination from the academic circle: "She [Edith Stein] had applied for a university post at Gottingen in 1919, and her phenomenological works from this time were intended as the Habilitationsschrift, a second doctoral thesis necessary in Germany to obtain a university position. Husserl had written a letter of recommendation that, after great praise, ended with, '[s]hould the academic profession become open to women, I would recommend Dr. Stein immediately and most warmly for qualification as a university lecturer.' She did not get the position. Stein then wrote a letter to the Prussian Ministry for Science, Art and Education in protest of the discrimination in academia against women. Approximately a year later, on February 21, 1921, Minister Becker issued a statement declaring that gender should not be used as an obstacle to habilitation. (Although Stein's letter resulted in a public statement from Berlin, 30 years passed before a woman held a post in philosophy in a German university.)" Boden, *Edith Stein*, 8

⁴⁰ Edith Stein, *Essays on Woman*, trans. Freda Mary Oben, Ph.D. (Washington D.C., U.S.A.: ICS Publications, 1996), 49.

discipline, even those remote from the usual feminine vocations.”⁴¹ The value of a woman must be upheld at all times; besides one cannot ignore a woman’s relevance in society and in all the other aspects of professional disciplines. Stein contends that “...the participation of women in the most diverse professional disciplines could be a blessing for the entire society, private or public, precisely if the specifically feminine ethos would be preserved. A glance toward the Mother of God becomes indicative for us again.”⁴² One can therefore see that the woman has an exclusive contribution that is unique in the realm of education. Stein also fought for educational reform that gives women their space to contribute, as reported: “She used both the spoken and written word not only in practical teaching in the school and in the teachers’ college but also in planning and in bringing about educational reform.”⁴³

Now, let us talk about Stein and her attitude towards education. According to Lucy Gelber, Stein “was single-minded in her personal aspirations and also in her devotion to those entrusted to her guidance. The strength of her will rejected all sophistry.”⁴⁴ In other words, Stein was against the neoliberal understanding of education as a milling machine of money. She, therefore, says that “the noblest function of the professional woman is the education of the person in general and of a woman in particular.”⁴⁵ Stein sees the value of education in relation to the formation of the human person, not primarily as a means to earn monetary income, though admittedly in her younger years, she was attracted to education because of that, she was able to overcome that temptation and come to realize later on that it is not the essence of education. She veers away from the lure of sophistry by making herself and her profession an ally of truth and servant of the Most High. Hence, in her notion of education, she recognizes the value of nature perfected by grace. As Gelber notes:

Along with this, Edith Stein was indefatigable, capable of continuous intellectual work. Through long workdays, she habitually kept up a rapid pace. According to her own testimony, she drew this power of

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 50-51.

⁴³ Stein, *Essays on Woman*, 5-6.

⁴⁴ Lucy Gelber, editor’s introduction to *Essays on Woman*, 4.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 4.

inner concentration from prayer, the fountain from which strength flows. From all of this, it becomes evident that in the sense of John Henry Cardinal Newman, nature and grace cooperate in Stein's personality to develop her inborn teaching gifts. Edith Stein knew and put into practice the Cardinal's moral claim 'that grace doesn't destroy but perfects nature.'⁴⁶

This perfection of nature through grace reveals that her philosophy of education is grounded on being and envisions its flourishing through the instigation of truth to those who seek it. It was "From the conclusion of St. Thomas's *analogia entis*, Edith Stein borrowed the concept that God's image is like a seed planted in the human soul. In order to bring this inner form to development, the human creature needs formative help of two sorts: the supernatural aid of grace and the natural help of the human educational process. If pupils receive this help, they can by an inner dedication become more similar to the inborn ideal image."⁴⁷

Neoliberalism is guilty of the exclusion of women in workforce regardless on what sector, as there exists for example, this so-called pregnancy discrimination against them. In a word, it pertains to the hostility of the capitalists against the output that a woman can do and the monetary losses incurred once a woman becomes pregnant.⁴⁸ When applied to the University setting, it becomes more problematic as the University should be the ground where virtues are shown by example. As such, moral values are being compromised for the sake of standardization and the over valorization of vanity through obsession in climbing the top of the ladder in rankings. As if it is the foundation of the entire value of educational quality. The result of this superficiality and the loss of the sense of moral value could be realized in what Stein observed about the reality of superficial and unstable women:

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Stein, *Essays on Woman*, 8.

⁴⁸ See further Bryan Robinson, Ph.D., "Pregnancy Discrimination In The Workplace Affects Mother And Baby Health" *Forbes*, [HTTPS://WWW.FORBES.COM/SITES/BRYANROBINSON/2020/07/11/PREGNANCY-DISCRIMINATION-IN-THE-WORKPLACE-AFFECTS-MOTHER-AND-BABY-HEALTH/?SH=1038F3C7CAC6](https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryanrobinson/2020/07/11/pregnancy-discrimination-in-the-workplace-affects-mother-and-baby-health/?sh=1038f3c7cac6), July 2021, accessed on August 28, 2021.

...there are many superficial and unstable women who chase after pleasure to fill their inner void, who marry and are divorced; often the home and children are abandoned either to themselves or to domestics, strangers who are no more conscientious than the mothers themselves. If it is necessary for them to seek gainful employment, they do so only as a means to an end, i.e., to make a living and to grasp life’s pleasures to the nth degree; in their case, one can speak neither of profession or of ethos. They are like shifting quicksand. The breakdown of family life and the decline of morals are actually connected with the increase in the number of such women and can only be checked by reducing their number; this can be done with the help of a qualified educational system for young girls.⁴⁹

Indeed, the value of moral education should be integrated with any form of education as it can be counterintuitive to the role of education as vanguards of truth if it will simply stop on a feeble superficiality of quantifiable values that are rendered in the form of rankings, that are more often fake than not. When numbers become the sole arbiter of truth, the person can no longer flourish as a human being. For they cease to be persons that should be loved and valued in accordance to their worth and dignity. Here enters as well the value of a woman in education, as she serves as the balancing point, so to speak, for she has a unique quality, as Stein explains: “A quality unique to woman is her singular sensitivity to moral values and an abhorrence for all which is low and mean; this quality protects her against the dangers of education and of total surrender to sensuality. This is expressed by the mysterious prophecy, which became legendary, that women would be engaged in a battle against the serpent; and this prophecy is fulfilled by the victory over evil won for all humanity through Mary, queen of all women.”⁵⁰ In addition to this, Stein was also against intellectualism in higher education. This is noticeable in a male-dominated university which seems to be hostile to women. Both reason and empathy are necessary. Stein’s empathy makes us realize that education needs the women’s faculties’ as well. In this sense, Stein emphasizes the love which gives itself to the students to the point of

⁴⁹ Stein, *Essays on Woman*, 54.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

selflessness. Stein was determined to fight for the recognition of the feminine psychic attitude “...with its perceptive and loving focus on the personal and the whole is a necessary attitude for the development of humanity. And it is also needed in order to recognize what lies dormant in the individual, to have an open mind, and to practice a self-effacing love. This is precisely the basic attitude of woman.”⁵¹ Stein’s notion of core personality⁵², tells us the beauty of a holistic approach to the human person. Her idea of the woman, when framed within the current situation of education, is something that is revolutionary. Yes, women have individuality and the same dignity as men in society, but their individual self-experience in this space should also be given an emphasis. Recall that she, together with Hedwig Conrad-Martius, was a victim of gender stereotypes at the University during her time.

Conclusion

Neoliberalism is guilty of despotism and hegemony for it monopolizes the truth in order to bring a favorable result to the capital. It patronizes the value of metrics over the person. Hence, its judgments are based on superficiality. It is transcendence-less because it cannot go beyond what is merely measurable and therefore incapable of touching the lives of the learners. It has *ethos* and *logos* but lacks *ontos* since it feeds on the idea that what is good should be translated into what is profitable—resulting in over-adherence to the metric reports in the form of numeric evaluation and rankings. It is hostile against the dignity of the human person. Since the person can only be valuable if they serve the objective to profit from the capital. Stein’s notion of empathy aims towards the recovery of the *ontos*, and therefore of the entire human person. She invites us to focus on the eternal without dismissing the value of the finite. However, we should see the two as complementary to each other.

Scattered Subjectivity⁵³ is the result of neoliberalism as teachers and students are being measured by different criteria, which

⁵¹ Gelber, editors’ introduction to *Essays on Woman*, 21.

⁵² In this light, paraphrasing John F. Crosby, Fr. Layug explains that for Stein there is this weak subjectivity: “one form of weak subjectivity is what we call scattered subjectivity. It is a kind of subjectivity in which a person is drawn to so many things and thus lives a life of dissipation.” Layug, Ph.D., “St. Karol Wojtyla and St. Edith Stein on Human Individuality: ‘Pausing at the Irreducible’ and why think about it,” 397.

⁵³ For a better explanation on this point see the scholarly article authored by Jose Adriand Emmanuel Layug, Ph.D., “St. Karol wojtyla and St. Edith Stein on Human

are sometimes irrelevant. Stein’s notion of emancipation is based on authentic freedom that is founded on transcendence, namely the Truth and the Good. It aims towards the Socratic notion of *enkrateia*, or self-mastery and self-governance. Not the extreme form of liberty as in anarchy. She subscribed to Husserl’s project only as far as the going back to the things themselves or the seeking after the *eidos* of things. Hence, in education, one should first seek the *eidos* of educational values rather than the superficial ones. What will society gain if students get high grades and excel in measures but are morally impaired. We should aim to teach virtues rather than pleasing the capital, which may lead to establishing a self-destructive and decadent society.

The realism embedded in Stein’s notion of empathy helps us retrieve the person and their worth in the sphere of education, where neoliberalism thrives at this very point in time. A self-deafened theory that invalidates any opinion and denounces any constructive criticisms and oppositions for the sake of the glorification of quality assurance and management tends to be depersonalized. Stein’s notion of empathy leads us towards the realization of the value of a woman’s formative care and love in education. Her notion of empathy gives us the means to emancipate from the tyranny of neoliberalism.

Now, to answer the problem this study posed: How can Edith Stein’s notion of empathy serve as a critical voice against neoliberal ideologies and methods in education? First, empathy for Stein is emancipative. As such, it seeks the liberation of the person from any dictatorship of metrics and manipulation of the truth. Second, her notion of empathy places the person and truth as the essential one, therefore having priority over anything else that is merely secondary and accidental. As a result, one can realize the importance of empathy in education, that one is educating a person—whom the neoliberals treat as an asset for the exponential growth of their profit—for the sake of leading that person towards the truth. Not for the sake of self-serving ambitions, that is, to get the highest ranking possible and earn monetary grants and rewards in doing so. This sophistry can be stopped; only if a philosopher would step in and stand up for truth.

Individuality: ‘Pausing at the Irreducible’ and why think about it,” *Philosophia* 21 (2020): 393. In this work, he points out that for Edith Stein “this core personality is stable in one’s life, a personal structure that each individual possesses. This structure dictates the line of development that each human individual must follow and possesses traits and characteristics yet to be actualized in real life.”

Indeed, Stein—with her phenomenology of empathy fused together with her thoughts on education—being true to the vocation of a philosopher, crushes the head⁵⁴ of this serpent; incarnated in radical neoliberalism in education. Applying her principles, one can reject the arrogant and defiant neoliberal tendencies that reject the opposition and embrace receptivity that is open to truth and reality free from delusion.

References

- Boden, Sarah. *Edith Stein*. New York, U.S.A.: Continuum, 2003
- Giroux, Henry A., *Higher Education After Neoliberalism*. Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2014
- Layug, Jose Adriand Emmanuel. “St. Karol Wojtyla and St. Edith Stein on Human Individuality: ‘Pausing at the Irreducible’ and Why Think About It.” *Philosophia* no. 21 (2020): 385-403. doi.org/10.46992/pijp.21.si.a.
- Levidow, Les. “Neoliberal Agendas for Higher Education” in *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader*. Edited by Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston. London: Pluto Pres, 2005.
- McNerny, John. *Wealth of Persons: Economics with A Human Face*. U.S.A.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016.
- Miranda O.P., Fr. Jesus Jay. “Caring, not conforming, is what schools need now.” *The Manila Times*, April 18, 2021. <https://www.manilatimes.net/2021/04/18/opinion/columnists/caring-not-conforming-is-what-schools-need-now/865077>.
- _____. “Rethinking standardization in the university.” *The Manila*

⁵⁴ Despite the rich thought of Edith Stein serving as one of the possible responses against the atrocities made by neoliberalism in education, there are also other philosophers worthy of exploring this perspective. Examples are Jacques Maritain’s *Education at the Crossroads* and John Henry Newman’s *Idea of a University*. The latter was encountered by Edith Stein. Boden reports: “In addition to her teaching duties, Stein was enlisted in several academic projects. She had begun translating Henry Cardinal Newman’s *The Idea of a University*, but rather than finishing that, Fr Pryzwara asked her to translate a volume of Newman’s diaries and papers. She completed the volume written between 1801 and Newman’s conversion to Catholicism.” Boden, *Edith Stein*, 8. A common denominator to them is that they—like Stein—are also known as *personalist philosophers*, this is because these philosophers emphasize the dignity and value of the *person*. Alasdair McIntyre’s *God, Philosophy, and University* is also worthy of mentioning despite his difference in terms of philosophical method, intention, content, and presuppositions. These works too, can surely sever the head of the serpent.

- Times*. February 28, 2021.
<https://www.manilatimes.net/2021/02/28/opinion/columnists/rethinking-standardization-in-the-university/846094>.
- Muller, Jerry Z. *The Tyranny of Metrics*. U.S.A.: Princeton University Press, 2018.
- Nazarian, Cynthia. “When you cut humanities, what you lose is the human” in *The Hill*. April 05, 2018.
<https://thehill.com/opinion/education/381677-when-you-cut-the-humanities-what-you-lose-is-the-human> Accessed on May 20, 2021.
- Ratzinger, Joseph “Culture and Truth: Some Reflections on the Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*” in *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI: His Central Writings and Speeches*. Edited by John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007.
- Smith, Adam. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations*. USA: Penguin Classics, 1982.
- Stein, Edith. *Essays on Woman*. Translated by Freda Mary Oben, Ph.D. Washington D.C., U.S.A.: ICS Publications, 1996.
- _____. *On the Problem of Empathy*. Translated by Waltraut Stein. Washington D.C., U.S.A.: ICS Publications, 1989.
- _____. *The Science of the Cross*. Translated by Kosephine Koepfel, O.C.D. Washington, D.C., U.S.A.: ICS Publications, 2002.
- Themelis, Spyros. “Neoliberal Globalization” in *Critical Reflections on the Language of the Neoliberalism in Education: Dangerous Words and Discourses of Possibility*, Edited by Spyros Themelis. New York, U.S.A.: Routledge, 2021.
- Robinson, Bryan. “Pregnancy Discrimination In The Workplace Affects Mother And Baby Health” *Forbes*. [HTTPS ://WWW.FORBES.COM /SITES/BRYANROBINSON/2020 /07/11/ PREGNANCY- DISCRIMINATION-IN-THE- WORKPLACE-AFFECTS-MOTHER-AND-BABY- HEALTH/?SH=1038F3C7CAC6](https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryanrobinson/2020/07/11/pregnancy-discrimination-in-the-workplace-affects-mother-and-baby-health/?sh=1038f3c7cac6). July 2021. Accessed on August 28, 2021.
- Sardoc, Mitja. Edited. *The Impacts of Neoliberal Discourse and Language in Education: Critical Perspectives on a Rhetoric of Quality, Well-Being, and Justice*. New York, U.S.A.: Routledge, 2021.