

Book Review

Fr. Jose Conrado Estafia. *Edith Stein's Inquiry into the Meaning of Being*.
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Fr. Jose Conrado Estafia offers an elegant yet accessible way of introducing the reader to the thought of Edith Stein. The work combines the rigor of phenomenological investigation and theology, with the intent to graft reason and faith through the question of being. The book is divided into four parts, each providing a direct approach to the Philosophy of Stein and her interlocutors, especially Husserl and Heidegger. Fr. Estafia is meticulous and comprehensive.

Fr. Estafia explains the spatiotemporal distance between the self and the object of our perception, between the body and its world. Sensation allows the mind to seize the object that is outside. But how does one perceive the pain of another person? Fr. Estafia examines the method by which the subject can have a knowledge of what the other feels. The experience of pain must be a given because like the other, the subject too can feel such pain. But while eidetic reduction brings the person to the givenness of things, it still dwells on the ego as pure consciousness.

To understand the pain of the other, this pain should also be “my pain” which means that the body is not just a spatiotemporal object but a given in the experience of “my being”. This “body” is at the same time “my body”, according to Eduardo Calasanz (1986). But the conceptual boundaries are not always clear. Such explains why some do not understand what others feel because they only see but cannot empathize. Understanding what other people are going through means to know them by heart. Method in this way brings us back to the primordial status of values.

For Stein (1989), “selfness” is the basis of individuality. Empathy in this way is to be in the position of the other without letting go of the self as an individuality. The meaning of being is part of the wholeness of our existence. This is the starting point of Edith Stein’s phenomenology. And this tells us that things do not just appear before us. It is about the “intersubjective relationship” that we have with others so that this person’s pain becomes mine, the “I” finds itself in the “Other”, and that other in the end ultimately is God.

What is interesting about Fr. Estafia’s approach is that the question of being is at the center of it all. St. Thomas presented the problem of being through causality while Heidegger addressed it in terms of *aletheia*. But Stein offers a way to bridge the two giants of Western thought without necessarily dismissing one or the other. For her, empathy is not an outer perception of something but a primordial experience, an act of seeing the other *sui generis*, which should in the end lead us to the original author of the meaning of being.

References

Calasanz, Jose Eduardo. “My Body.” In *Philosophy of the Human Person*. Edited by Manuel Dy, Jr. Manila: Goodwill Book Store. 1986

Stein, Edith. *On the Problem of Empathy*. 3rd Edition. Translated by Waltraut Stein. Washington, DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies Publication. 1989.