

concrete forms in which we can study men's submersion in the shadows of their own inner selves. 'What were we? What have we become? Where do we come from, and where is it we have been cast? Whither are we hastening? How are we redeemed?'—such are the questions, as one of Valentine's disciples lists them for us, to which the gnostic seeks the answers. And the saving revelation which claims to provide them is, at bottom, knowledge of being already saved: for it tells him of his real home, and of his inevitable return to it. He need only disown the world to which he is now a stranger, and to endure the nostalgia of his exile, in the assurance of his return home.

EDITH STEIN

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NO form of biography is more difficult to write than the life of a man or woman credited with sanctity. If the account is to be uniformly honest, the impression of transcendent goodness must inevitably be marred: the smallest fault is enough to invalidate the claim to perfection. If the picture is deliberately edifying, the impression conveyed is too remote to command admiration, still less affection. The conventional Lives of the Saints possess an advantage over modern essays in hagiography in that they are concerned with persons sufficiently long dead for their faults to have sunk into oblivion. If the subject happens to be near-contemporary, however, certain imperfections are bound to loom large. 'God protect us from living saints', wrote an ancient ecclesiastic. In the first biography of Edith Stein to appear in English,¹ the author makes a genuine attempt at objectivity. She does not minimize a certain stiffness of character in her subject, while admitting that this gradually mellowed; and there is much criticism of her theological views. If the book suffers from one major fault, it lies in its refusal to allow us sufficient opportunity of judging the woman for ourselves. For every little fact we are given a disproportionate amount of comment. And this liberal comment, however fair in

1 *The Scholar and the Cross*. By Hilda C. Graef. (Longmans, 18s.)

intention, is apt to come between us and the extraordinary woman about whom we feel we can never know enough on the factual plane alone.

This stricture apart, Miss Graef's book is of compelling interest: one hopes that it will be both widely read and vigorously discussed. The story of Edith Stein is one of the most noble to have come out of the war. Circumstances were such as to render her more obviously heroic than Simone Weil; but a comparison between the two women would occupy a lengthy study. The facts, however briefly narrated, speak for themselves. The daughter of orthodox German Jewish parents; early intellectual curiosity; the profession of atheism in adolescence; a taste for philosophy and its cultivation by association with one of the most remarkable of modern German thinkers, Husserl; a sudden conversion to Catholicism following the experience of faith in a bereaved friend: a desire to enter the Carmelite Order gratified only after some years as teacher in a theological institute; seven years of enclosed life, with facilities to continue philosophical and theological studies; the departure for a convent in Holland as the Nazi persecution intensified; a period of gathering stress as war came nearer, culminating in deportation to Poland; death in the gas-chambers of Auschwitz in August, 1942.

In the present article our concern is less with the individual than with the thinker. That is already to attempt a dangerous act of separation: for Edith Stein is a signal example of one for whom 'philosophy' was not enough. This fact alone lends her interest at a time when philosophy is often conceived as a bizarre mental exercise for those so constituted as to derive exhilaration from such stimulus. The account of Edith Stein as the *Fräulein Doktor* delivering 'brilliant' public lectures on philosophy is that part of Miss Graef's book which brings her least to life. Possibly Miss Graef makes rather too much of the 'sacrifice' entailed by the abandonment of the public rostrum; there is no evidence to suggest that Edith Stein coveted academic honours. She becomes interesting as a person at the point at which her individuality disappears in the act of total submission to her Order: for it is one of the mysteries of personality (as was pointed out by Max Scheler) that it is not 'localizable'. Edith Stein, the individual, shared the same physical fate as her sister Rosa and thousands of others of her race. On the purely humanist level,

there is something terrifying about such anonymous sacrifice, and its meaning is too deep to form anything less than part of the 'meaning of history' itself. Edith Stein's one recorded apocalyptic utterance on this subject must be greeted with silence this side of the Day of Judgment: 'This is the shadow of Cain falling on my people. This is the fulfilment of the curse which my people has called down on itself. Cain must be persecuted, but woe to him who touches Cain. Woe also to this city and this country, when God shall revenge what is today done to the Jews.' Meanwhile, apart from her share in this anonymous convulsion, she remains significant on account of the remarkable record she left behind of metaphysical insight; and since this aspect of Miss Graef's book is likely to receive less attention than its more dramatic features, there is a case here for trying to assess its relevance for contemporary thought.

Such an assessment, even so, must be provisional: the present writer is obliged to rely wholly upon the expositions and citations given in Miss Graef's book. It is to be hoped that the treatise on 'Uncreated and Created Being' and on the mystical theology of St John of the Cross (the two principal works) will soon be made available to the English public, for there is no reason to doubt Miss Graef's estimate of them—it is even possible that she somewhat underrates the profundity of the mystical study. The general aim of these works is stated as follows: 'The re-born philosophy of the Middle Ages and the new-born philosophy of the twentieth century—can they come together in the river-bed of the *philosophia perennis*?' For Edith Stein, the 'new-born philosophy of the twentieth century' is Phenomenology; and it is a tribute to the powerful influence of Husserl, its founder, that long after she became Sister Benedicta of the Cross and the devout student of St Thomas, the phenomenological method retained its spell for her. To those for whom 'the new-born philosophy of the twentieth century' is not Phenomenology but some kind of 'philosophy to end philosophy' such as Logical Positivism, her problem will appear to be an 'unreal' one. Yet Husserl's philosophy, especially in its later phases, may prove to be a channel whereby the Anglo-Saxon tradition of common-sense may regain contact with the main stream of metaphysical philosophy. One of the most regrettable tendencies of the present time is that which hands over to science all the 'facts' while

allowing theology or metaphysics to retain a sense of 'unity' or 'wholeness'. Whitehead's *Principle of Concretion* and the various forms of Holism provide examples of this tendency. While aiming to be descriptive, Phenomenology represents an attempt to correlate experience in such a way as to lead from conscious experience to Essences and back again. That it was not wholly successful Edith Stein is the first to admit. Had it been otherwise, she would hardly have been led to embrace a fuller doctrine. 'The philosopher whose foundation is faith', she writes, 'possesses from the very beginning the absolute certitude one needs in order to build with safety; whereas the others have first to look for a point of departure; and so it is quite natural that in modern philosophy the theory of knowledge (rather than metaphysics) becomes the fundamental discipline. . . . This happened to Husserl.' Elsewhere in the same work she writes: 'A rational understanding of the world, that is to say a metaphysics . . . can be obtained only through the co-operations between natural and supernatural reason. The fact that this was no longer understood is responsible for the abstruse character of all metaphysics and, consequently, for the rejection of metaphysics by modern thinkers.'

The treatise on 'Uncreated and Created Being' begins with an attempt to interpret Descartes's *Cogito* in terms of Husserl. The result comes very near to certain theories of Existentialism. There is the same 'suspension of judgment . . . in regard to the whole existence of the natural world'. In phenomenological terms, all that we know to exist is our consciousness, and this is 'thrown into existence'. Edith Stein goes on to point out that 'being thrown' must necessarily imply a Thrower; and although the Thrower is merely a dynamic expression for an 'Unmoved Mover', this use of Heidegger's word *Geworfenheit* ('being thrown') shows how the employment of a popular term distorts the idea of Creation. For God 'raised man up' rather than cast him down; any 'throwing' has been done by man himself, since he has fallen deliberately into evil ways. Her analysis of the *Cogito* remains striking. Whereas for Descartes the *Cogito* proves that I, the doubter, must exist, Edith Stein points out that it proves something more than that; it proves that my nature is of such a kind that, in acting, it seeks a particular kind of fulfilment. In short, the *Cogito* demonstrates that I am an axiological being; that I exist

only in action; and that such active existence presupposes a realm of value to which I am by nature drawn. Like Hume, I do not find 'myself'; but what I find is a 'finding', which is myself coming into existence. When she says that 'my present being is at the same time actual and possible', and that 'as far as it is actual it is the actualization of some possibility that existed before', she implies not that this actualization is the result of an impulsion *a tergo* but that it is due to the attraction of a realm of value which is neither 'before' nor 'after' but meta-temporal.

What, then, is 'time'? Edith Stein associates it with what she calls 'finite being'. This is defined as 'that which does not possess its being, but needs time in order to reach being'. The infinite and eternal is that which 'cannot *end*, because it is not given its being, but is the *possession* of *being*, the master of being, even Being itself'. From this we may infer that man is 'given' existence in order that he may possess being: 'Be thyself,' not 'Know thyself,' is the rule of life. Fear or *Angst* is fear that we shall be carried away by time; egoism is the defiance of time; joy is the conquest of time. Such states as joy and sorrow are possible only to a creature who apprehends value. (That sorrow should bow the head and joy raise it is, like most forms of gesture, symbolic.) My states or ideas are not mere mental events, arbitrary fragments drifting in the stream of consciousness. Fragments they are, but they are not wholly arbitrary. They have a source: Edith Stein does not hesitate to call this source an essence. 'The life of the ego', she writes, 'would be a chaos impossible to disentangle, if nothing could be distinguished in it, if the essences were not "realized" in it; through them comes unity and multiplicity, organization and order, sense and intelligibility into it'. In pointing out that 'the essence of joy cannot produce real joy', however, she seems to leave us with the perplexities occasioned by the Platonic Theory of Ideas. For how can Essence descend to fecundate the actual? There would seem to be only one solution to this ancient problem: it is to discern a *psychic* zone between pure being and pure multiplicity. In another context, she appears to realize the necessity for this intermediate zone. Speaking of the soul, she observes: 'As form of the body the soul has that intermediate position between spirit and matter which is proper to the form of bodies. As spirit she has her being "in herself" and is able to elevate herself in personal freedom above herself

and to receive a higher life into herself.' The soul as 'form of the body' is precisely the psyche. Thus whereas the psyche makes of man an individual, the spirit makes of man a person. Man possesses ideas; he is possessed by values.

A thinker who talks thus plainly the traditional language of metaphysics is bound to appear isolated and even archaic; but we must take Edith Stein's approach to orthodoxy by way of Phenomenology with the seriousness it deserves. The common sense method employed by a thinker such as G. E. Moore is more limited than we may at first sight realize; it is concerned with the truth of common sense propositions ('sense data exist', etc.). But the field of common sense explored by the Phenomenologists is concerned with the mental operations which render possible the enunciation of such propositions, as well as such mental acts as willing, desiring, dreaming and hoping. These are *facts* just as much as the existence of objects of perception. Of the 'intentional fallacy' much has been written of recent years, particularly in relation to artistic creation; but the emphasis on the 'fallacy' must not obscure the 'intentionality' (a scholastic term) of all mental activity, including that which propounds the fallacy itself; and the reference to a world of Essence is presupposed in even the humblest act of thought. The philosophical trend initiated by Brentano and Meinong and developed by Husserl needs to be broadened to include the world of nature. Judgment on this subject cannot be suspended indefinitely. For when Edith Stein asks of the ego 'did it come from nothing? does it go to nothing?' the answer must finally be given in terms which include life as well as mind. Man's conscious life develops not from some abstract mental limbo but from the organism; and when Edith Stein maintains that according to the phenomenological method experience should be analysed *ab ovo*, we should proceed to take her at her word and begin literally with the ovum and the germ-cell. Again, when she states that 'despite the abyss between the two (i.e. man and God, mixed being and pure Being) it is permissible to speak both here and there of *being*', we may find it more illuminating to substitute for 'being' the word 'life': for just as we use this word to describe the most elementary organic activity, so we use it—and so have all the great religions used it—to describe the highest spiritual condition, which is 'fulness of life'. It may be that the 'next step'

in philosophy is to proceed towards metaphysics not through physics but through biology. Meanwhile, the road followed by Edith Stein, first in emulation of a revered human master and finally of one divinely human, may prove to be the way out of the wilderness in which there are so many voices crying in mutual unintelligibility but common need.

CLAUDEL AND DANTE ON TRIAL

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DR Ernest Beaumont in his new book¹ examines the ways in which two major Christian poets relate human love to the salvation of the soul, so that the former appears as a means, under divine grace, to the latter. Of such interrelating Dr Beaumont is rather suspicious; he smells heresy in it. He finds excuses however for Dante, reserving most of his disapproval for Paul Claudel, who is blamed both for misrepresenting (in his *Ode Jubilaire* for the Dante centenary, 1921) the role of Beatrice in Dante's work, and for adding, in his own dramas, a series of more or less explicit expressions of a false idea of human love. The falsehood seems to consist chiefly in Claudel's thinking (a) that if human (erotic) love could be 'satisfied' with its object, God would be 'excluded'; (b) that since it cannot be so satisfied, this love implies a longing which only God can satisfy; and (c) that, this being so, lovers who refrain from carnal satisfaction may become, providentially, grace-bearers to one another and so, in a sense, mutually 'necessary' in a process of producing, reciprocally, 'the child of God in each other'. This last 'error' is the more glaring in that the love in question is made to contrast with married love to the disadvantage of the latter.

Since I am far less acquainted than Dr Beaumont with the dramatic work of Claudel, my feeling that his critique of the French poet is somewhat partial is not in itself of much interest. These thoughtful chapters on the Claudelian heroines have probably a greater value than I am able to assess. But the

1 *The Theme of Beatrice in the Plays of Claudel*. By Ernest Beaumont. (Rockliff; 12s. 6d.)