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FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY IN SOCIAL AND INDIVIDUAL LIFE

Adolf Reinach's Influence on Edith Stein

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Abstract

This article examines Adolf Reinach's influence on Edith Stein's phenomenology through the interconnected concepts of freedom and responsibility. It argues that Reinach's theory of social acts provided Stein with a decisive conceptual framework that she subsequently transformed across three domains: communal life, political organization, and religious experience. Reinach's analysis demonstrates how freely performed interpersonal acts, such as promising, can establish objective relations of obligation without eliminating the freedom of the acting person. Building on this insight, Stein develops an account of community in which supra-individual unity and collective responsibility remain grounded in the free acts and ultimate responsibility of individual persons. Her political philosophy extends this structure to the state, showing that authority and responsibility may be distributed or concentrated while remaining dependent upon personal agency and relations of representation and trust. Finally, Stein's writings on grace reinterpret freedom as a responsive capacity through which the person may freely accept or reject the divine call. The article concludes that Reinach's influence on Stein is best understood not as the adoption of a finished doctrine but as a phenomenological impulse that enabled her to articulate a unified account of freedom becoming responsibility through interpersonal, communal, political, and religious relations.

Keywords: responsibility, freedom, social act, community life, promise, empathy, grace

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1. Introduction

Adolf Reinach, a jurist and phenomenologist, exerted a decisive influence on Edith Stein from the beginning of her studies in Göttingen. His intellectual formation itself resists any simple division between philosophy and law. Reinach completed his doctoral studies in philosophy under Theodor Lipps, yet his dissertation, Über den Ursachenbegriff im geltenden Strafrecht, already addressed a problem in criminal law. He subsequently undertook serious legal studies in Tübingen with Ernst Beling, spent a semester in Göttingen with Edmund Husserl, and eventually completed his habilitation under Husserl. Philosophy and jurisprudence therefore did not constitute separate phases of his career; rather, each repeatedly challenged and shaped the other. Because Reinach's understanding of phenomenology was grounded in Husserl's *Logical Investigations* and developed in sustained engagement with law, his work was particularly attentive to the social structures of experience.[1]

Stein began her university studies in Breslau in 1911 and moved to Göttingen in 1913 in order to study with Husserl. She encountered Reinach immediately upon her arrival: as she later recalled, "when arrive to Göttingen, one goes first to Reinach […]". Reinach's gifts as a teacher were highly valued not only by Stein but throughout the Munich–Göttingen Circle of the Husserlian phenomenology, whose members regarded him as a possible successor to Husserl's chair. Husserl, for his part, appreciated Reinach's achievements in his own way, even while recognizing the growing difference between their philosophical orientations.

After Reinach's death in 1917, his former students Hedwig Conrad-Martius and Edith Stein edited and prepared his philosophical legacy for publication. The resulting *Gesammelte Schriften* appeared with Max Niemeyer in 1921. Conrad-Martius's editorial preface contains an observation of particular importance here: "Reinach was a philosopher in the fullest sense of the word. And precisely what is remarkable is that we can truly understand him as a philosopher, and grasp the structure and central significance of his philosophical world, only if we begin from the fact that, for him, philosophy is capable of attaining and realizing, within its own domain, just as much strict objectivity and factual rigor as the natural sciences do within theirs. An objectivity that manifests itself directly in the precise, categorical graspability of its results."[2] Although Conrad-Martius also refers to Reinach's work in legal philosophy and legal theory, her characterization suggests a stronger interpretive claim: Reinach's philosophy of law is not a peripheral application of his phenomenology. It provides a privileged perspective from which the systematic character of his philosophical project can be understood.

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1 More about the historical background see: Anna Jani: A fenomenológiai mozgalom korai szakasza. In: Péter András Varga – Deodath Zuh: *Husserl és a* Logikai vizsgálódások. Budapest, L'Harmattan, 2009. 200–225.

2 Adolf Reinach: *Gesammelte Schriften. Herausgegeben von seinen Schülern*. Halle, Max Niemeyer, 1921. VII.

Alexandro Salice similarly argues that Reinach's distinctive contribution emerged through the integration of impulses derived from the Munich phenomenology associated with Theodor Lipps into his own philosophy of law.[3] Central to this development is the notion of the state of affairs (*Sachverhalt*). Through it, phenomenological attention shifts from an isolated thing to the objective relation articulated in judgment and intended in consciousness. A state of affairs does not concern a single thing taken by itself; it involves a plurality of elements that together constitute an objectivity or fact.[4] Reinach's legal studies also supplied an important impulse for his analysis of social acts.[5] The philosophy of law was therefore both a field of application and a source of phenomenological discovery.

This point helps clarify an important contrast between Husserl and Reinach. Husserl increasingly describes intersubjective world-experience in constitutional and transcendental terms. Reinach, by contrast, emphasizes the realistic structure of social situations and the states of affairs disclosed from the shared standpoint made possible by expression. Stein occupies a productive position between these tendencies. She describes communal life both as a shared life directed toward common states of affairs and as a unity whose constitution remains founded in individual experience. Her account neither dissolves the community into a collection of isolated subjects nor treats it as a free-standing personal subject identical in structure to the individual.

Reinach's relation to Husserl must accordingly be stated with some precision. On the one hand, Reinach was a leading figure of the early phenomenological movement. Conrad-Martius called him "the phenomenologist among the phenomenologists,"[6] while Stein wrote to Roman Ingarden that "all Reinach-phenomenologists were decisive realists who are not on the ground of idealism".[7] On the other hand, the period of the close collaboration of Husserl and Reinach was comparatively short, extending

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3 Cf. Alexandro Salice: *Urteile und Sachverhalte: ein Vergleich zwischen Alexios Meinong und Adolf Reinach*. München, Philosophia, 2009.

4 Cf. Salice op. cit. 310: "In particular, it remains open how the facts and the underlying factual facts are related. From Reinach's examples in this regard, it can be seen that he does not understand the facts as a simple matter. Rather, it seems to be the case that different facts can build on the same complex objectivity. The same rose is involved in different issues."

5 According to MacIntyre, Husserl's impulse on Reinach makes itself visible first of all on Reinach's philosophy of law. Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre: *Edith Stein. A philosophical Prologue*. London, Continuum, 2006. 52: "Yet for Reinach it was just this possibility that Husserl's phenomenology had opened up. For he took it that Husserl had provided the means for showing that we not only apprehend essential properties of the objects that are presented in perception, but also those of changes in those objects that occur to them and the necessary relationships that may hold between such changes."

6 Hedwig Conrad-Martius: Vorwort. In: Adolf Reinach: *Was ist Phänomenologie*. München, Kösel 1951. 5–17.

7 Cf. Edith Stein: *Self Portrait in Letters. Letters to Roman Ingarden*. The Collected Works of Edith Stein. Vol. 12. Transl. by Hugh Candler Hunt, ICS Publication, 2014. Nr. 83. September 30th, 1922.

principally from 1909 to 1914,[8] and Reinach developed a conception of phenomenology that cannot be reduced to Husserl's later transcendental project.[9]

Against this background, the present essay examines Reinach's influence on Stein's early writings through the concepts of freedom and responsibility. Its central claim is that Reinach's theory of social acts gave Stein a conceptual impulse that she transformed in three connected domains: the life of community, the juridical order of the state, and the person's religious response to grace. The continuity among these domains lies neither in a direct identification of social, political, and religious acts nor in a claim that Stein simply adopted Reinach's conclusions. It lies in a shared structural problem: how can a free personal act enter an objective order of relations and obligations without surrendering the individual responsibility of the acting person?

2. Reinach's Social Acts: Freedom, Obligation, and Community

From a phenomenological perspective, one of Reinach's most important legacies is his analysis of social acts as irreducibly interpersonal acts. The legal and phenomenological significance of the state of affairs converges in this analysis. A social act is not merely an interior experience that happens to concern another person. It is an act whose performance requires an outward orientation and whose validity depends upon its being apprehended by its addressee. In *The Apriori Foundations of the Civil Law*, Reinach characterizes such acts as acts which "not only belong to a self, but in which the self shows itself as active".[10] Promising, commanding, requesting, and granting are not passive psychic occurrences. In performing them, the person intervenes in a shared normative world.

The social act has both an individual and a communal dimension. At the individual level, it is performed by a person who takes a position – *pro* or *contra* – toward a state of affairs. At the communal level, it contributes to the dynamic structure of social life by establishing relations that did not previously exist. Expression is necessary to this structure, but embodiment in a particular physical sign is not. Reinach illustrates the point through a limiting case: "If we imagine a community of beings who can directly and immediately percieve each other's experiences, we will have to recognize that in such a community social acts could perfectly well be performed which have only a soul and no body."[11] What is essential is not the material form of the expression but the act's need to be perceived by another person.

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[8] Cf. Karl Schumann: Husserl und Reinach. In: Karl Schumann – Barry Smith – Kevin Mulligan (ed.): *Speech Act and Sachverhalt. Reinach and the Foundation of Realist Phenomenology*. Springer, 1987. 239. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-009-3521-1_11

[9] More about the differences between Husserl and Reinach see in: Anna Jani: *The Ontological Roots of Phenomenology. Rethinking the History of Phenomenology and Its Religious Turn*. New York, Lexington (Bloomsbury Academic), 2022.

[10] Adolf Reinach: "The Apriori Foundations of the Civil Law". (trans. John F. Crosby). *Aletheia. An International Journal of Philosophy* 3, (1983), 1–143., 18.

[11] Reinach (1983) op. cit. 20–21.

Freedom first appears here as the subject's active participation in the act. The ego does not merely register an already completed social reality; through its decision and expression, it helps constitute a new interpersonal state of affairs. Yet the distinction between one's own experience and participation in the experience of another remains decisive. Reinach writes:

> "We also have to distinguish experiencing in dependence on another, from sympathetically feeling oneself into the experiencing of another. The disciple who lives according to the pattern of his master is certainly not free in his experiencing; but is still *his* experiencing which he derives from the person of the master. This dependency in his experiencing makes for an unfree experiencing of his own, but it is his own. By contrast, sympathetically feeling oneself into the experiencing of another is beyond the antithesis of freedom and unfreedom, for it involves no experiencing of one's own at all."[12]

Freedom and unfreedom apply to experiences that remain the subject's own. Empathic participation, by contrast, cannot simply be classified as a free or unfree instance of one's own experience, because its content is given as belonging to another.

This distinction prevents a premature identification of sociality with collective consciousness. The social field is constituted through acts of persons, but those persons do not thereby lose the ownership of their experiences. At the same time, once a social act has been validly performed, it can create an objective relation that is no longer at the performer's arbitrary disposal. A promise is freely made; the obligation generated by it is not freely revocable at will. Freedom thus has a twofold significance. It is the condition of entering the social relation, while the relation thereby established imposes a normative constraint upon subsequent action.

Reinach makes this consequence explicit by contrasting social with non-social acts. Social acts affect communal life; they leave something behind "when they are completed. All civil law is based on this:"[13] Non-social acts, by themselves, do not institute comparable relations in the external social world. The basic structures of obligation are not created ex nihilo by the state or community. They are rooted in a priori relations disclosed through ordinary interpersonal experience and presupposed by positive law. As Reinach states: "Legal relationships are built up in and through social acts. This is neither a natural social right, nor an ideal right, but the basis of law. Civil and similar rights, mandatory liabilities and claims are based on these files."[14] Positive legislation can regulate, modify, or extinguish such relations, but it does not first invent the essential structures of promising, claiming, obligating, or granting.

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12 Ibid. 84.

13 Adolf Reinach: Nachgelassene Texte. Nichtsoziale und soziale Akte. In: Idem. *Sämtliche Werke. Textkritische Ausgabe in zwei Bänden*, vol. I. (eds. Karl Schumann – Barry Smith). München, Philosophia, 1989. 355–361., 357. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2x8v8xh.17

14 Reinach (1989) op. cit. 358.

The ethical importance of social acts follows from their interpersonal character. They arise in verbal communication, gestures, and other forms of expression; through them, persons enter relations that can ground claims and obligations. Yet every social act also presupposes an interior experience. Reinach explains: "We have distinguished the social acts as sharply as possible from all those experiences which do not necessarily express themselves to others. We now have to take note of the remarkable fact that all social acts presuppose such internal experiences. As a matter of apriori necessity every social act presupposes as its foundation some internally complete experience whose intentional object coincides with the intentional object of the social act or is at least somehow related to it."[15] An act of promising, for example, presupposes an intention concerning the promised performance; a question presupposes an uncertainty or absence of conviction. The internal experience grounds the social act but is not identical with it.

In his notes on "Nichtsoziale und soziale Akte," Reinach distinguishes the two classes of act according to their manifestation in communal life. A social act is not defined merely by having another person as an intentional object, as hatred or envy may have. It contains a specifically interpersonal direction: "It is also intentional, but there is also something more. This leads us into a whole new class of acts that are particularly important to civil law. You have a social moment, direction towards another subject. This direction is not intentionality in relation to a subject. But a question is intentional in relation to its object. As a result, these acts are different from the act of hate, envy and like. They have a direction to someone about something."[16] The other person is not simply objectified. Rather, the act is addressed to someone concerning something; the subject–subject relation is therefore integral to its intentional structure.

The common state of affairs supplies the objective term of this relation. Social acts obtain their significance within a shared world, and their inner foundation and outward performance jointly explain their connection to freedom. The individual is free with respect to the performance of the act but cannot unilaterally determine all the consequences of the relation that the act institutes. Reinach summarizes the dependence of the social act upon its non-social foundation as follows: "Every social act is based on an experience that is not a social act. E. g. a question presupposes non-conviction, a promise presupposes the will that what is promised happens through the addressee. A distinction must therefore be made: an inner experience that underlies the social acts. Building social acts on the experience, which may or may not be free."[17]

This structure provides the basis for a phenomenological account of responsibility. A person voluntarily performs an act directed to another and thereby assumes responsibility for an interpersonal state of affairs. Reinach's engagement with Kant is relevant here because it links imputability to freedom. He observes: "Freedom in Kant is therefore still not unambiguously defined. The capacity to be free is itself free, as is the possibility of freeing oneself from sensibility. The human being as noumenon is genuinely free in

[15] Reinach (1983) op. cit. 21–22.

[16] Reinach (1989) op. cit. 356.

[17] Ibid. 357.

this second sense. It is from this alone that Kant derives responsibility, imputability, and the like. Evil, too, is a product of freedom."[18] Reinach does not simply reproduce Kant's moral theory, but he retains the fundamental connection between freedom and the attribution of responsibility. The promise is the clearest juridical example. It is not merely a report about an existing volition or an expression of a psychological state. It is an independent spontaneous act that places the promisor under an obligation.[19] The proposition that the will alone produces the obligation would therefore presuppose precisely what needs to be demonstrated.[20] The claim of the promisee arises through the social act itself, once the act has been expressed and apprehended. The promisor's freedom is not cancelled by the obligation; rather, the obligation is intelligible because a free act has instituted it.

Reinach's account can also accommodate rights and obligations held by a plurality. He writes: "As we know from our earlier reflections, a group of persons can be the holder of rights and obligations in such a way that each person *participates* in them; such relations of right can derive from acts of promising, granting, and other social acts which address the members of group all together. But what is required in the present case is that a group of persons is for example the owner or co-owner of the thing."[21] Participation in a common right or obligation does not erase the persons who participate. The group's juridical unity is constituted through relations in which individuals remain implicated.

Reinach's analysis therefore establishes a bridge between personal and communal life. It explains how an act issuing from an individual can acquire an objective interpersonal validity and how a common normative order can bind persons without becoming a separate will that absolves them of responsibility. This bridge is the point at which Stein's transformation of Reinach's insights begins.

3. Stein on Individual and Communal Responsibility

Stein develops the relation between individuality and community more systematically than Reinach. In *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities* and *An Investigation Concerning the State*, she differentiates personal, social, and communal acts and asks how individual acts can sustain a supra-individual unity. Her terminology should not be treated as a simple repetition of Reinach's. Reinach's social act is essentially other-directed and requires apprehension by an addressee. Stein's communal experience concerns the participation of several individuals in a shared experiential unity. Her "free acts," moreover, include personal position-takings such as love and hatred that are not social acts in Reinach's strict juridical sense. The relation between the two

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18 Adolf Reinach: Kants Ethik. In: Idem. *Sämtliche Werke. Textkritische Ausgabe in zwei Bänden*, vol. I. (ed. Karl Schumann – Barry Smith). München, Philosophia, 1989. 497–515. 500.

19 Cf. Reinach (1983) op. cit. 26.

20 Cf. Reinach (1989) op. cit. 359: "This presupposes what is to be proven."

21 Reinach (1983) op. cit. 129.

thinkers is thus one of appropriation and transformation rather than terminological identity.[22]

Stein had already prepared this problem in *On the Problem of Empathy*. The second part of the dissertation analyzes empathy in relation to other acts and places the individuality of the other person at the center of the investigation. Empathy provides a bridge from the analysis of individual consciousness to the possibility of communal life. The foreign physical body is apprehended as a living body through an act in which bodily and psychical dimensions are co-given. Stein calls the unity of these dimensions the psycho-physical individual. The other is neither a pure ego inferred behind an object nor a mere physical body. As she writes, "my own hand feels the foreign hand's sensation 'with,' precisely through the empathy whose essence we earlier differentiated from our own experience and every other kind of representation."[23]

Empathy makes the other's experience accessible as the other's without converting it into my own. This point corresponds to Reinach's distinction between dependent experience and empathic participation. It also gives Stein the basis for explaining how individuals can constitute a community while preserving their personal distinctness. Cultural objects, values, and shared purposes are apprehended within a world that is both individually experienced and communally meaningful. The last part of the dissertation is consequently developed further in the essay *Individual and Community*, where Stein interprets individual psychic life as embedded within communal life.

For Stein, communal experience presupposes individual streams of consciousness but cannot be reduced to their mere sum. A community has a unity and a history of its own insofar as individuals live, feel, and act as members of it. Nevertheless, it is not a free subject in the same sense as the person. This limitation is crucial for the relation between freedom and responsibility. Individuals remain responsible for the free acts through which communal life is sustained. Stein writes: "The community as such is no free subject, so neither is it 'responsible' in the same sense that the individuals are. Individuals bear the ultimate responsibility for the community's actions, which they perform in its name. And even if they do something in the service of the community which they wouldn't do from personal motives, the entire weight of the responsibility rests upon them and they have no possibility of shifting the blame to the community. This seems to stand in contradiction to the *solidarity* that we are claiming for the community and that includes a *collective* responsibility."[24]

The apparent contradiction is resolved by distinguishing ultimate personal responsibility from solidarity-based co-responsibility. A community may have a collective history, shared ethos, and common actions. Its members may participate in the

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[22] In Anna Jani's *Edith Steins Denkweg von der Phänomenologie zur Seinsphilosophie*, one chapter is dedicated to Reinach's influence on Edith Stein's philosophy. See: Anna Jani: Adolf Reinachs Einfluss auf Edith Steins Philosophie In: *Edith Stein's Denkweg von der Phänomenologie zur Seinsphilosophie*. Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2015. 62–79.

[23] Edith Stein: *On the Problem of Empathy*. The Collected Works of Edith Stein, vol. 3. Washington D. C., ICS Publication, 1989. 54.

[24] Edith Stein: *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*. The Collected Works of Edith Stein 7. (transl. by Marianne Sawicki). Washington D. C., ICS Publication, 2000. 222.

consequences of acts that they did not individually initiate. Yet the community cannot become an alibi behind which the acting person disappears. Collective responsibility is borne through persons, not transferred to an independently willing collective subject.

This argument sharpens Reinach's insight into plural rights and obligations. In Reinach, members may jointly participate in a right or obligation constituted by social acts addressed to them as a group. In Stein, the unity of communal life explains how persons can share a history and bear responsibility in solidarity. In both cases, participation does not eliminate individuality. Stein, however, makes explicit the asymmetry between the community's supra-individual life and the personal freedom required for responsibility.

4. Political Freedom and Responsibility in the State

Stein develops the political implications of this analysis in *An Investigation Concerning the State*. The state is sovereign and has a distinctive life, but its acts are performed through persons and institutions. Stein therefore approaches responsibility from the personal level even when discussing co-responsibility or its apparent suspension. The transfer of political authority to a single juridical person can concentrate responsibility, but it cannot transform the state into a person whose freedom replaces that of its members.

Her discussion of political forms makes the relation between the carrier of state life and the whole especially clear:

> "In absolute monarchy, the ruler is the carrier of the life of the state and so is necessarily the 'number one servant of the state'. He carries the full responsibility for the life of the state, and there cannot be anyone else who stands in the same relation to the whole. […] Whereas the consciousness of community that holds the state together is concentrated in the monarch, with tyranny the bond of community between ruler and ruled is ripped to shreds. With tyranny, each regards the other as an object, which means there has been the closest imaginable approximation to a relationship of unadulterated association, bringing with it the possibility of an arbitrary destruction of the whole at any time. Solidarity in opposition to the ruler can unite those whom he rules into a community, but that community is not a state for it does not take on the form of state. Analogously, in aristocracy we have a select circle of carriers of the life of the state who stand in for the whole, while its opposite, oligarchy, manifests a degeneration into a community of 'exploiters' and a community of 'exploited,' or even into two special-interest groups, each of which is held together by its opposition to the other. Finally, in demokracy, by its very idea, all citiziens are carriers of the life of the state (whereby the concept of citizien actually is first defined and determined). Here, the state is resting upon the broadest base. But on the other hand, you have got the

> caricature that goes with it – mob rule – the most severe atomization of civil community imaginable."[25]

The passage does not merely classify constitutions. It identifies different distributions of participation and responsibility. In monarchy, the life of the state is concentrated in a single bearer who assumes comprehensive responsibility for the whole. In aristocracy and democracy, responsibility is distributed among a narrower or broader plurality of carriers. The corrupted forms – tyranny, oligarchy, and mob rule – destroy the communal bond by converting persons into objects, opposing exploiters to exploited, or dissolving civic unity into atomized interests. The freedom secured by the state therefore depends upon fidelity within relations of representation and trust. The ruler or institutional office-holder functions as a juridical person only insofar as that person reliably serves the whole. When the bearer of authority substitutes private interest for the common life and no longer honors the obligations attached to office, the freedom of citizens becomes subjection to arbitrary power. This political unfreedom should not be confused with the voluntary self-surrender that Stein later describes in religious terms. Despotism negates the subject's responsible agency; religious self-surrender, by contrast, is meaningful only as a free personal response.

Here the structural connection to Reinach becomes visible. Political authority is not merely the expression of a superior will. Like the promise, it establishes and presupposes objective interpersonal relations. Its legitimacy depends upon the relation between the person's free assumption of an office and the obligations that follow from that assumption. Neither the community nor the state can release an individual from responsibility for acts performed in its name.

5. Natural and Supernatural Freedom

At first sight, Stein's social and political phenomenology may appear only loosely connected with her writings on religion from the same period, even though Reinach's religious notes also influenced her. The connection becomes clearer when these early writings are read in light of *Finite and Eternal Being*. Across these works, Stein repeatedly asks how a person can be receptive to an order that transcends the person without ceasing to be free and responsible.

In *On the Problem of Empathy*, Stein distinguishes psycho-physical causality from motivation, the meaningful order in which one spiritual act arises from another. In *Freedom and Grace*[26], she reformulates the boundary between natural and supernatural life in terms of the freedom of the will. The arguments of the two works should not be identified, but a clear continuity remains. *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities* confirms the centrality of free will and responsibility: "For the person, however, there

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[25] Edith Stein: *An Investigation Concerning the State*. The Collected Works of Edith Stein 10. (transl. by Marianne Sawicki). ICS Publications, 2006. 49–50.

[26] Cf. Edith Stein: *Freedom and Grace*. Transl. and Introd. by Joseph T. Papa. In: *Edith Stein's Freedom and Grace*. Bloomsbury Academic 2026.

is a freedom of the will, over against both the 'influence of the environment' and 'natural predisposition' alike. The 'responsibility' of the person can't be suspended by appeal to either environmental influences or natural predispositions."[27] Neither causal explanation nor social conditioning is sufficient to remove personal responsibility. This principle is important for both communal and religious life. A person is formed by dispositions, environment, and community, but is not reducible to them. The person can take a position toward motives and values. Such position-taking does not mean that human freedom is absolute; it means that the person can answer for the orientation of his or her will.

The opening section of *Freedom and Grace*, "Nature, Freedom, and Grace," is closely related to §5.5 of *Finite and Eternal Being*, where Stein describes the efficacy of grace as calling for a free human response. She writes:

> "[…] grace calls for a 'personal' receptive response. It is a call or a knocking of God, and the person who is thus called is to listen and to open: to open the door of his or her own self so that God may enter. The ready capacity to receive or the potentia obedientialis in the more restricted and authentic sense, therefore, is a capacity to obey, to listen to God and to freely surrender one's self to him. The person-to-person relationship makes possible that being-one [*Einssein*] which can come to pass only among persons. And in the relationship between God and the free creature, being one results from the communication and communion of grace. Grace thus presupposes freedom as well as nature, since there must be free creatures if the efficacy of grace is to find fertile ground."[28]

Two claims are decisive here. First, personal being is disclosed and actualized through free response. Second, freedom reaches a distinctive fulfillment in obedience to God's call. Obedience does not signify the external cancellation of the will. It is the conscious decision to accept a personal relation with God. Grace may call and enable, but the person must open – or refuse to open – the self.

In *Finite and Eternal Being*, Stein emphasizes that creaturely freedom is real but limited. "No creature is absolutely or unconditionally free. Only the Creator is absolutely and unconditionally free, because his self is his freedom. And yet there exists in free creatures – in angels and in human beings – a possibility of saying 'yes' or 'no' to their own natures, which is equivalent to a possibility of saying 'yes' or 'no' to the Creator."[29] The yes or no of the creature is not creative freedom in the divine sense. It is responsive freedom: the capacity to accept or reject the order and vocation given with one's being. This responsive structure supplies the deepest point of contact with Reinach's analysis of social acts. The relation to God is not a social act in the

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27 Stein (2000) op. cit. 300.

28 Edith Stein: *Finite and Eternal Being. An Attempt at an Ascent to the Meaning of Being.* The Collected Works of Edith Stein 9. (transl. by Kurt F Reinhardt). Washington D. C. ICS Publication, 2002. 399. f.

29 Stein (2002) op. cit. 400.

technical juridical sense, and grace is not a civil-law obligation. Nevertheless, both accounts illuminate a personal act that is addressed, received, and answered within an objective relation. In Reinach, a social act such as promising creates a claim and obligation through free interpersonal performance. In Stein, the divine call elicits a free response that can culminate in communion. The analogy concerns the form of responsible response, not the identity of the relations.

Stein's development also clarifies the limits of the analogy. In a human social act, the parties stand within a shared worldly state of affairs and may reciprocally create claims. In the relation of grace, the initiative belongs to God, and the creature's freedom is receptive rather than originating. Yet self-surrender remains free precisely because it cannot be coerced. Religious obedience is therefore the opposite of political despotism: despotism treats the person as an object, whereas grace addresses the person as a person capable of response.

6. Conclusion

Reinach's influence on Stein is most illuminating when it is understood as a set of phenomenological impulses rather than as the transmission of a finished doctrine. His theory of social acts showed how personal acts can establish objective interpersonal relations, how freely assumed obligations can bind without ceasing to be rooted in freedom, and how juridical structures are founded in a priori features of social experience. Stein adopted these problems while substantially enlarging their scope.

In her phenomenology of community, Stein distinguishes the supra-individual unity of communal life from the freedom of the persons who sustain it. The community can possess solidarity, history, and collective responsibility, but it cannot displace the ultimate responsibility of individuals. In her theory of the state, she applies the same insight to political representation: authority and responsibility may be concentrated or distributed, but the state's acts continue to be borne by persons. Corrupted political forms arise when the relation of service and representation collapses into objectification, exploitation, or atomization.

Finally, Stein's phenomenology of religion transforms the structure of responsible response into an account of grace. The person's freedom is neither absolute autonomy nor passive submission. It is the finite capacity to say yes or no – to a communal vocation, to a political obligation, and, at its highest level, to the divine call. The unity of Stein's account therefore lies in the preservation of personal responsibility across increasingly comprehensive forms of sociality. Community, state, and communion with God each transcend the isolated individual, but none becomes meaningful by abolishing freedom. On the contrary, each reveals a different way in which freedom becomes responsibility through relation.

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