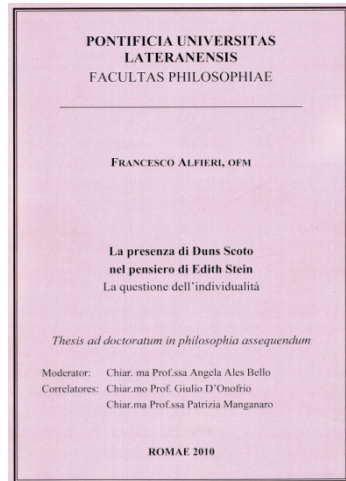


Overarching: Duns Scotus and Edith Stein on Individuality and Individuation Problem



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Francesco Alfieri, OFM. *La presenza di Duns Scoto nel pensiero di Edith Stein. La questione dell'individualità.* Roma: Pontificia Universitas Lateranensis, 2011. Pp. 331.

An in-depth research dedicated to the relevance of the doctrine of individuality, as it is crystallized on the ground of the intimate relationship between the Scholastic philosopher-theologian John Duns Scotus and the twentieth century phenomenologist Edith Stein, is offered by the book of Francesco Alfieri, OFM.

This substantial hermeneutic study represents the doctoral dissertation of the Franciscan thinker, defended in 2010 at the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome. The young author teaches at the University of Bari and he is the archivist of the „Italian Center of Phenomenology in Rome”. During the last years, he has published articles and chapters in academic journals and volumes, also involving in a very impressive editorial project that is directed by Angela Ales Bello – a well-known personality of the contemporary phenomenology, and one of the greatest exegetes of Edith Stein -, which is carried out in cooperation with Edizioni Giuseppe Laterza.

Searching in a generous territory of bibliographical sources, reading and exploring them carefully, reflecting on and interpreting by a personal subtlety, Francesco Alfieri succeeds to emphasizing the Scotistic influence on Edith Stein's work. Actually, we face a complex picture avoiding a simplified bipolar manner of analysis. Not only the thought-in-continuity of two eminent philosophers makes the content of the book; but, also, a wider view of outstanding medieval contributions is bringing out into bold relief, by delineating key-themes of philosophy and theology in the Middle Ages as they permanently awake the interest of professionals.

We get a fine exposure of reasoning, in a coherent elaboration, which discloses a clearer and critical comprehension regarding the profound sense of the unique individual as the ultimate real mode of being. Generally, we get an image circumscribing the closer contact of that what the Franciscan „Doctor Subtilis” called *ultima realitas entis / haecceitas*, and that is *the intangible singularity* of human, in Steinian language, as positioning the uniqueness (human's value) within the created universe.

The erudition of Francesco Alfieri penetrates the entire investigation illuminating the „convergences” of Stein with Scotus' doctrine of the individuation principle (intrinsic, positive, and unique). It is eloquently, for example, to open the book at page 229, where we find the author's translation for a very important Scotus' piece in any critical edition – as it has been assumed by many Franciscans and researchers over the years. We refer to *Stand der Skotus-Forschung 1953 Nach Ephrem Longpré, OFM* (published in „Quaderni di Studi Scotisti” 4 / 2007, 11-24). And this is not an isolated one, seeing that the author has already published certain translations concerning the topics here discussed.

La presenza di Duns Scoto nel pensiero di Edith Stein. La questione dell'individualità focuses on the phenomenological reading of Scotus' writings, as it is unfolded in the anthropological vision of Edith Stein around the human individuality – like one of the main themes in her later work, especially.

Acknowledging the teaching coming from the predecessors in the field, Francesco Alfieri develops a hermeneutical commentary in his very own mode of expression. By rigor and refinement alike, he registers himself in the spiritual community space cultivated by his scientific advisor, Professor Emeritus Angela Ales Bello.

Following the line of thought centered on individuality, the book is organized in three chapters that carry on from a „Historical-critical study of the *Scotistic* sources used by Edith Stein” (pp.21-75), passing through „The question of *individuation principle* in Duns Scotus’ *Ordinatio / Lectura-Quaestiones super Libros Metaphysicorum (q.13)*” (pp.79-124), to „The intangible singularity of human being. The originality of Edith Stein’s perspective” (pp.127-212). „Conclusion” and „Appendix” are followed by a thorough „Bio-bibliographical Note on Edith Stein” (pp.267-323). The text is plentifully of extensive footnotes - perhaps, too in plenty -, demanding an apart attention on the reader’s behalf.

In a detailed and nuanced presentation, Alfieri seeks to decipher the core of the convergences between Stein and Scotus. He realizes a persuasive approach concerning the particularities in emerging, over the centuries, the Scotistic „individual entity” or „individual form” within the Steinian metaphysics and anthropology. Drawing from the Aristotelian-Thomistic position, at the same time relying on Husserl, Stein operated a synthesis between phenomenology and medieval scholastic tradition, and she advanced an original view about the „essential being”.

Overarching between Scotus and Stein, the latter fully appears by the option for „a Christian metaphysics, without denying the phenomenology of her master, Husserl” (p.33). Steinian concepts of the *I*, the *soul*, the *spirit*, and the *person* are revealing in this intertwining vision. The references carry from the early studies of Edith Stein, precisely from her PhD dissertation, *Zum Problem der Einfühlung / On the Problem of Empathy*, to her most important Christian philosophical work, the magnum opus *Endliches und ewiges Sein / Finite and Eternal Being*.

The ontological dimension of individuality is a nucleus one. According to Alfieri, „each concrete and distinct individual finds the ultimate reality in the singular-universal relation” (p.83). In its entirety, the discourse proves to be a thoughtful look at a crucial topic in the spiritual dialogue between the two great figures of philosophy. The author aims to expound major issues, like: matter and form, *materia prima* and the individualizing concretion, being and essence, singularity and universality, *natura commune*, identity, transcendence, potentiality and act, individual unity and quality, spiritual soul and living body, uniqueness and originality of person, experience of the own oneself and sharing with others, unity of lived experiences. All is

displaying in the attempt of encompassing a better understanding of „the presence of Duns Scotus in Edith Stein’s thought”.

Alfieri holds the idea that beyond any material or formal determination, the individuation principle is disclosing as „singularity” freely acting within universality. The intellectual trajectory of the author balances between Aristotelism, Thomism, and Scotism, looking for an analysis of the structure of being in its ultimate stance, to underscore the meaning of individuality experience as a path of touching the fullness of existence. The exposure is moving in terms of Stein’s affinity towards the theological anthropology, which engages an educational project, too, for the ethical, social, and political dimensions of self-and-the others in the same community of living.

Undoubtedly, Francesco Alfieri is aware of many nuances he has to deal with the Scotistic doctrine as it is renewed in Edith Stein’s writings. Scrutinizing manuscripts, considering key-sentences of codices, inquiring a large bibliography and interrogating upon the authenticity of some works attributed to Duns Scotus and the position of Stein in this direction, etc., he lays out the metaphysical problem of universals, the thesis about substantial natures (neither singular nor universal, but common), the distinct intelligibility of individual, and so forth. He is interested about Steins’ re-valuation of metaphysical concepts and re-thinking of the Scholastic philosophy through the subjective experience of person.

In the effort to assuring the accuracy of interpretation, inherent difficulties of the topics are surmounting. It is worth noting, for instance, the bio-bibliographical profile made to the Franciscan theologian Vitalis de Furno concerning the questions of *De rerum principio*: „author, compiler or commentator?” (pp.72-77), and the literature the author has perused in this regard (pp.258-262).

Alfieri frames the problem of the ontological dimension of individuality by the “criterion of identity”, the principle of individuation; the attempt being directed towards Stein’s account of the „individual form” and the perception of the other’s subjectivity, properly the „singularity” (*principium individuationis*), the self-encountering-the other’s-experience, the authentic community by grasping empathy. Likewise, he examines the Steinian issue of feeling („Fühlen”) as a spiritual perception opening the access to the qualitative fullness of the being; and he enters the discussion about the „Einführung” term, which is attentively treated, by considering its translation as „intropathy”, too (cf. the extended reasoning made by

Angela Ales Bello in *Edith Stein o dell'armonia. Esistenza, Pensiero, Fede*, 2009). Alfieri notices and rigorously comments the diversity of terminology, the continuous re-defining literature, the investigation of parallelisms and similarities, controversial opinions, re-considerations in the endeavour of comprehending the *unique individual* in the play of particular and universal. A glossary – for Latin and German frequent concepts – would find an entitled place at the end of the whole study.

Certainly, many important articulations of the theme are to be unveiled for the intellectual joy of the reader.

In conclusion, the book of Francesco Alfieri, OFM stands for a valuable contribution to rounding the scholastic and phenomenological meditation and understanding of the (problem of) *individuality* in its intricate essence and manifestation, by the complexity of „finite being” in the created world. This essay provides a well-argued insight into a controversial and significant issue that remains open to further discussions as one of topical interest concerning the deep meaning of the *own being*; and that marks the ongoing search for the truth of living, eventually.