

Ana Tropia and Daniele De Santis. Eds. *Rethinking Intentionality, Person and the Essence. Aquinas, Scotus, Stein. Investigating Medieval Philosophy*, Vol. 21. Leiden: Brill, 2024. 243 p. ISBN: 9789004693456. Hardback: 132,50€

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This edited volume brings together ten essays that revisit core metaphysical and phenomenological problems, namely, intentionality, personhood, essence, and individuation, through the lenses of three pivotal figures in the Christian philosophical tradition: Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, and Edith Stein. Framed by both historical depth and systematic ambition, the volume seeks to recontextualize medieval metaphysical insights and to rethink their implications in dialogue with phenomenological method and concerns.

Each chapter engages one or more of these thinkers, frequently in comparative fashion. The opening section focuses on scholastic treatments of consciousness and cognition. Perler examines Aquinas's notion of *conscientia* and its connection to reflexivity and personal identity. Pini revisits Scotus's account of intentionality, emphasizing its irreducibility to naturalistic or causal explanations. Tropia focuses on Scotus's theory of singular cognition in the present state, showing its relevance for understanding individuation and epistemic access to particulars.

In the second part, contributors explore Stein's integration of medieval and phenomenological traditions. LaZella draws from both Scotus and Stein to argue for a metaphysics of singularity rooted in love rather than mere formal distinction. Cory investigates the concept of vital striving in Stein and Aquinas, questioning whether intentionality can be understood in terms of dynamism and self-transcendence. De Santis offers a technical reconstruction of Stein's engagement with the *principium individuationis*, navigating between early phenomenology and scholastic metaphysics. Borden Sharkey provides a detailed comparative study of Stein and Scotus on the status of universals, focusing on the metaphysical implications of essential being and less than numerical unity.

The final section turns to the affective, embodied, and cosmological dimensions of Stein's philosophy. Calcagno traces the evolution of Stein's view of personhood across her corpus, with special attention to the breakdown of personal unity and the metaphysical persistence of the personality core. Vendrell Ferran offers a comprehensive taxonomy of affective intentionality in Stein, distinguishing between object, horizon, and personal forms. Tommasi advances a bold metaphysical interpretation of *Potency and Act*, arguing that Stein attributes to matter an analogical form of intentionality and personality, rooted in its participation in divine createdness.

Collectively, these essays build a nuanced case for the ongoing relevance of scholastic metaphysical categories when interrogated through phenomenological frameworks. The volume reveals Edith Stein not only as an inheritor of Aquinas and Scotus, but as a metaphysician in her own right, one whose work continues to challenge and enrich contemporary philosophical debates.

The strength of this volume lies in its integration of historical depth with conceptual clarity. By placing Aquinas, Scotus, and Stein in sustained dialogue, the contributors offer a rare triangulation of scholastic and phenomenological approaches, namely, one that neither collapses distinctions nor merely juxtaposes them. The result is a dynamic reappraisal of metaphysical and anthropological categories that reanimates the stakes of intentionality, essence, and personhood for contemporary philosophy.

One major contribution of the volume is its reframing of intentionality beyond its traditional epistemological confines. Several chapters, notably those by Vendrell Ferran and Tommasi, emphasize intentionality's affective and ontological dimensions. Vendrell Ferran's chapter deepens the early phenomenological account of affect by showing that affective intentionality is not monolithic but comes in multiple forms, namely, what she terms object-, horizon-, and personal-intentionality. This refined typology not only expands affective phenomenology but also links Stein's stratified theory of emotions to a realist account of value, suggesting that different affective states disclose different layers of evaluative meaning.

Tommasi's contribution offers a metaphysical provocation: in *Potency and Act*, Stein proposes that matter is never merely passive but bears the imprint of spirit through its createdness. Drawing on Hedwig Conrad-Martius's *Metaphysische Gespräche*, Tommasi shows how Stein extends the analogy of being into an "analogy of the person". This allows even non-rational nature to manifest traits of intentionality and personal character; not metaphorically, but analogically and ontologically. His interpretation opens new avenues for considering how spiritual structure might inform material being within a theologically grounded metaphysics.

Sarah Borden Sharkey's chapter provides a careful reconstruction of the problem of universals in Scotus and Stein, clarifying the stakes between "essential being" and "less than numerical unity". Her analysis elucidates how Stein positions herself within the debate between moderate and extreme realism, offering a distinctive account that affirms the integrity of the common nature while preserving its non-individuated status. Sharkey's comparative approach succeeds in bridging the technical scholastic vocabulary with Stein's phenomenological rearticulation of essence.

Antonio Calcagno's chapter turns to the complex terrain of personhood. He traces how Stein's account evolves from her early phenomenology of empathy to her later metaphysical synthesis in *Potency and Act*. His analysis centers on Stein's distinction between living and being, and raises a pointed challenge: can personhood be both essential and experientially intermittent? Introducing the concept of "occasional

personhood", Calcagno confronts the tension between metaphysical persistence and lived fragmentation, especially under the weight of trauma, despair, or soullessness. His reading invites a critical rethinking of what it means to affirm an irreducible personal core.

What emerges from the volume is not a unified metaphysical system but a constellation of interwoven concerns. Each chapter contributes to a shared aim: to rethink classical metaphysical categories, i.e. intentionality, individuality, essence, and value, in light of phenomenological experience and theological insight. Rather than treating the medieval heritage as a closed archive, the volume shows it to be a living resource, capable of engaging contemporary debates about embodiment, affect, and the conditions for personal identity.

This volume offers a distinctive contribution to current efforts to bridge medieval metaphysics and phenomenology. Rather than merely tracing influence, it demonstrates how sustained engagement with Aquinas and Scotus can yield new interpretive frameworks within Stein's phenomenology and vice versa. Through its blend of rigorous historical scholarship and innovative systematic reflection, the volume invites scholasticists and phenomenologists alike to rethink familiar problems through unfamiliar juxtapositions.

For readers invested in Aquinas and Scotus, the essays by Perler, Pini, Tropia, Cory, De Santis, and Borden Sharkey provide valuable insights. They revisit classical topics such as the nature of conscience, the cognition of singulars, the problem of universals, individuation, and the analogy of being, not only within their historical contexts, but in light of phenomenological challenges concerning embodiment, lived temporality, and affective life. These engagements shed new light on medieval categories by setting them in dialogue with concerns drawn from 20th-century and contemporary philosophy.

For scholars focused on Stein, the volume is a significant contribution. Chapters by Calcagno, Vendrell Ferran, De Santis, and Tommasi expand the interpretive horizon of Stein scholarship, moving beyond *On the Problem of Empathy* to probe the complexities of *Potency and Act*, *Finite and Eternal Being*, and *The Structure of the Human Person*. These contributions show how Stein rethinks classical metaphysical categories in a phenomenological key, whether in her analysis of affective life, personal unity, essential being, or the spiritual structure of nature.

The volume also has an interdisciplinary reach. Philosophers of religion, philosophical anthropologists, and scholars in affect theory will find these chapters to be valuable resources for rethinking spiritual life, value-apprehension, and personhood. In particular, Vendrell Ferran's typology of affective intentionality, Calcagno's account of "occasional personhood", and Tommasi's argument for the analogical intentionality of nature speak directly to ongoing debates about the limits of personhood, the role of affect in perception, and the ontological status of non-human beings.

That said, this is not an introductory volume. While rewarding for those with the relevant background, it presumes significant familiarity with scholastic and phenomenological terminology and debates. Its detailed textual work, frequent recourse to untranslated primary sources, and intricate conceptual distinctions render it most appropriate for experienced researchers. It is unlikely to be viable as a graduate seminar textbook outside of highly specialized settings. Rather than offering survey-level exposition, the volume demands expert engagement and rewards it with philosophically rich contributions to contemporary metaphysics and Stein studies.

The volume stands out for its careful historical contextualization and its balanced combination of textual exegesis and philosophical analysis. Contributors demonstrate deep familiarity with Stein's corpus, including her major metaphysical works, namely, *Finite and Eternal Being*, *Potency and Act*, and *The Structure of the Human Person*, as well as her early phenomenological writings, such as *On the Problem of Empathy*. These texts are examined alongside primary Latin and German sources from Aquinas and Scotus, with sustained attention to terminological nuance and doctrinal precision.

Throughout the volume, the methodology remains pluralistic yet coherent, reflecting the disciplinary strengths of each contributor. Tropia and Pini offer meticulous historical-philological reconstructions of Scotus's views on cognition and intentionality, situating his thought within precise doctrinal and textual contexts. Tommasi likewise adopts a historical approach but expands it by drawing on Conrad-Martius to illuminate Stein's metaphysics of nature. Cory and De Santis blend close textual exegesis with speculative analysis, tracing conceptual continuities and transformations between Aquinas, Scotus, and Stein on individuation, vital striving, and essence. Calcagno employs a more systematic and phenomenologically informed approach, bringing Stein's early and late works into conversation to develop the notion of "occasional personhood". Vendrell Ferran applies phenomenological methods such as stratification and intentional analysis to articulate a typology of affective life. LaZella and Borden Sharkey also engage in conceptual reinterpretation, the former through a comparative analysis of love and singularity in Scotus and Stein, and the latter through a layered reading of universals and essential being. This methodological range, spanning historical scholarship, phenomenological analysis, and speculative metaphysics, allows the volume to explore Stein's thought from multiple disciplinary angles while maintaining a shared focus on core metaphysical questions.

This diversity of approaches is not merely additive but converges in a shared comparative methodology that bridges medieval philosophy and phenomenology in substantive ways. Rather than treating scholastic and phenomenological frameworks as parallel or complementary, several chapters structurally enact their integration. Phenomenological tools such as intentional analysis, eidetic variation, and experiential stratification are used to reframe scholastic categories like essence, *haecceitas*, and *analogia entis*. This methodological fusion enables a dialogue in which metaphysical questions are revitalized through phenomenological insight, while phenomenological

concerns are anchored in historical and doctrinal precision. It is this interplay between traditions, methods, and conceptual registers that gives the volume both its scholarly rigor and its philosophical vitality.

The volume's strengths are considerable: it offers a nuanced and philosophically sophisticated engagement with Stein's metaphysics, foregrounds her position in the historical lineage from Aquinas to Scotus, and does so with careful attention to both textual and conceptual precision. The comparative framework of juxtaposing Stein's phenomenological insights with scholastic metaphysics is especially valuable, and the volume fills a clear gap in Stein scholarship by demonstrating how her metaphysical project cannot be fully understood apart from its medieval antecedents.

While the volume succeeds admirably in bridging scholastic metaphysics and phenomenological analysis, one notable limitation lies in the relative under-representation of critical engagement across chapters. Although each essay offers a rich, standalone contribution, there is little in the way of direct dialogue or critical tension between the positions advanced by different contributors. For instance, alternative readings of Stein's appropriation of Scotus appear in Chapter 7 and Chapter 10, but without being brought into explicit conversation. In Chapter 7, Borden Sharkey presents Stein as developing Scotus's account of *quidditative* being into a more refined notion of essential being, thereby positioning her firmly within an extreme realist framework. Meanwhile, in Chapter 10, Tommasi emphasizes Stein's theological transformation of metaphysical categories, highlighting her claim that even matter bears traces of spiritual intentionality; a view shaped more by Conrad-Martius than by Scotus himself. These complementary but divergent readings are never set into dialogue, missing the opportunity for a comparative synthesis that could have deepened the reader's understanding of Stein's metaphysical project.

A similar missed opportunity occurs in the discussion of personhood. In Chapter 8, Calcagno raises the provocative question of "occasional personhood", challenging the coherence of Stein's claim to an irreducible personal core in light of lived experiences of fragmentation. Yet this does not engage directly with the more metaphysically robust treatments of personal identity found in Cory's or De Santis's chapters, where Stein's Thomistic commitments are taken to secure the enduring unity of the person. Likewise, the affective analyses in Vendrell Ferran's chapter could have been fruitfully contrasted with Calcagno's notion of peripherally lived personhood, particularly on the question of whether emotional responsiveness presupposes a stable self.

A more dialogical editorial structure, perhaps through internal cross-referencing or a synthetic afterword, would have allowed such tensions and convergences to emerge more clearly, sharpening the volume's internal coherence and amplifying its philosophical payoff.

Despite this, the collection represents a significant contribution to Stein studies and to the broader philosophical project of reconciling phenomenology with scholastic metaphysics. It will be particularly valuable for researchers working on Stein, medieval thought, or the phenomenological tradition. The volume is a rewarding and at times provocative read for the trained eye. It will serve as a touchstone for future work on Stein's metaphysical commitments and her engagement with medieval intellectual sources.

Another potential area for further development is the engagement with contemporary metaphysical debates. While the historical and phenomenological analyses are consistently rigorous, the volume tends to remain within the bounds of intra-traditional dialogue between scholasticism and early phenomenology. This is intellectually fruitful, but it somewhat limits the volume's reach beyond its core audience. A more explicit engagement with current issues in analytic metaphysics such as debates on essence and modality, the grounding of intentionality, or the metaphysics of personhood, could have revealed how Stein's metaphysical framework might offer alternatives to or critiques of dominant paradigms. For instance, Stein's stratified model of affectivity and her account of essential being could contribute meaningfully to contemporary discussions on layered minds or non-reductive essentialism. Similarly, the feminist philosophical potential of Stein's thought, particularly her treatment of embodiment, the soul-body unity, and relationality, remains largely untapped. Engaging with currents in feminist metaphysics or philosophy of gender could have opened new interpretive and critical pathways, especially in light of Stein's complex views on the nature of personal identity and spiritual vocation. Broadening the horizon in this way would not only enhance the volume's interdisciplinary appeal but also demonstrate the contemporary philosophical vitality of Stein's legacy.

Despite these minor reservations, the collection is highly recommended. It not only deepens our understanding of Stein's metaphysics but also models a fruitful method for engaging the historical philosophical tradition through phenomenological reconstruction. It will be of particular interest to scholars in phenomenology, medieval philosophy, metaphysics, and theology, and it contributes meaningfully to the ongoing effort to situate Stein as a systematic thinker in her own right.