

Empathy

In her thesis, *On the problem of Empathy*, Edith Stein (1916/1989)¹ defines a corporeality where the sensuous subject function as the basis for a critique of previous research and as a starting point for reasoning about empathy. In the chapter, “The Constitution of the Psycho-Physical Individual”, the constitution of a corporeal self that is not a physical thing is discussed.

This individual is not given as a physical body, but as a sensitive, living body belonging to an "I", an "I" that senses, thinks, feels and will-. The living body of this "I" not only fits into my phenomenal world but is, itself the center of orientation of such a phenomenal world. It faces this world and communicates with me.

(Stein 1989, 5)

I use the concepts of *comprehension* and *constitution* from Parkinson (2018). In the work of Stein (1989) I encounter the concepts in a different context. Stein's definition of empathy is interesting, because of the reasoning it led me to. In one of my readings, the concepts were reversed in a way that was important for my study.

Empathy proves to have yet another side as aid to comprehending ourselves. [...], inner perception contains within it the possibility of deception. Empathy now offers [...] corroboratory or contradictory perceptual acts. It is possible for another to [...] give me clarity about myself. [...] This is how empathy and inner perception work hand in hand to give me myself to myself.

(Stein 1989, 89)

Here, comprehension does not mean how someone else is comprehending my practice, but how I can comprehend myself through someone else. Through someone else's point of view, I have gained a new perspective on my practice, its contradictions, dilemmas, strengths and potentials have become visible to me.

¹ Original title *Zum Problem der Einfühlung* (1916)

Stein, Edith. 1989. *On the Problem of Empathy: The Collected Works of Edith Stein, 3rd Volume*. Translated by Waltraut Stein. ICS Publications, Washington D.C.