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CORE OF THE ESSENCE AND CORE OF THE PERSON: JEAN HERING AND A HIDDEN SOURCE OF EDITH STEIN'S EARLY ONTOLOGY*

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The present paper makes the case for considering Jean Hering the source from which Edith Stein first borrowed the concept of “core,” notably, “core of the person.” In particular, we maintain that the background of Stein’s decision is represented by the original version of Hering’s famous booklet *Bemerkungen über das Wesen, die Wesenheit und die Idee*, namely, the Appendix (*Fragmente zur Vorbereitung einer künftigen Lehre vom Apriori*) to his still unpublished dissertation on Lotze. Nevertheless, whereas Hering introduces the concept of “core” to merely discriminate between different types of essences within the framework of a general attempt at determining the structure of individual essences, Stein takes it to characterize always and exclusively the structure of the person, notably, its mode of being, thereby paving the way for her future personalistic ontology. The paper will be divided into three parts. In § 2 evidence will be produced to support the thesis that Stein had direct knowledge of Hering’s dissertation. § 3 will analyze Hering’s notions of essence and “core of the essence” (in both versions of the text and in relation to the example of the “essence” of Caesar). Finally, § 4 will tackle the “core” in Stein’s early works, in particular in the book on empathy, and in comparison with Hering’s understanding of it. The paper intends to pursue a double goal: it aims at emphasizing the novelty of Stein’s conception of the essence, notably, core of the (individual) essence while at the same time reconstructing the wider framework to which it belongs.

Keywords: Edith Stein, Jean Hering, essence, individuum, philosophy of the person, eidetic phenomenology, ontology.

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ЯДРО СУЩНОСТИ И ЯДРО ЛИЧНОСТИ: ЖАН ХЕРИНГ И СКРЫТЫЙ ИСТОЧНИК ОНТОЛОГИИ ЭДИТ ШТАЙН*

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В данной статье обосновывается понимание философии Жана Херинга как источника, из которого Эдит Штайн изначально заимствовала понятия «ядра», и, прежде всего, понятие «ядра личности». В частности, мы утверждаем, что контекст истолкования этих понятий у Штайн составляет первоначальная редакция знаменитой брошюры Херинга «Замечания о сущности, сущностности и идее», а именно, приложение («Фрагменты к наброску будущего учения об *Arriogri*») к его еще неопубликованной на тот момент диссертации о Лотце. Тем не менее, в то время как Херинг вводит понятие «ядра» только для того, чтобы различить различные типы сущности в рамках общей попытки определить структуру индивидуальных сущностей, Штайн интерпретирует его как то, что всегда и исключительно характеризует структуру личности, а именно, модус ее бытия, прокладывая, тем самым, путь к своей будущей персоналистической онтологии. Статья будет разделена на три части. В § 2 будет обоснован тезис о непосредственном знакомстве Штайн с диссертацией Херинга. В § 3 анализируются понятия сущности и «ядра сущности» у Херинга (в обеих версиях текста и на примере «сущности» Цезаря). Наконец, в § 4 рассматривается понятие «ядра» в ранних работах Штайн, прежде всего в книге об эмпатии, и в контексте сравнения с интерпретацией этого понятия у Херинга. Статья преследует двойную цель: она направлена на раскрытие новизны концепции сущности у Штайн, прежде всего, ядра (индивидуальной) сущности, и, в то же время, на реконструкцию более широкого контекста, которому она принадлежит.

Ключевые слова: Эдит Штайн, Жан Херинг, сущность, индивид, философия личности, эйдети-ческая феноменология, онтология.

1. POSITIO QUAESTIONIS

The concepts of “core” (*Kern*) and “core of the person” (*Kern der Person*) are by far two of the most important pillars of Edith Stein’s ontology and metaphysics, in particular of her assessment of the person. They have already undergone several insight-

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ful analyses in relation to the larger context of the phenomenological movement (Ales Bello, 1992, 124–138; Moran, 2017; Sepp, 2017); recently, the Scotistic background of Stein’s thought has also been systematically reconstructed (Alfieri, 2015). Regardless of specific issues that could still be tackled and concerns that could still be raised, it seems that the framework within which the two concepts above can be understood has been fully identified (along with the novelty of the manner in which she uses them). Yet, we believe that there is at least one additional source of Stein’s ontology that still needs to be fully explored.

The aim of this paper is to make the case for deeming Hans or Johannes or Jean Hering the most important source of the concept of “core” in the first place, and thus of the “core of the person.”

Our argument will be mostly of historical nature. However, it is important to keep in mind that, systematically speaking, the manner in which Stein resorts to the core to characterize the innermost essence of a person was part of a discussion bearing on the structure of individual essences (*Wesen*) (which involved not only Hering, but also Husserl, Reinach, Ingarden, and many others (De Santis, 2014, 2016)). Such context will be merely evoked here and not systematically elaborated on.

Historically speaking, we will maintain that the backdrop of Stein’s original decision to adopt the notion of core is represented not by Hering’s booklet *Bemerkungen über das Wesen, die Wesenheit und die Idee* (Hering, 1921), but rather by his unpublished dissertation on Lotze, the *Appendix* of which includes the original version of the essay: *Fragmente zur Vorbereitung einer künftigen Lehre vom Apriori* (Hering, 1914, 163–247; De Santis, 2020).

This text is divided into three parts. In § 2, evidence will be produced to support the thesis that Stein had direct knowledge of Hering’s dissertation. § 3 will analyze Hering’s notions of essence and “core of the essence” (in both versions of the text). Finally, § 4 will tackle the “core” in Stein’s early works, in particular in the book on empathy, and in comparison with Hering. Now, as our sole focus is the concept of core, we will have to put aside most of the concepts mobilized by Stein, such as empathy and the person in general (which will be recalled only to the extent that it can help us address our topic). As we will explain in more detail in the conclusion, the main goal of this paper is to start writing what, for lack of a better expression, we will label “conceptual micro-history”: the ambition being primarily to account for what happens to *one* single concept (= core of the essence) in the transition from Hering to Stein in a rather short span of time (see § 5 *Conclusions*).

2. STEIN AND HERING: FACTS AND DATES

It is a fact that Edith Stein and Jean Hering had a close relationship marked by mutual philosophical esteem: the correspondence between Stein and Hedwig Conrad-Martius (Stein, 1960, 32), as well as that with Roman Ingarden (Stein, 2015a, 53, 64), leave no room for doubt (for a more general introduction, see Felde, 2010)¹.

Hering studied with Husserl in Göttingen from 1909 to 1912; in 1913—when Stein arrived for the first time in the then phenomenological capital—Hering moved back to Strasbourg to finish his dissertation on Lotze and came to Göttingen once again in the summer of 1914 to pass the state exam (Stein, 2010a, 204; Hering, 1939, 367). It is probably on this occasion that the two had the chance to first get to know each other well: “Hering also came this semester for a few weeks to pass the state exam. In the evening we went to Husserl’s to celebrate [...]. One needed only a short while to establish a good connection with Hering” (Stein, 2010a, 238).

In *Endliches und ewiges Sein* Stein pays systematic attention to the *Bemerkungen* (Stein, 1962, 61–87). However, her correspondence with Ingarden testifies to her familiarity with Hering’s paper and conceptuality far before the latter ever started working on its publication: e.g., Husserl announced to Ingarden the publication of Hering’s essay only at the beginning of 1920 (Husserl, 1968, 13–16). Ingarden later pointed out that he had probably read the manuscript of Hering’s essay already in 1916 (Ingarden, 1925, 168), and at the end of January 1917 Stein communicated to her friend: “I have finished reading Hering’s work” (Stein, 2015a, 37). On February 3, she suggested to Ingarden, who most likely was planning on writing something on the same problems as the future *Bemerkungen*, that “considering the history of the essence, you should get in touch with Hering” (Stein, 2015a, 41)². She then goes on to mention some of the

¹ Stein sent to Hering a copy of her translation of Aquinas’ *De veritate*, asking for a review to be published in *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*. The document is preserved at the Hering Archive, Fondation du Chapitre de Saint-Thomas, in Strasbourg. I am grateful to E. Mehl, director of the archive, for sharing this document with me.

² The recently discovered letters from Roman Ingarden to Jean Hering preserved at the Hering Archive (Fondation du Chapitre de Saint-Thomas, Strasbourg) confirm that Ingarden followed Stein’s advice. Although we do not know yet when the correspondence between the two actually started, it is however clear from what Ingarden writes to Hering on April 4, 1926 that Hering had sent him his *Phénoménologie et philosophie religieuse* and that he regarded Ingarden’s contribution to the problem of essence (*Essentielle Fragen*) as an actual improvement (*Fortschritt*) of his *Bemerkungen* (Ingarden, 1926, 1). I am grateful to E. Mehl, director of the archive, for sharing this document with me.

concepts of Hering's essay such as object, μορφή, the difference between ποῖον and τί, εἶδος and idea³.

Now the question arises: why is it crucial for us to ascertain that Stein had direct familiarity with the first version of Hering's booklet?⁴ To answer this question, we will provide an overview of how Hering understands the concept of essence and, in particular, that of "core of the essence."

3. JEAN HERING ON ESSENCE AND CORE OF THE ESSENCE

In his review of *Endliches und ewiges Sein*, Hering retrospectively characterizes his booklet as the "cri d'alarme, que nous poussâmes [...] en signalant certaines obscurités qui affectent la base de la notion phénoménologique de l'essence" (Hering, 1952, 159). The booklet is divided into three chapters, each of which develops the analysis of a specific concept: "individual essence" (*Wesen*), "essentiality" or *eidos*, and the "idea." For the sake of our problems, we will exclusively and briefly address the essence and leave aside the other two.

Now, the reason why we insist on translating *Wesen* with "individual essence" is because Hering frames the "fundamental principle of the essence" as follows: "Every object [...] has one and only one essence, which—as its own essence—makes up the fullness of its constituting specificity." By the same token, "Every essence is by its nature the essence of something, namely, the essence of this something and of nothing else" (Hering, 1921, 497). Instead of the demonstrative "of *this* something," the original version states: "the essence of a completely determined individual something," and the principle of the essence affirms that the essence "determines the full constitution of the entity all the way to its individuality" (Hering, 1914, 165). Since the essence "cannot even be thought" without its "bearer," and since it is "as fully determined as the object to which it points" (Hering, 1914, 170; 1921, 498), the *Fragmente* propose to use the mathematical symbol (\overline{Wa}) (Hering, 1914, 170), with the overline meant to express the unitary conjunction of essence and bearer (= *Wesen von a*).

If the question were in what the (individual) essence of an (individual) object consists, the answer would be: the "system" or "stock" (*Bestand*) of "characteristics" (*Merkmale*) or "features" (*Züge*) that belong to an object in its individuality *hic et*

³ See also the 1917 draft of a text on Gustav Steinmann where Stein refers to "the very important investigations [...] in an unfortunately still unpublished work by Johannes Hering" (Stein, 2014, 321).

⁴ In this respect, our claim is more specific than Ales Bello's (1992, 40–43), who underlines the overall importance of the ontology laid out in the *Bemerkungen* for both Stein and Conrad-Martius.

nunc (Hering, 1921, 496–497). In his Stein-review, Hering translates *Wesen* with “les attributs essentiels” (Hering, 1952, 159), and in both versions of the essay ποῖον εἶναι and *So-Sein* are used as synonyms to refer to the essence: “The total system of the *being-thus* (ποῖον εἶναι) of an object [coincides] with its essence” (Hering, 1921, 496).

Nevertheless, in order not to assign too broad of a meaning to the concept of essence, the following distinctions must be recognized:

- (A) The essence includes neither the Aristotelian ποῦ and πότε εἶναι nor the ποιεῖν καὶ πάσχειν (*where, when and doing and being affected*) (Hering, 1921, 499).
- (B) Generally speaking, among the characteristics that *do not* belong to the essence, a distinction is to be drawn between:
 - (B') Those that are completely contingent or accidental (= A);
 - (B'') Those that do not belong to the essence and nevertheless essentially derive from it.

The opposition between *belonging to the essence* and *not belonging to the essence* intersects but does not coincide with the distinction between *essential* and *contingent* (Hering, 1921, 500). What is contingent falls outside the essence and does not belong to it (A); however, there are also characteristics that do not belong to the ποῖον εἶναι and yet are not to be deemed contingent because they directly derive from the essence itself.

If these distinctions discriminate between *characteristics* (belonging to the essence; derived from the essence; external to the essence), a further concept is required to discriminate between *essences*:

(C) Certain essences have an “essential core” (*Wesenskern*), or a “core of fundamental features” that brings about the essence as an interconnected whole (Hering, 1921, 502).

In the *Fragmente* the core is originally introduced to make direct sense of “certain known facts of scientific thinking” (Hering, 1914, 166). Quite often, in fact, during the analysis of an essence we are not satisfied with “the full inventory of the ποῖον εἶναι,” and the essence itself seems to become a problem. As Hering writes: “The description of the character of an historical personality always leaves us unsatisfied, even when it results in a detailed enumeration of the single characteristics of the essence.” The *Fragmente* suggests that what we still lack is the “understanding” of the essence (Hering, 1914, 167). This could be attained only if “the result of the description” were “a more or less simple core of fundamental features,” the “presence” of which makes “understandable that of the remaining fibers of the essence according to a priori laws

that can guide us in a clearly intuitive way or more instinctively” (this passage is the same in (Hering, 1914, 167; 1921, 502–503))⁵.

The talk of historical personalities is elucidated a few lines later by considering the case of Julius Caesar in contrast to a piece of paper. No matter how complex the essence of “this blotting paper” is (*the being-extended* and *the being-heavy* that belong to it as a material thing + *the being-soft* that characterizes it as blotting paper + *the being-green* that pertains to it as *this* blotting paper (Hering, 1921, 503)), it cannot be compared to “the essence of Julius Caesar,” for this also includes “certain fundamental characteristics” (= the core). Here is how the *Fragmente*-version comments on this:

We do not think that it is possible for the complexity of the essence of this blotting paper to be more than a mere random contingency; it is not something [...] the being of which would be understandable based on the existence of certain fundamental characteristics in a way akin to the essence of Julius Caesar, [which can be understood] based upon a more or less complex essential core. Probably only a further, thorough examination of the essence of the essence will decide whether the fact that the essence of Julius Caesar—unlike that of this blotting paper—is an object of science depends on this. (Hering, 1914, 168–169)

It is worth remarking that the term used by Hering is *Persönlichkeit*, and the core of the essence characterizes precisely Caesar’s “personality.” This being acknowledged, two observations impose themselves to corroborate our thesis that the *Fragmente* represented an actual source for Stein.

(I) In *Zum Problem der Einfühlung*—which was sent for printing at the beginning of 1917 after Stein had finished reading Hering’s work (Stein, 2015a, 37)—not only does Stein use the term *Wesenskern* to describe “a very deep layer” of one’s personality (*Persönlichkeit*) (Stein, 2016, 126); the example she makes during the assessment of the “unalterable core” is Caesar (Stein, 2016, 128).

(II) As the last sentence from the excerpt above on Caesar shows, Hering recognizes that some essences, e.g., Julius Caesar’s, are per se the object of science: the question is whether this depends upon their having a “core.” Now, in *Endliches und ewiges Sein*, during the assessment of Hering’s booklet, Stein seems to directly address

⁵ According to one of the blind reviewers of my paper this passage would show that for Hering $\pi\omicron\iota\omicron\nu\ \epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu\alpha\iota \neq \text{Wesen}$. This conclusion is based on a misunderstanding of the passage, and Hering is extremely consistent in his use of the term *Wesen*: the point here is rather that, *in certain cases such as that of a historical personality*, the enumeration of the *Merkmale* does not suffice and the essence itself becomes a problem (*es wird das Wesen selbst uns zum Problem*). What we need in these cases is to grasp the principle that alone can disclose the essence itself as a unitary whole: the core and the a priori laws grounded in it. But the principle of the essence is not something other than the *Merkmale* of the $\pi\omicron\iota\omicron\nu\ \epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu\alpha\iota$: it consists in some of them, out of which all the remaining ones stem.

the question and answer it in the affirmative: she explains that when “the search for the core” is not successful, only the study of the “material domains” can be pursued (the Husserlian material ontologies) (Stein, 1962, 84).

The latter point is crucial because it bears on one of the main differences between the *Fragmente* and the *Bemerkungen*—and this second consideration by Stein (II) is understandable only in light of the former text. Indeed, even if the 1921 version still speaks of “scientific thinking” (Hering, 1921, 502), Hering completely removes the long excerpt above on Caesar’s essence as an object of science and mentions “the essence of a conic section” as a further example of essences with core (Hering, 1921, 503). Thus, if the question of the scientific investigation of individual essences tends to disappear, the case of the essences of historical personalities—which in the *Fragmente* was the sole case of essences with a core—is no longer as unique as in 1914. Even if in 1926 Hering reaffirms the thesis that “l’individualité concrète d’un personnage historique” can be the object of essential analyses (Hering, 1926, 112), the remark is made without any mention of the core.

In short, both Stein’s reference to Caesar’s personality during the discussion of the core in *Zum Problem der Einfühlung* (I) and the thesis to the effect that where there is no core only the eidetic investigation of the material-regional domains is possible (II)⁶ would make no sense had Stein been familiar only with the *Bemerkungen*. It can be surmised that both in 1917 (when Hering’s name was never evoked, yet his concepts were already at work) and in *Endliches und ewiges Sein* (wherein the *Bemerkungen* is commented upon), the *Fragmente* represented for Stein a reference point. While her late *opus magnum* addresses Hering’s formal ontology as a whole, the beginnings of her career were already marked by the silent assumption of one of its fundamental ideas: the “essential core.”

Let us remark that the fact that Stein was familiar with Hering’s work is nothing exceptional per se; for example, the following posthumous note by Reinach from the WS of 1912–13 shows that Hering’s ideas had been known and discussed in the Göttingen circle since far before Stein studied them:

What does essence mean? What do people mean to affirm by it? Hering’s “essence of individual things”? [Then there would be essences as] constitutive elements of different layers [as] the different constituents [in that] which makes an object an object at all, and

⁶ The importance of this point cannot be underestimated because it is crucial for Stein to show that there can be sciences investigating individual objects, as is mostly the case in the *Geisteswissenschaften* (Stein, 2010b, 252). Stein makes a clear distinction, for example in the case of “history,” between the study of the general material domain “spirit” and that of individual spiritual subjects (e.g., Caesar, Alexander the Great or Napoleon).

so forth. [A] unique case [of this would be the] empirical counting up of constituents in which I do not yet know what is grounded in the essence of the thing and what is not. (Reinach, 1989, 362)

Not only does the excerpt perfectly capture Hering's understanding of the essence as the "sum-total" of the object's characteristics; it also recognizes the distinction between essence in a narrow sense for which a distinction obtains between the essence and what is grounded in it, and essence in the broad sense as including all the characteristics without any such distinction.

Having said this, it should be evident that Edith Stein borrows the concept of "core" from the dissertation version of Hering's essay, and that its introduction on the part of the latter was connected to the more general aim of determining the concept of essence.

4. EDITH STEIN ON CORE OF THE ESSENCE AND CORE OF THE PERSON

To appreciate the novelty of Stein's view on the core, it is crucial to keep in mind the following.

The introduction of the core serves two main purposes. First, Hering relies upon its presence as a classificatory criterion so that two types of essences can be identified: those whose internal structure can be accounted for as a unitary whole; and those for which this is not at all the case. In the *Fragmente* this distinction is exemplified by the case of "historical personalities" on the one hand and what could be labeled material objects such as "this pen," "this piece of blotting paper," and a "house" on the other hand (Hering, 1921, 497, 503–504). The introduction, in 1921, of "geometrical shapes" as essences with a core underplays the uniqueness of the original example. Second, the core is necessary to make sense of the possibility of two different typologies of a priori laws, as Hering distinguishes between the a priori laws that determine all the properties and characteristics of the object that essentially "derive" from the essence without belonging to it (see above, B"); and those that, based upon the presence of a core, prescribe all the remaining features or, as Hering writes, "fibers" of the essence. In contrast to the former, this latter distinction falls fully within the essence.

In the present paper, we will be concerned with Stein's early texts: primarily with *Zum Problem der Einfühlung*, but briefly also with the *Beiträge zur philosophischen Begründung der Psychologie und der Geisteswissenschaften*. Even if it is true that only in the latter the structure of the person is first systematically laid out based on the concepts of core and core of the person, it is in the former that Stein's re-elaboration of

Hering's conceptuality can be first ascertained. And it is to such a first re-elaboration that we want to pay attention.

Yet, we would like to start out our assessment by recalling a passage from the late *Endliches und ewiges Sein* that, we think, perfectly captures Stein's position vis-à-vis the 1921 version of Hering's essay. In Ch. III, § 7 Stein offers a detailed discussion of the *Bemerkungen* and, in particular, of the distinction (within the essence) between *grounding* and *grounded* elements. Stein recognizes that an essence is understandable only if there obtains an "*internal inter-connection*," i.e., only if there is "a more or less simple core of fundamental features" (Stein, 1962, 83). Along with Hering, she also admits that the core does not necessarily "inhabit" every essence (the reference is to Hering, 1921, 503). Then she adds: "Quite clearly, the *essential core* inheres in the essential structure of a human being. Here we seek first of all a fundamental system (*Grundbestand*) [of characteristics]—upon the basis of which everything else will become understandable" (Stein, 1962, 83–84).

The importance of the latter remark cannot be underestimated, for the page Stein is commenting on is the one that originally included the long excerpt on the essence of Caesar's personality as an object of science and that now—in the *Bemerkungen*-version—also speaks of "geometrical shape" and of "the essence of a conic section" as examples of essences with a core. It is quite telling that the latter two examples are never used by Stein to clarify the concept of core of the essence. In contrast to the published version of Hering's essay—and perfectly in line with the *Fragmente*—Stein restates, and steadily holds on to the idea, that one can speak of "core of the essence" only in the case of a human being (taken as epitomizing the concept of "person" or "spirit" in general)⁷.

While for Hering the case of (Caesar's) personality in the *Fragmente* is simply the *sole example* of essences with core, and in the *Bemerkungen* *one of the many examples* of essences with core, Stein is committed to the idea that *only the essences of spiritual subjects or persons* have a core. A better way to frame this would be to say that the core no longer simply serves a mere classificatory purpose, as is still the case with Ingarden's (1925, 221 ff.), Spiegelberg's (1930, 189 ff.) or Pöll's reading of the booklet (1936, 61 ff.); rather, it characterizes the very "mode of being" of the person.

As in *Endliches und ewiges Sein* the very notion of core is assumed within a larger metaphysical context, the assessment of which goes beyond our ambitions, we can now go back to the beginnings of Stein's career so as to see how she first appropriated such a crucial notion.

⁷ The reason for this is that only persons have absolute individuality.

In *Zum Problem der Einfühlung*, the only appearance of the term *Wesenskern* is at the end of Ch. IV, § 3 and is used by Stein to quickly label “a peculiar layer of the personality,” indeed “a very deep layer” (Stein, 2016, 126). At the end of the short § 4, during the description of “the givenness of the alien person,” the phrase *Kern der Person* is introduced to refer to this very “deep layer” in which the person’s “own spiritual acts” are rooted, and out of which they develop (Stein, 2016, 127). Such use of the concept of core is comprehensible only in light of the way in which Stein understands the person and the difference between *Person* and *Seele*. As it is not our ambition to tackle this latter issue, we will refer to it only to the extent that it can serve our purposes here.

In § 5 the term core is used as an equivalent of “personal structure” (Stein, 2016, 128). Here, the function that the “core” is assigned is that of establishing the “limits” of the possible variations that one’s personality undergoes. Against the argument that our human nature is contingent because it is influenced by the environment and could have developed otherwise had the circumstances been different, Stein states the following:

But this variability is not without limits; we encounter limits here. Not only because the categorial structure of the psyche as such must be retained, but also because within its individual form we find an unalterable core: the personal structure. I can think of Caesar in a village instead of in Rome and can think of him transferred into the twentieth century. As it is certain that his historically fixed individuality would undergo some changes (*Änderungen*), so is also sure that he would remain Caesar. (Stein, 2016, 127–128)

Hence—Stein concludes—“the personal structure” (read: the core) limits (*grenzt*) “the range of the variation-possibilities (*Variationsmöglichkeiten*),” within which the person’s real shaping (*reale Ausprägung*) “can develop ‘according to the circumstances’” (Stein, 2016, 128). The appeal to the core is not only necessary to express the person’s “individuality”; as far as we understand Stein’s train of thought, one could not even speak of the “development” of the person were there no core of the essence. For, if there were no “circumstances” or “environment,” there would of course be no “influences” that *de facto* prompt and trigger one’s development. However, were there no core, there would merely be a “non-person” kind of object, the individual essence of which can change, and thereby lose or acquire properties, but which never develops. And such development consists in the fact that certain personal layers (*Schichte der Person*) come to disclose or reveal themselves (*zur Enthüllung*) (Stein, 2016, 128).

The importance of such a position, still only outlined in a rough manner in *Zum Problem der Einfühlung*, can be fully appreciated only if compared, once again, with Hering.

In both the *Fragmente* and the *Bemerkungen* the first chapter ends with a paragraph about the alteration or change (*Veränderlichkeit*) of the essence (Hering, 1914, 177–180; 1921, 504–505) where the case of a “small, dark, uncomfortable house” that is renovated and becomes “spacious, bright and comfortable” is described (Hering, 1914, 178; 1921, 504). Thus, the essence of this house changes either partially or fully, thereby becoming a whole different essence. As Hering adds, the talk of “change” presupposes that something “stays the same.” Yet, rather than explaining what this would be, he simply recognizes that it needs not consist in the persistence of some of its parts. At this point, Hering makes the following remark:

Certainly, there are partial changes where, under certain circumstances, what we tried to hint at by speaking of core of the essence remains unaltered (*das unverändert Bleibende ist*). Examples of this can maybe be found in the case of the so-called characterological changes of a human being (*Charakteränderungen des Menschen*)—which can be very radical, yet without affecting, so to say, her inner essence. (Hering, 1914, 180; 1921, 505)

Once again, it is apparent that what for Hering is nothing but one example among others of essences that can change (*ändert*)—a house can be completely or partially renovated; the character of a human being changes more or less radically—becomes for Stein something different. As Stein would explain: since human beings are the only essences with core, the talk of *development* applies only to them; by contrast, the essence of a non-person kind of object, e.g., a house, only *changes*.

Hering’s talk of “change”—which he applies to both a house and a human being indifferently—is sharply distinguished by Stein from that of “development”: the example of a “human being,” the character of which *develops* by disclosing new “personal layers,” cannot be on an equal footing with the more or less alterable essence of a house. Of course—and as the quotation above on Caesar “transferred into the twentieth century” says—this does not rule out that the essence of a person can undergo some alterations; the point is rather to recognize that only persons “develop.”

That we are on the right track by pointing to the relation between Stein’s and Hering’s essays on these matters is further confirmed by a footnote that Hering adds to the text recalled above on the “characterological changes of a human being” that would not affect her “inner essence.”

Here is the footnote:

However, one needs to consider the essential law (*Wesensgesetz*) according to which if there is an invariable core of the essence, then the essential characteristics cannot vary completely at random. As their presence can be understood upon the basis of the core of the essence, then their variation-possibility is a priori prescribed. By contrast, any al-

teration in the core usually implies that of the shell. It would be necessary to study more precisely these relations. (Hering, 1921, 505 in footnote)

Since the line of thought and the expression used by Hering and Stein (*Variationsmöglichkeit*) is the same, there can be no doubt about the appropriateness of reading the two texts side by side.

However, upon closer look it is also evident that the two arguments do not completely match: in Stein, there is no mention of the possibility for the core to change. Both Hering and Stein admit that essences can change; both recognize that some essences have a fundamental core; yet, whereas for Stein *only* the essences of persons have a core, this is not the case for Hering. While Hering admits that there can be alterations in the core itself, Stein rules this out. Both admit that the core limits the variation-possibilities of the essence; yet, while Hering speaks of change in general, for Stein a distinction is to be drawn between the alteration, or change, of the essence and its development: the essence of a person both changes and develops, while the essence of, say, a house can only change.

This being said, how is the “development” (of the essence) of a person to be more specifically characterized? We saw above that Stein speaks of “personal layers” coming to disclosure—but what does this mean? To answer this question, it is important to keep in mind that in *Zum Problem der Einfühlung* the personal subject is understood “axiologically,” so to speak, i.e., as the correlate of a system of values that characterizes the world in which the person (both individually and inter-subjectively) lives⁸. This can be seen from the manner in which Stein sums up the major outcomes of her investigations towards the end of the book: “Thanks to the correlation between values, the experience of values, and layers of the person, all the possible types of persons can be established a priori” (Stein, 2016, 132). In § 3, where the concept of core of the essence appears, she had already said that the layer of the personality is what corresponds (*entspricht*) to a certain “domain of values” (*Wertbereich*) (Stein, 2016, 126; on Stein on the emotion-value relation, see Vendrell Ferran, 2017).

⁸ We have been speaking of person or “spiritual subject” indifferently because the nuanced difference that Stein recognizes between the two at the beginning of Ch. IV, § 3 does not affect our arguments. There, she claims that while the “spirit” is consciousness understood as the correlate of the world-object, the “person” requires the introduction of the *Gefühle* as the actual act-correlates of values (*den gefühlten Wert*) (Stein, 2016, 108, 116–119). The point seems to be that whereas every person is a spiritual subject, the world of the spirit is not personal through and through. All our arguments have been proposed from the angle of the last part of the book, in which the spirit is constituted as a person.

Even if Stein never actually defines the core, the fact that she refers to it as “a very deep layer” means that one can apply to it what she affirms of the layer in general: the *core of the person* being what corresponds to the most basic and deepest system of values on which all the others rest. Only in this way can we appreciate the following excerpt:

One can speak of the development of a person under the influence of the life-circumstances [...] only to the extent that the real surrounding world is the object of her experiences of value and determines which layers come to disclosure and which possible actions become actual. (Stein, 2016, 128–129)

If we understand Stein correctly, for *a person to develop* means, in this context, that based on the *inalterable core* (understood as what in the person corresponds to a most fundamental *Wertbereich*) and given a real surrounding world exerting an influence on the person, certain systems of values become disclosed and, along with them, certain “possible actions become actual.”

Were we to clarify all of this with an example, we could consider “Caesar.” When Stein affirms that we “can think of him transferred into the twentieth century,” this means that we are imagining Caesar in a different “real surrounding world,” i.e., a world that would exert upon him an influence other than the one exerted by the real surrounding world of Rome in the first century BC. For sure, his “individuality would undergo some changes,” for Caesar would speak Italian rather than Latin. Yet, he would remain Caesar. His personal structure or, better, the core of his essence would remain the same, and this means that his “fundamental *Wertbereich*” would remain the same too.

For example, if we were to describe such a core as that of “a natural born ruler” (we borrow the description of Caesar from (Mommsen, 1857, 447)), this would limit the variation-possibilities of Caesar’s development and which possible actions could become actual. As the real surrounding world is different (let us think of the unstable political systems of early 21st century Europe), it is unlikely that he will develop the desire to become an “emperor”; yet he might strive to become a modern “dictator” with a military background or even just a “populist” leader.

Let us hasten to remark that the analysis of the development of one’s personality should include also the distinction between the spiritual person and the “psycho-physical empirical person”: the latter, Stein points out, is “the more or less complete realization of the spiritual person” (Stein, 2016, 129). As she puts it: “We could name ‘empirical person’ the psycho-physical individual as the realization of the spiritual person” (Stein, 2016, 129). Now, to distinguish the “development” (*Entwicklung*) of

one's personality in the sense discussed thus far and its "more or less complete realization" in an empirical person, Stein speaks of "unfolding of the personality" (*Entfaltung der Persönlichkeit*) (Stein, 2016, 129)⁹. The two go hand in hand, and yet need not be confused or conflated. One thing is the "development" of one's essence construed as the coming to disclosure of such and such a layer based upon the core. Another is the degree to which the person is able to "unfold" or, better, to "empirically" realize it. For example, Caesar's personality might "develop" in such a way that the aspiration to become a modern dictator arises in him (together with the relevant system of values), and yet he might be unable to realize (or, in Stein's jargon, to unfold) empirically such an aspiration. Hence, he will have to be content with becoming a mere "populist" leader¹⁰.

Now, in the book on empathy the discrepancy between "development" and "unfolding," namely, between "spiritual person" and "empirical person," is introduced in order to classify three different typologies of empirical persons: complete unfolding of one's personality; incomplete unfolding of one's personality; and no unfolding of one's personality (Stein, 2016, 129). In line with this, in the essay on *Individuum und Gemeinschaft* the same distinction is relied upon (yet within a much more conceptually refined framework) in order to discriminate between "behaviors" (*Verhalten*) that are more or less true to the core—or that express it more or less faithfully.

As a consequence, Stein speaks of "the originality and authenticity of the 'core-determined' life" (*Ursprünglichkeit und Echtheit des „kernhaften“ Lebens*) (Stein, 2010b, 197) to designate an empirical person, the life of which is conducted fully in line with the *Wertbereich* that corresponds to the *Wesenskern* of her own personality. This is why in 1919 Stein even introduced the term "center" (*Zentrum*) to designate the core of the person (Stein, 2010b, 166–167): indeed, the core is the "center" around which the essence of one's personality revolves, out of which it develops, and upon which the life of the empirical person should hinge as much as possible. Only in the case of a full development of the essence of one's personality (*Entwicklung*) and its full empirical realization (*Entfaltung*) on the part of the empirical person is one allowed

⁹ As Stein (2016, 131) refers to Eduard von Hartmann (1887, 190 ff., 200 ff.) for what concerns the distinction between "spiritual" and "empirical" person, the thesis can be advanced that she borrowed the term *Entfaltung* from his account of individual ideas such as the idea of a concrete and individual human being (which in its individuality *unfolds* all the ideal content of the higher ideas) (von Hartmann, 1887, 194–197). Yet, while von Hartmann seems to understand such unfolding as an ideal process, Stein takes it to be empirical instead.

¹⁰ Unfortunately, the anti-Leibnizian flavor of this consideration cannot be developed here. For Stein, a Caesar that does not cross the Rubicon is still the very same Caesar; this would not be the case for Leibniz.

to speak of “authentic personality” (*echte Persönlichkeit*) (Stein, 2010b, 220). Such a personality is not only one that has developed in full accordance with the core; it is one that has also been able to fully empirically realize itself.

Once the concept of “core” has been turned into the most fundamental element of a theory of the person, its presence no longer simply serves to differentiate unitary from non-unitary essences, i.e., unitary from non-unitary connection of “characteristics” (as is the case in Hering). The core is now regarded as the root of one’s personality; it determines the development of its life and hence prescribes how the empirical person should authentically realize it. As Stein points out: “The human personality—taken as a whole—presents itself as the unity of a qualitative specificity that shapes itself out of a core, a formation-root (*Bildungswurzel*)” (Stein, 2010b, 199).

As the systematic discussion of all these topics stretches far beyond the problems of our paper—and it would require us to take into consideration the concept of motivation, the difference between person, psyche and body, as well as the relation between individual and the community, which Stein submits to close scrutiny in the works written after the book on empathy (Calcagno, 2007, Ch. 2–4; Ghigi, 2011)—, it is time for us to also move towards the conclusion.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In the present paper we pursued two main goals. First, we wanted to show that Edith Stein first borrowed the concepts of “core of the essence” and “essential core” from Jean Hering, i.e., from the dissertation version of the paper *Bemerkungen über das Wesen, die Wesenheit und die Idee*. Second, we argued that such appropriation resulted in a transformation of the concept, not only because Stein attributes to the core features other than those ascribed to it by Hering, but primarily because from now on it designates what makes a person a person, her mode of being, as it were. In short, the point is no longer to employ the core as a criterion to discriminate between the many ways in which essences could be internally structured; the point is rather to recognize that the presence of the core makes the essence of the person something absolutely unique.

This is also the reason why it was crucial for us to ascertain that Stein had read the *Fragmente*, for the issue is not only to reconstruct the factual circulation of ideas (from Hering to Stein), but to acknowledge that by thinking of the core in the way she does, Stein seems to radicalize as well as to systematize some of the insights of the *Fragmente* (which are nowhere to be found in the version of 1921), such as the idea that only the essence of human beings are endowed with a core.

It would be a mistake to believe that our aim is to underplay the novelty of Stein's understanding of the person by tracing it back to Hering. Quite the opposite: we firmly believe that the novelty of her position (at least for what concerns her early works) could be fully appreciated only if regarded against such a background. By the same token, we are aware of the many problems that a thorough examination of Stein's theses would encounter and would have to critically address. For example, in 1919 she described the core as "individual, indissoluble, unnamable" (Stein, 2010b, 193). But if this is the case, then how can we actually claim that the core can and needs to be known (Stein, 2010b, 82–83)? What does it mean to know something that cannot even be named? Why is it impossible to name it, if in the empathy-book it is understood as corresponding to a most basic *Wertbereich*?¹¹

For the sake of our circumscribed goal, these and similar questions can only be held in abeyance. Our ambition here was only to write, or to start writing, what for the lack of a better expression we would label a *conceptual micro-history* (we borrow from Hartmann (1910) the phrase "conceptual history"): *micro* not only because our analysis is meant to be only the first step towards a larger investigation, but also because it revolves around only two texts and what happens in a short span of time, namely, the few weeks necessary for Stein to study the *Fragmente* at the end of January 1917. Our *micro-history*, however, is *conceptual* because it tackles the articulation and re-articulation of a specific set of concepts: the concept of core and that of (individual) essence.

In contrast to the book on empathy (where the core appears a few times), the essays published in the *Beiträge zur philosophischen Begründung der Psychologie und der Geisteswissenschaften* rely on the notion of "core" (and its application to the person) extensively and systematically. Hence, the hypothesis could be advanced that already in 1917 Stein would have made more extensive use of the core—had she had more time. She read Hering's essay when her book was ready to be printed, hence only a few changes could be made. This is probably the reason for the discrepancy between the few appearances of the core in 1917 and its incredible proliferation in 1918/1919.

A conceptual micro-history is a history that explores what happens to a set of concepts as—in the transition from one framework to another—one or more concepts or the relations that hold between them in a certain structure undergo a transformation. We have already investigated what happens to the plexus "core—(individual) essence" once it is transformed in such a way that it ends up characterizing only the essence of persons (= from Hering to Stein). In connection to the latter, something similar can be also briefly shown as regards another notion: that of *Individuum*.

¹¹ Betschart (2010, 64) judges the "core of the person" to be nothing else but a "postulate."

This concept—used for example by Husserl in *Ideen I*—serves to characterize a type of essence in opposition to another. In § 15 Husserl distinguishes between “abstract” and “concrete” essences: the former are non-independent objects such as extension and color, or quality and matter of an act; the latter are independent objects (e.g., the essence of an individual “thing”). As Husserl adds: “A this-here—the essence of which is concrete—is an *Individuum*” (Husserl, 1976, 35). An *Individuum* is a “this-here,” namely, the empirical instantiation of a concrete essence; as a consequence, while every *Individuum* is individual (*individuell*), not every individual is an *Individuum*. For example, the *color* of this object is individual, yet not an *Individuum* (because it is an abstract essence); by contrast, the individual object itself is an *Individuum* (because its essence is concrete).

Hering borrows the concept of *Individuum* from Husserl and uses it in the chapter on “individual essences.” He labels the essence itself *Individuum* (*Das Wesen als Individuum*) (Hering, 1914, 169; 1921, 497) to signify the same as Husserl¹². For Hering it does not make any difference whether the essence has a core or not: every essence is an *Individuum* regardless of its internal structure.

On the contrary, even just a quick look at the book on empathy would reveal that—given her specific reinterpretation of the core—Stein submits to transformation also the notion of *Individuum*: the latter is now used to designate only the psycho-physical unity that will eventually turn out to be a person. While in Husserl the *Individuum* derives from the distinction between species of essences (i.e., abstract and concrete), in Hering it is employed to designate individual essences in general regardless of their own structure; by contrast, for Stein only psycho-physical unities are *Individua*, because only their essences display a core—and therefore a peculiar mode of being.

The reinterpretation of the “core” would imply a reinterpretation of what it means for a person to be an individual in a new, unique sense (= irreducible to the individuality of natural things)¹³: if the former represented, as we have shown here, the point of departure of Stein’s career, the latter issue (per se never tackled in 1917) was going to become her life-project (Ales Bello, 2003, 115–183).

¹² Hering does not make any distinction between “abstract” and “concrete” essences because all essences are concrete in the Husserlian sense; “abstract essences” are only abstract moments of the (concrete) essence.

¹³ „Jedes Individuum [ist] ein qualitativ Einzigartiges“ (Stein, 2015c, 61).

According to one of the blind reviewers, in this paper I would be overstating the “influence” of Hering on Stein’s understanding and use of the concept of “core.” As he or she adds, since during “the summer of 1913 Hans Lipps and Jean Hering had been assisting Husserl in the correction of the text of the *Logische Untersuchungen*,” and since “the meaning of *Kern* in several of these passages is quite similar to those which it will come to have in the works of Hering and Stein,” it could be “safely” assumed that “their own use of that term [*Kern*] was informed by Husserl’s.”

Regardless of the fact that I never speak of “influence” to characterize the Hering-Stein relation (the expression could in fact be interpreted psychologically, whereas our sole interest here is in the structure of a specific set of concepts and its possible transformation from one framework to another), I deem the reviewer’s argument a bit misleading. The expressions he/she points out are:

- (i) *Kern der Kundgabe* (A39);
- (ii) *Kern des Allgemeinheitsbewusstseins* (A120)
- (iii) *Kern des Vorstellungsaktes* (B120–121; 127–128)
- (iv) *Kern der empirischen Ichvorstellung; unsagbaren Kern* (B356–357)
- (v) *begründenden Kern* (A335) (implied in the judgment *I am*)
- (vi) *Kern des phänomenalen Ich* (B357; 361)
- (vii) *phänomenologischen Kern des Ich (des empirischen)* (B362)
- (viii) *den intuitiven Kern* (B206)

While only a quite superficial reader could claim that meanings *i-iii* and *viii* might have something to do with what Stein-Hering mean by “core of the essence,” the situation with *iv-vii* seems to be different. However, on closer look the difference would immediately leap into view. What Hering and Stein are referring to when they speak of core of the essence is a formal-ontological component of a quite specific formal-ontological formation: the “individual essence.” They are not considering the intuitive content of the *Vorstellung*, or the *Urteil* “*Ich bin*,” or the concept of phenomenal I—just as Husserl is not discussing the formal-ontological concept of individual essence. Moreover, Stein explicitly distinguishes between the essence of the person and its realization in an empirical ego: the core belonging to the former, yet not to the latter. Identifying the concept of person and that of the phenomenal I is a misunderstanding. The group of concepts on which I focus my attention in this paper (core—essence—individuum) is nowhere to be found in the *Logische Untersuchungen*.

As for the relation between the *Logische Untersuchungen* and Hering, the following can be added.

Besides the fact that W. Pöll, for example, explicitly recognizes that the *Wesenskern* was first introduced by Hering (Pöll, 1936, 63) and that the concept is nowhere to be found in Husserl, it is hard to tell what influence the *Logische Untersuchungen* had on Hering's "ontology." Based on a close-up reading of the dissertation, the following detail struck me as meaningful. As far as I can tell, in the *Fragmente* and the *Bemerkungen*, the only explicit reference to the *Logische Untersuchungen* is to the *Dritte Untersuchung* (Hering, 1914, 204; 1921, 515). Moreover, whereas the dissertation includes several references to the *Logische Untersuchungen* as well as to *Ideen*, the references to the latter which can be found at the beginning of the *Bemerkungen* are nowhere to be found in the *Fragmente*-version. As we know that *Ideen* was published at the beginning of the SS 1913, and Reinach's notes on Hering's concept of essence were written during the WS 1912–13, the hypothesis can be even advanced that the text of the *Fragmente* was written before the release of *Ideen I*, before the editing of the *Logische Untersuchungen* and even before Hering himself started working on the actual dissertation on Lotze. Hering might have written the *Fragmente* (which includes some references to the *Untersuchungen*) before or during the publication of *Ideen*; then, he went back to Strasbourg to write the dissertation. Finally, when he decided to publish the *Bemerkungen*, the references to *Ideen I* were also added.

In a text soon to be published (*Jean Hering, Husserl and the Essence of Caesar*¹⁴), I show that—based on the *Fragmente*—the hypothesis can be advanced that Hering took the expression "core of the essence" from Theodor Mommsen, who speaks of *Kern seines Wesens* and *wesentlichen Zügen* to describe Caesar's personality. Mommsen talks of Caesar and of the *Kern seines Wesens*; Hering makes the example of Caesar during the discussion of the *Wesenskern*, and so does Stein¹⁵.

¹⁴ In a volume on *The Essence of Phenomenology* (Routledge), edited by T. Grohmann (2022).

¹⁵ In the case of the expression *Kern der Person* (not *Wesenskern*), the micro-history should also include Scheler, who employs it in both *Zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Sympathiegefühle* (only once) and *Der Formalismus* (a few times). The hypothesis could be advanced that the concept of *Wesenskern* undergoes a transformation in the transition from Hering to Stein via the latter's reading of Scheler. On the contrary, Conrad-Martius is to be excluded, at least as far as *Zum Problem der Einfühlung* is concerned: the term *Bildungswurzel* comes from *Von der Seele*, which, however, Conrad-Martius published after Stein had sent her dissertation out for printing.

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