



Living an Anti-Fascist Life: Empathy, Spaces, and the Problem of Other People

Gregynog Theory School 2026

Keynote: Chris Philo

Christopher Philo



Cover image: *Mothers* by Käthe Kollwitz (1919).

Reference: Alexandra von dem Knesebeck Käthe Kollwitz: Werkverzeichnis der Graphik

Neubearbeitung des Berzeichnisses von August Klipstein, publiziert 1955. 2, Bern, 2002, cat. no. 140, 432, ill.

Welcome to Theory School 2026

The annual *Gregynog Theory School* has been funded by the WGSSS Cohort Development Fund to provide a forum for postgraduate students to engage with theoretical topics in a supportive and collaborative setting.

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Schedule

Thursday March 12th

11.30 - 12.30	<i>Agoriad</i> Interview: Prof Chris Philo*
13.30 - 14.45:	Welcome & Keynote: Prof Chris Philo
14.45 - 15.30:	Tea break
15.30 - 17.30:	Seminar 1
17.30 - 18.30:	Reception in the Joicey Room
19.00:	Dinner

Friday March 13th

8.00 - 9.00:	Breakfast
9.00 - 11.00:	Seminar 2
11.00 - 11.30:	Coffee break
11.30 - 13.30:	Seminar 3
13.30	Lunch and Farewell briefing

*The Agoriad interview is technically not part of the Theory School but participants are welcome to join. If they do so we encourage them to either pack a lunch or avail themselves of the Gregynog Café which has coffee, light bites, soups, sausage rolls and cakes.

Gregynog Theory School Workshop Guidance

Tips to help you prepare for discussion

The Gregynog Theory School is a place where we work through difficult texts in a collaborative fashion in order to gain understanding of complex ideas that may push our own thinking. We begin from the presumption that theory is difficult and as such requires group discussion. This means that everyone in your discussion group is in the same boat. We are all trying to work through, understand and develop the implications of difficult texts and we do so from a position where few of us are experts. In order to help with this process we offer the following guidance.

1. Staff are not experts:

It is important to understand that many of the staff have also not engaged with the texts being explored and thus should not be counted on to be sources of expertise or authority. This means that questions about the reading will need to be grappled with collaboratively and you should expect questions about the meaning of terms, concepts or passage to be turned back to the group. The aim of the discussion leader will be to establish a collaborative ethic where the group can work through the text together.

2. Keep discussion focused on the text:

The best source for understanding is the text itself. Thus, questions about meaning or points of discussion should refer to specific pages and passages. Do not be surprised if the discussion leader asks you to link your point to a specific page and asks you to read a passage out loud. Points of confusion and discussion are best elaborated as they are discussed step by step, working through ideas sentence by sentence. Keeping focused on the text anchors conversation on the author and their ideas.

3. Read with the author:

The role of the seminar is to understand the main ideas of the reading and to use those ideas to encourage further thinking and discussion. For this reason, it may be useful to avoid - or at least delay - critique. The main ambition should be to read with the author, meaning to try and follow their thinking process as much as possible. This does not mean we should avoid raising questions about the argument or develop counter positions. But it does mean making understanding the priority.

4. It is ok to be pushed on your ideas:

Raising half-baked ideas is to be encouraged and we should all be willing to articulate our thoughts even if they are not 100% (or even 50%) clear in our mind. In addition, given the collaborative ethic of the group, we should not be discouraged if the discussion leader or other members of the group push us on these ideas to foster clarity. Sometimes this process can help us make sense of inklings that we have not fully developed.

5. Come prepared with questions:

You are encouraged to come to the sessions with questions about the reading already in mind. These can be questions of clarification (about basic terminology), argument (about overall thesis or direction) or implication (about tensions in the reading or illuminating how different authors address the same issue). It is often helpful to come to the session with passages or points highlighted that you found particularly interesting, confusing or worthy of discussion (please note down the page). Indeed, often the best questions come from those areas we find genuinely puzzling or perhaps particularly innovative in the text.

6. A note about expectations:

The Gregynog Theory School is a state funded event that allows staff and post-graduates the unique opportunity to come together to discuss complex material in an open, supportive and collaborative fashion. But the expectations are high. There is a lot of reading assigned, many of the texts are difficult to comprehend and we spend long hours in discussion. While we understand that you will not find everything useful or relevant, we expect students to read the work, engage in discussion and approach the process with intellectual intent and an open mind. While you may not be able to read everything closely, it is expected that you will come prepared. Sometimes students feel the need to confess that they have not done the work. While this may seem like an intellectually honest position, in reality it invalidates your contribution. The expectation is that you read. And while we understand that you may not be able to read everything well or fully, we expect you will read enough to participate effectively.

Living an Anti-Fascist Life: Empathy, Spaces and the Problem of Other People

What might living 'anti-fascistically' entail or demand? What might it mean to foster forms of 'anti-fascist empathy', suggesting empathy conceived and practised in an anti-fascist mode for anti-fascist ends? Such questions are not only of historical relevance, sealed around the terrible events of the mid-twentieth century in the shadow of Nazism, since fascism in various guises is on the march again in many different worldly contexts as part of our deeply troubled current global conjuncture. And what of geography: what role does space, place, environment, location and more play in the new collisions of fascism and anti-fascism? One way into such crucial matters is through the figure of Edith Stein (1881-1942), German phenomenologist who worked with Husserl and Heidegger, Jewish-born but converting to Catholicism and becoming a Carmelite nun and theologian, someone gassed at Auschwitz. Stein's life was shaped and ended by fascism: her life and thought stands as a defiance of fascism. Her work has never attracted the attention of geographers, and so this running of the Gregynog Theory School will be highly experimental: a collective engagement with Stein, learning about her life and work, reading extracts from some of her writings - as both philosopher and theologian - and also some secondary commentary on her contributions. While Stein's work is indicative of its time, we contend that there is something distinctive about her (spatialised) conception of the 'I' who shows empathy for what is 'foreign' (in both abstract and literal senses) and how that empathy becomes a basis of caring for, and enhancing the 'life-power' of, diverse communities, peoples and places. Such orientations could be enlisted as scholarly guidance for being, feeling, thinking and living anti-fascistically.

The topic is divided into three separate seminars with readings and themes presented below.

Seminar sessions and key readings: fascism, anti-fascism and introducing Edith Stein

Preamble

This running of the Gregynog Theory School is framed by the dramatic and disturbing reawakening of fascism in the current global conjuncture, (geo)politically and diffusing its dismal (il)logics throughout countless socio-cultural domains. The rise of numerous self-appointed ‘strongman leaders’, the brushing aside of democratic and legal process, the mobilisation of nationalist chavinisms and ethnic animosities, the glorification of imagined past glories, a deeply intensified sealing of spaces, securing of territories and erasure of landscapes, the spewing forth of hate, violence and contempt for care, compassion and grace: these are all hallmarks of what has been widely regarded as ‘fascism’ since the second quarter of the last century. The task of fashioning an anti-fascistic response to fascism is hence urgent, a response that, notwithstanding fascism’s own relative thoughtlessness, does demand a thought-full critical-intellectual engagement with what it is, including its ideas, moods and habits. In this respect, we would like you to read in advance one very short piece – the epilogue from a recent book called *Fascism: The Story of an Idea* (Dunt & Lynskey, 2024) – which captures, at least in part, the broadest ‘sense’ of what, for us, comprises the horizon for everything to be addressed in the Theory School.

The couplet of fascism and anti-fascism is so many-headed, complex and indeed contentious that we are electing in our proceedings not to confront it directly, but rather indirectly as a background hum to our engagement with the life and work of Edith Stein (1881-1942), German phenomenologist who worked with Husserl and Heidegger, Jewish-born but converting to Catholicism and becoming a Carmelite nun and theologian, someone gassed at Auschwitz. Stein’s relationship with fascism, specifically German National Socialism, is obvious: indeed, it killed her, but she can also be cast as one of its critical interlocutors, creating a body of writing – and we might even say worldly practice – with an emphasis on love, life, care, empathy and thoughtfulness standing against all that the Nazis despised and wished to jackboot out the way. That is not to say that we need concur with everything that she wrote, far from it, and indeed we should not shy from critiquing her writings, notably those where her philosophy mixes with Christian mysticism. We duly position this Theory School as experimental, comprising probably the first time ever that geographers have considered this particular theorist-writer, and we honestly admit our uncertainty about exactly what we may jointly learn, agree or disagree about Stein’s significance.

Reading:

- Dunt, Ian & Lynskey, Dorian. 2024. Epilogue: the story of fascism, in Dunt, Ian & Lynskey, Dorian, *Fascism: the story of an idea*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, pp. 152-159.

Edith Stein

Edith Stein was a student of Edmund Husserl and much of her work is dedicated to refining the phenomenological method developed by her mentor. In particular, Stein was interested in how ‘human experience’ (the central object of phenomenological study) was fundamentally constituted by its imbrication with the experiences of other beings. In much of Husserl’s work, human experience is understood in an individual sense; that which appears to a single human being. To some extent this makes sense. We cannot experience other people’s experience (at least not in the same way as we experience our own) as their minds are fundamentally foreign to ours. And yet, it is also true that our experience is shaped by an understanding that we are in a world with others and those others are not only ‘in’ our experience (they appear to us as others) but their experience also shapes and colours our own. Thus, in asking questions about the communal nature of experience, Stein is asking about the nature of experience itself as well as proposing big ideas about humans how exist in and amongst other beings (what she sometimes termed, intriguingly, ‘the foreign’).

In this Theory School we will conduct separate seminars engaging with three areas of Stein’s work: (1) her early work on empathy, (2) her later work on community, and finally (3) her spiritual writings. All of these areas relate to the theme of ‘anti-fascist life’ (as in the main title that we have given to this event). Each of the texts to be considered across these three seminars provide novel ideas about the body, space, consciousness and human interdependence. It should be noted that Stein’s conversion from Judaism to

Catholicism, her death at Auschwitz and her beautification by the Catholic church, has given her an odd place in the history of phenomenological debate. While figures like Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas and Arendt are central interlocutors in phenomenology writ large, Stein is something of an outlier, being more commonly read in Catholic Studies and Christian theology, and appearing only intermittently in discussions at the intersection of phenomenology and the social sciences. This is despite writing extensively about the role of phenomenology in the humanities (by which she means sociology and anthropology). In many ways the aim of this Theory School is to retrieve Stein from her theological corner and explore her relevance for geography, while still paying some attention to what becomes her mystical phenomenological theology.

We are pleased that the forthcoming issue of *Agoriad* will be the first edited collection in geography dedicated to Stein's thought and its application to geographic debate.

A couple of points regarding the reading. First, we will only be discussing primary texts during the seminars. The secondary texts will be referred to when developing points of clarification but are not meant to be under discussion in and of themselves. Second, you will notice we have added 'study guides' for the first two Stein texts (Burns for S1 and Lebech for S2). These provide explanations that correspond to Stein's original text. We do not provide page numbers because they are best read alongside the primary material and should be used to clarify confusions along the way (Stein's writing can be dense). Third, we recommend doing some preparatory background reading to familiarise yourself with Stein's work. We list our preliminary reading suggestions below. Finally, we are providing more exposition than normal in this handbook to help situate the selected readings, and we do recommend that you spend some time with the 'Primer' below.

The key readings texts that we will cover during the Theory School are:

Primary reading by Edith Stein:

- PoE: *On the problem of empathy*. 1964. Translated by Waltraut Stein. M. Nijhoff.
- PPH: *Philosophy of psychology and the humanities*. 2000. Translated by Mary Catharine Baseheart & Marianne Sawicki. ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies.
- SoC: *The science of the cross: a study of St. John of the Cross*. 1960. Translated by H. Graff. Henry Regnery Company.

Secondary reading:

- Andrews, Michael F. 2024. *One (un)like the other: rethinking ethics, empathy, and transcendence from Husserl to Derrida*. Syracuse University Press.
- Borden, Sarah. 2003. *Edith Stein*. Continuum.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair C. 2007. *Edith Stein: a philosophical prologue*. Continuum.

Reading Schedule

Background and preparatory readings: Husserl and the project of phenomenology

Below are background readings that help situate and contextualise Stein within wider debates in phenomenology. They explain the key philosophical contribution of Husserl, how his project was situated within conversations in Germany and the novel solution he provided to the problem of ‘how humans can have knowledge about the external world?’ Understanding this context will help when encountering Stein’s unique contribution.

Readings:

Borden: chapters 1-2 (pp. 1-45)

Also suggested:

Macintyre: chapter 1-5 (pp. 1-49)

Seminar 1: The Problem of Empathy

This reading is Stein’s doctoral dissertation, *On the Problem of Empathy* (PoE), and it represents her earliest attempt to engage with the question of other people (‘the foreign’) and their role in the constitution of experience. We are focusing on the main part of the text: her concept of the psycho-physical individual (or subject) and how that subject encounters others (foreign individuals) empathetically in the ‘spatial world’. We recommend you look at the Primer below on page xx before embarking on the readings.

Readings:

PoE: forward and part 2, chapters 1-2, and part 3, chapters 1-5 (pp. 4-12 and 35-82)

Also suggested:

Macintyre: chapter 9 (pp. 75-87)

Andrews: chapter 5 (pp. 133-47)

Study Guide: Burns, T. A. 2024. *Edith Stein’s On the problem of empathy: a companion*. Lexington Books.

Seminar 2: Identity and Community

The essay assigned here is from the book *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities* (PPH). The aim of the essay is to explore how the human psyche takes shape in relation to the human community. While many ideas in *Problem of Empathy* (PoE) can be found here, they are far more developed. At its heart, this essay examines the role of psychic life-power in shaping individual experience as always already experienced as communal. Again we recommend you look at the Primer below (page 12) as it outlines the main arguments outlined in the previous essay *Sentient Causality*.

Readings:

PPH: Treatise 2, Chapter 1 (pp. 129-196)

Also suggested:

Macintyre: chapters 12-13 (pp. 99-132)

Borden: chapter 3 (pp. 46-67)

Study Guide: Lebech, M. ND. [*Study Guide to Edith Stein’s Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*](#).

Seminar 3: Soul, Spirit and Space

The material assigned here is from the book *The Science of the Cross* (SoC), where her phenomenology and her Christian mysticism enter into a complicated dance. We have extracted several tracts from the book, provided in a separate attachment (apologies, the reproduction is not great). Specifically, find here some opening text (Prefaces, Editorial Forward, Stein's own Forward and Introduction), which clarify that the book is an elaboration of the writings of St. John of the Cross (1542-1591), Spanish Roman Catholic priest, Carmelite friar, mystic and poet. Learning something about this source for Stein, including his life and writings about themes such as 'Flaming Love', 'Night' and 'Ascent' will be useful. Then there is a tract (pp. 114-122) that is the crux of Stein's phenomenological 'extension' to St. John's writings; and note the multiple spatialities of self, soul, spirits and the relationship with God that are evoked here very explicitly.

And finally there is a tract (pp. 194-206) – which we urge you to read swiftly (it reads like a stream of consciousness) – where Stein charts the 'ascent' (also in certain respects a 'descent') of the human believer into the deepest, hidden interior of a now God-filled soul (leading to a 'union', a 'betrothal', a 'marriage' to/with God). For all the supposed disciplining of 'the sensual' demanded by this journey, Stein's depiction here is extraordinarily sensual. The claim is heard that this new place pulsates with the Godhead's 'hatred of human wickedness', but – at the risk of inflecting your reading – what might be pondered more critically is how Stein depicts the self's mystical 'in-dwelling' with God, the classic mystic's retreat from the world, that leads to an 'ignorance of evil' and even a thirsting for 'suffering' (or 'wounding') as a means of feeling vitally present to God (thereby recapitulating Christ's suffering on the Cross). Quite what such constructions might offer the problematic of living an anti-fascist life is arguably much less clear than is the case with what Stein claims in both PoE and PPH, and yet the ideas on display here undoubtedly allowed her to respond differently to the horrors of Auschwitz than did surely the majority of its victims. Much, therefore, to contemplate ...

Readings:

SoC: Prefaces, Editorial Forward, Stein's own Forward and Introduction, Chapter 13 (200-213/114-122) and chapter 21 (328-343/194-206) (page number refer to 1983/1960 version)

Primer for Primary Readings

The assigned readings are based upon selections from larger texts; texts that not only embed an overall logic, but work incrementally, building their argument on previous points and developments. For this reason, we are providing the primers below to help navigate the reading selections. We suggest you tackle these discussions first (along with the secondary reading and reading guides) as they may help you engage with the primary material.

Primer POE (Seminar 1)

It is worth remembering that Stein understands herself as working within the phenomenological project set out by Husserl. While the suggested background reading can clarify what this means in more detail, in a broad sense she understands human experience as *the basis for all knowledge*. In other words, if we want to subject the world and its objects to philosophical (as well as scientific) scrutiny, then we need to understand how those things appear *within human experience*. This is the phenomenological project in a nutshell. And Stein is raising two further questions about how to actually *do* phenomenology.

The first question can be posed thus: if we want to understand how things appear within human experience, then we need to understand the nature of human experience itself. In this sense, you can think of Stein (and Husserl) as attempting to establish a *universalist epistemology*: they want to understand the structure of human experience so that we have a basis for understanding that which appears within human experience. This leads to a second question (which is Stein's main question). Human experience is never simply our own experience. This is Stein's key insight. If we want to take human experience seriously, we need to recognise that it includes other people and their own experiences. In addition, we need to recognise that their experience has an influence on us. This is why Stein focuses on the question of empathy. For Stein empathy needs to be taken seriously because other peoples' experiences not only appear within our own horizon of experience but seem to shape, effect and colour how we ourselves experience. While we cannot feel joy the same way another person feels joy (most of us do not have ESP and thus are constitutionally blocked from experiencing what another person experiences from their perspective), we nonetheless experience their joy as *their* joy and their joy seems to impinge upon us in a distinctive way. In this sense, *their* joy appears to us as a distinct kind of phenomena.

POE is divided into three main sections. Our focus is section two (confusingly labelled as Part 3 in the book) entitled 'The constitution of the psycho-physical individual'. The groundwork for this discussion focuses on establishing what empathy is – i.e., what makes empathy a distinctive kind of experience. Stein opens by posing the following scenario: "a friend tells me that he has lost his brother and I become aware of his pain" (14). The first question is 'what kind of awareness is this?' I obviously cannot perceive pain like I perceive objects (I cannot turn pain around and observe it from its many angles). Their pain is also not available to me to experience directly (again I do not have ESP so I cannot feel it). While I can reflect on my own history with pain (my own memories of suffering, grief and loss), I can listen to how they describe their pain to me, I can look at the various things contributing to their pain (the fact that they recently suffered a separate tragedy) and I can try to put myself in their shoes (imagining how it must feel), none of these mental acts capture what Stein means by empathy. Indeed, Stein is trying to describe an experience of the pain that is more than a perception of the pain and/or a reflection on its nature. On the contrary, she argues that empathy is a distinctive kind of experience. It is what she terms *sui generis* – it is utterly unique and it appears to consciousness in a distinctive way.

So what is this experience? In short it is an experience defined by our experience of another person's psychic life; a life we recognise as 'like ours' (in its depth and complexity) but is also fundamentally 'not ours' (in its difference and otherness) and is totally inaccessible to our knowing. In some ways, Stein's description reminds me of Derrida's notion of the secret: the content of the other's inner life is a secret. Yet, we know that that secret is nonetheless there. The fact that we cannot access the secret (that we cannot know the secret) does not mean we cannot experience it. But we experience it *as a secret*, i.e., as an inner life that appears in its inaccessibility. The emphasis of section one is illustrating what this experience is and how and why it is unique. It also explores how we can become acquainted with another person's experience (and deeply so) without ever having knowledge of its content. As Stein suggests, "empathy... is the experience of

foreign consciousness in general, *irrespective* of the kind of experiencing subject or of the subject whose consciousness is experienced” (p. 11, my emphasis).

There are three key terms Stein introduces in section 2 which are significant for understanding the assigned reading: primordial and non-primordial experience and the ‘pure I’.

In terms of the former, the distinction between primordial and non-primordial experience seems relatively straightforward. Primordial experience is experienced immediately. For example, my experience of being at the final game when the Detroit Tigers won the 1984 World Series with my father and brother. Non-primordial experience is my memory of that experience. Stein spends significant time in this chapter discriminating between these two ways of thinking about experience, often illustrating how easy it is to confuse them. For example, in the memory of the baseball game, it is easy to confuse the memory of the ‘I’ that was joyful at the game (non-primordial) and the ‘I’ that is now joyful in experiencing that specific memory (primordial). While the memory is powerful, resonant and luminous with various associations, as a memory it is non-primordial (regardless of how intensively it is felt). Memory is a useful example for Stein because it shows how primordial and non-primordial experiences often fold into one another. The memory links the ‘I’ at the baseball game to the ‘I’ that is remembering, the former is an object (a representation of myself in memory) while the latter is a subject (someone experiencing joy at my memory of the game). We can also think of memories that position this link differently, for example a joyful memory of my mother making a joke at a party (non-primordial) that is nonetheless experienced sadly because she recently passed away (primordial). Stein’s point is that we need to understand these different modes of experience as different kinds of experience: the one direct and the other at remove.

Now why is this distinction significant for Stein? Because for Stein empathy is defined as a non-primordial experience that *announces itself as primordial*. What does this mean? In many ways, the first part is easy to understand. As already suggested, we cannot experience another person’s experience. While we may be infected by another person’s joy such that we become joyous ourselves (we primordially feel joy), this is not us experiencing *their* joy. This is a key distinction for Stein. Empathy may indeed allow us to grasp another person’s joy and in doing so we feel joyous ourselves. But in this scenario, we are not experiencing their joy. On the contrary, the joy we feel is merely predicated upon an empathic capacity. We experience their experience as primordial even as it is non-primordial. This allows us to feel ‘infected’ by their joy, but the joy is always our own. So how does this empathetic capacity happen? And what does it mean that empathy (as a non-primordial experience) *announces itself* as a primordial one? These are the central concerns of section 3 (our reading), i.e., to understand what precisely is being announced and how that announcement is occurring. To do this Stein focuses on explaining what she calls the distinctive psycho-physical structure of human experience.

The final term we need to discuss is the ‘pure I’. This is a term pulled from Husserl and re-occurs in *PPH*, though often referred to there as the ego (see primer for seminar 2). To understand the ‘pure I’ we need to know that Stein and Husserl often discuss different levels (or thresholds) of consciousness related to subjective experience. For example, there is the experience of myself as a person with various qualities and attributes. There is also the experience of myself with various attitudes and inclinations (which I may or may not be conscious of). The ‘pure I’ is a way of thinking about the ‘I’ before all such qualifications and descriptors. It is pure because it constitutes a location for all experience, without attributes or properties. In short, the ‘pure I’ is where experience happens. It is the source of my own field of experience. If it qualifies itself at all, it does so only at the level of the ‘I’ versus the ‘not-I’ – i.e., a distinction measured by the space between its experience and those of others. As we will see, Stein goes on to describe this pure I in distinctively corporeal and spatial terms.

Primer for PPH (seminar 2)

PPH is divided into two main treatises: (1) *Sentient Causality* and (2) *Individual and Community*. Our focus is on the second treatise. But in order to understand Stein’s ambition we need to understand how she

develops a particular conception of what might be called individual psychic life.¹ Many of the ideas here will have resonance to those we encountered in PoE, but I am going to address them ‘from scratch’ so as to be consistent to their development within the overall work.

The text begins with a distinction Stein makes between different modalities of consciousness. First, there is what she terms the ‘stream’ or ‘flow’ of consciousness. Here she is identifying a primordial capacity to experience; experience as an unfolding field that encompasses the pure experience of being alive, i.e., being a being that senses both an external empirical world (a world which appears to us in consciousness as a real and abiding phenomena) as well as an internal dimension that feels, thinks, has ideas etc.² The aim of discussing this pure experience is to distinguish it (the experience of experience itself) from the *contents* that that experience experiences – i.e., the actual things that appear to us, e.g., dogs, trees, memories, ideas, practices, etc. The latter belong to intentional consciousness, meaning a mode of consciousness that is concerned with what appears to it.³

To this basic distinction Stein adds a third dimension; a domain of experience that colours or shapes *how* we experience experiential content. To be clear, this is not accurately a third domain (or separate domain) but a substrate within the latter domain. It is perhaps best understood by way of example. Think of a time when you were watching a film and you found yourself profoundly affected by it. Then a few years later you watch the film again. A few responses are possible: perhaps the film has no real impact the second time around; you find it ‘trite’ and you wonder why you were so moved the first time. Or perhaps you are no longer moved by it as profoundly *but* you still have the memory of being moved by it and that memory has its own resonance and thus contributes to your current experience of the film (and your ongoing love for it). Or finally, perhaps it moves you just as greatly (or more so) as before because you pick-up further nuances that you missed the first time around. Here we see the ‘experience of experience’ that Stein is trying to draw our attention to; how our experiences are shaped and coloured by various modes of experience itself. In everyday parlance we might say ‘I was very joyous when I saw the film the first time and that affected my viewing’; such qualifiers and conditions are very familiar to us in everyday life. What Stein is attempting is to develop these qualifiers and conditions into a methodical study. In doing so she wants to attend to the psychic conditions that shape our everyday experience as well as explain how our decisions and choices operate within a complex of internal and external motivations.⁴

Now that we understand a bit about Stein’s project we can say something about her approach. For Stein, the conditions that shape and colour experience are made manifest through what she terms ‘life-power’. When we feel sluggish, experiential content is experienced as dull. When we are full of joy or are otherwise invigorated, experiential experience is felt more intensely. Often, we think that the content of the experience itself is the cause of our sense of life-power. Thus, I sense that the rain is making me feel blue.⁵ While rain

¹ The word psychic is not ideal here given its connotations in English but neither is psychological and Stein’s own word ‘sentient’ is also somewhat awkward. I am sticking with psychic as it resonates well with other work such as Butler’s *Psychic life of power*.

² “The current of consciousness as we experience it is already constituted as me-experiencing-something, and hence constituted as such (i.e. as a stream of experience). Yet we can imagine the stream of consciousness as pure becoming, pure unarticulatedness, entirely obscure. This is experience without the experience of something. However, there is becoming and fading away of phases, and these are what make us constitute the entities of experience within the current. Constitution happens, the experiencing becomes the experience of something, because things ‘linger on’ in experience until you see them and start ‘having an experience’” (from Lebech 1.1)

³ It should be noted that this distinction has its roots in Kant’s transcendental subject, a dimension of consciousness of oneself as a subject before one has an image about what one’s subjectivity is actually composed of (i.e., what its content is). In many ways Husserl’s phenomenology is a development of Kant’s transcendentalism: a demand to attend to experience itself rather than concern oneself on the relation between objective and subjective realities.

⁴ In this manner Stein’s project is analogous to (but very different from) psychoanalysis. Both of these traditions endeavour to understand the various conditions that shape psychic life. Stein however is exploring these in a phenomenological manner – i.e., it is about understanding the universal structures that shape experience itself rather than the structures of consciousness per se.

⁵ It is important to understand that Stein does not suggest that we have a clear understanding of the conditions invigorating or depleting life-power or indeed shaping our experience more generally. On the contrary, she suggests we often mis-read our life-power, thinking we have more energy than we do and pushing on even when we are depleted. Last year I bought a ‘wearable’ for the first time, and sometimes I decide to go for a run, even when it is telling me I am

can be a motivation for feeling blue, Stein is trying to distinguish different kinds of conditions of which external causes are but one type. For example, an over-flowing of life-power can over-ride external causes (like rain) that shape experience. Thus, I might joyously feel good *despite* the rain or indeed *embrace* the rain – Gene Kelly like – as it folds into my invigorated experience. The content of experience (the rain) is thus shaped by the life-power infusing my experience of experience.⁶

In many ways the heart of Stein's essay revolves around a number of key terms, the two most important being (1) psyche and (2) motivation. Below I give my understanding of these two terms followed by a short glossary of other key terms Stein introduces throughout the essay. My reading of *Sentient Causality* (and again I am a novice so this is open to debate) is that Stein is primarily interested in (1) conceptualising the psyche as a substrate of human experience and a source of life-power and (2) identifying the key motivations shaping the psyche and the various ways its life-power is spent, invigorated and/or depleted. The longer list of key terms is designed to extend and develop her key arguments regarding the psyche and its various motivation.

Psyche: The key to understanding the psyche is that it is shaped by various conditionalities which present it with what might be called life-power 'expenditures' – i.e., life-power costs that may or may not be 'cashed out'. For example, I am inclined to loan money to a family member I love despite knowing that they will not pay me back. I am motivated to help because I love them and want to help. But there are other motivations within me that make it difficult to act. The external conditions (the loan request) present a certain life-power expenditure which I may or may not cash-out. Perhaps I act on my desire to loan the money, and I do so without concern about being paid back. In this case, I decide not to 'worry about it' and so the potential life-power cost is never manifested. More likely, however, I spend days agonising over the decision. This amounts to a major expenditure of mental power (I cannot stop thinking about it) and potentially an expenditure of will power (particularly if I decide to act against my desire to make the loan). Such 'work' will incur a depletion of life-power. To be clear, there are different kinds of life-power at stake here. First there is the thinking about (the agonising) which involves mental power. Then there is the decision to act against my inclinations (to withhold the money) which involves will-power. While thinking and willing involve their own kind of energy expenditure, they are engines driven by an underlying current (aka life-power). Thus while the mental bandwidth (needed for thinking about the problem) and the will-power (needed to work against my inclinations) might be exhausting, they also are depleting of my overall life-power, making my experience of things dreary, dull and broadly depressed.

Motivations: similar to causal laws in the natural world, motivations are a way for Stein to describe the 'lawfulness' of the sphere of the psyche.⁷ As Stein puts it, motivation allows us to understand how various acts "get into with one another...an emerging of the one out of the other" (41). Motivations can be conscious or latent and what is latent can be made conscious and can affect consciousness. Motivation not only shapes our experience of intentional content (i.e., the rain discussed above), it also shapes what we allow ourselves to intentionally perceive or attend to. For example, I may be motivated to ignore certain sense data (my favourite song playing in the background in a café) because I am also motivated to focus on my book. One possibility is that I hear it (and thus bring it into intentional consciousness) and decide to ignore it. Another possibility is that I do not hear it at all because I am so otherwise focused. Much of Stein's text involves describing the different kinds of motivations (impulses, inclinations, attitudes, values, etc.), how they interact

depleted. I do this because I am anxious so I 'push through' my depletion because I know the run will calm me down. Sometimes these mismatches make sense (I know I am depleted but I need to run anyway) and sometimes they don't (I wonder whether I am judging my vitality correctly or the wearable is giving me false information or indeed is the wearable making me think I am more depleted than I really am?). The point is that we are not the best judge of our experience, though Stein says we can learn to be better observers of our inner perception.

⁶ This concept of life-power may seem familiar given our current vitalist milieu (where ideas about affect, human-non-human relations and 'liveliness' constitute a broad intellectual orthodoxy). Yet it is important to be circumspect about the comparison. While Stein understands there to be currents of energy that transfer between different beings, she does not understand the world to be alive in the same manner as we find in Latour, Deleuze and other advocates of contemporary vitalism. Better to think of Stein as illustrating the cognitive conditions and mechanisms by which our experiences is invigorated or depleted.

⁷ In this sense, they seem to be akin to 'desire' in psychoanalysis.

with each other, how those interactions may instigate acts or modes of willing and how all such events incur various life-power expenditures.

Other key terms:

As already suggested, *Sentient Causality* often reads like a typology of motivations and psychic conditions that interact to generate various (conscious and latent) outcomes. While the list below is incomplete, it provides a potential starting point for understanding Stein's typology and how they provide an overall conception of the psyche. To be clear, not all the key terms below represent motivations. Better to think of them as conditionalities affecting and qualifying psychic life.

1. Act: intentional events that provide insight into underlying motivations. Their role in her framework is primarily about how they bring motivations to givenness (to presence). Motivations motivate many kinds of psychic responses, only some of which result in acts. When a motivation does result in an act the motive can be understood as the act's meaning. For example, I withdrew from the party because I was saddened by my mother's death. Here a complex array of motives (feelings of sadness, representations about my mom and her past love of parties, associations between parties and happiness), results in an act (withdrawing from the party) in a manner where I (and others) other understand the meaning (one does not feel like socialising when one is sad). Motivations are often latent (i.e., below consciousness) but acts bring motivations out into the open – i.e., into what Stein calls 'givenness'.
2. Associations: experiences that come together within the flow of consciousness. There is no necessary relation between associations. They are things that (for historical or random reasons) flow together and can lead to various motivations. Stein also talks about association in PoE [SS 49-50]. Here she is focused on corporeal associations: "for example, the sight of the table corner reminds me I once bumped myself on it...this corner's sharpness is not remembered, but seen" (p. 42). Stein's point is that our associations are corporeal and sensory rather than strictly cognitive. I associate a rough lump of sugar with a particular kind of sweetness. It is the visual that is associated with the memory, illustrating how the cognitive is intimately imbricated with the sensory.
3. Attitudes: latent ideas or positions within us that effect our outlook. They are a particular type of motivation in the sense that they are predispositions which we may or may not be aware of. Attitudes can come from many sources (society, family, friends, politics) and their generation within oneself cannot be willed.⁸ However, humans do have the capacity to reject or accept our attitudes. For example, we may initially take a negative attitude towards black people but decide to reject it and neutralise its effects (see judgement). The decision to reject or accept an attitude is also motivated and come from core values. One last point, attitudes are similar to inclinations. Yet while inclinations are goal-conscious, attitudes are more like feelings or sensibilities
4. Attention: while the stream of consciousness is singular and cannot be divided or broken into various streams, the psyche can attend to certain things over others. In other words, things can phase in and out of our consciousness depending on various motivations. What we attend to (and how we attend) is both a question of motivation and external causal influences. To use the example above, I may decide to attend to my reading and thus do not hear a song being played in a café. But then someone turns the volume so loud that I cannot help but hear it. Thus, even as I am motivated to ignore everything but my reading, I am still receptive to external causal influences.
5. Cause or causal law: Stein draws a distinction between causal laws (which operate in the objective natural world) and motivations (which operate in the psyche). While she wants to show that there are 'causes' to psychic experiences, she also wants to show that these causes are of a different kind, precisely because they cannot be predicted. That said, psychic experiences (and acts) can potentially be explained (if not predicted) if we understand the various motivations, associations, impulses and

⁸ It is difficult to tell from Stein whether attitudes are instinctive or learned, she merely says they befall us.

meanings involved.⁹ That said, we can also never fully understand because we can never fully see all the conditions mixed into a particular experience or act.

6. Ego: while Stein continues to discuss the 'pure I' in these essay the terminology she uses is 'ego'. It is important not to think of the ego in the psychoanalytic terms we are used to. As far as I understand, the concept of the ego (as it is used in these essays) has not changed much from how the 'pure I' is used in *PoE* – i.e., as a generic site of consolidated I-ness that is not defined or qualified by any subjective attributes. Given what we have discussed regarding the consciousness of consciousness (the pure experience of consciousness), the ego is the origin of that experience.
7. Emotions: it is surprising how little Stein has to say about emotions here, particularly given their central place in the *Problem of Empathy*. On the one hand, emotions seem to be effected by life-power (one can feel joy less joyfully if depleted of life-power) but on the other they seem to be able to contribute to life-power: "joy is a new current, as it were, that gushes into the life-stream from elsewhere, "churns it up", influences its subsequent flow, and colours it in a determinate manner" (75). In this sense, emotions seem to be able to channel life-power into the psyche "from elsewhere" but also be affected by life-power like any other experiential content.¹⁰
8. Impulses: like inclinations (below) but more corporeal, instinctive and lacking any sense of goal. Examples include getting up to stretch after a long period of reading or drinking a glass of water after a long-walk. Impulses and inclinations are unwilled and can encompass thoughts and feelings that are unwelcome and/or undesired. Because impulses require some kind of fulfilment, they always present a certain expense of life-power.
9. Inclination: like attitudes, these are presuppositions that take hold of the psyche as it engages with various objects, acts and events. In doing so they bring the ego to various decision points – i.e., their very presence or emergence within the psyche force the ego into some kind of response. For example, when I was in Cairo I saw a woman sitting on the pavement crying with a smashed carton of eggs at her feet. My motivation is to help her (because I have inclinations about seeing someone in distress, I have certain attitudes about poverty and certain values around helping those that are poor). However, I remember that I recently went to help someone in a similar situation and had money stolen during the interaction. Suspecting a similar ruse, I am also motivated to be circumspect. My solution is to not bend down and assist her but to hold out some money as I pass. Here I do not turn my attention away from the grounding event (the woman on the pavement crying over eggs), nor do I give-in to my inclinations and repair the situation (I do not lift her up and help her buy more eggs). Rather I use my will and judgement to measure my various motivations and come up with a different decision. This is an example of will-power responding to a multitude of motivations. Will power draws upon life-power (and can affect life-power) but is not the same thing.
10. Judgement: the term Stein uses to identify the stance of a will vis-à-vis various inclinations, impulses and attitudes. Judgements are a matter of will-power and illuminate the freedom of the will in relation to the various conditionalities shaping the psyche. The key to understanding judgement (and hence the will) is two-fold. First Stein understands the ego as always placed in-between various motives and that this placement requires certain decisions. However, she does not understand those motivations as determining those decisions. This latter point is key. For Stein, decisions are a 'fiat!'. By this she suggests that they share something in common with impulse. Thus, while the ego is always in-between motivations and is (to some extent) under some obligation to understand their decisions rationally (in relation to cultural expectations regarding the appropriate ways to respond to 'known' motivations), its decision is always a matter of free will. To be clear, however, I understand 'free' not in the sense of being unfettered (Stein's whole essay surrounds the various motivational demands that engulf our being) but in the sense of there being something unpredictable or unknowable about our egoic choices. Thus, even if we understood (wholly and completely) all the

⁹ Again, we can see the obvious correlation here between Stein's phenomenology and psychoanalysis.

¹⁰ I suppose one could argue that this holds for all of the conditions Stein is discussing here. On the one hand they effect experience and on the other they are conditions that can be brought to experiential consciousness as content.

motivations that imposed themselves upon an ego (which is impossible), we still would still not be able to understand the free expression of the ‘fiat!’’. As Stein states, “even if more can be said for the doing than for the abstaining, the doing still requires my “fiat!” I can grant it according to the “weightiness”, but I can also grant it without carrying out any weighing of motives or, finally, when the motives look equally weighty to me. Thus, free acts presuppose a motive. *But besides that, they require an impulse that is not motivated itself* (55 my emphasis).

11. Life-power: a primordial or current within our bodies and the world that shapes how we experience experience. Most psychic conditions drain life-power (impulses, acts of will) but some replenish (emotions and other empathic experiences). Life-power can be replenished through external (infusions of life-power energy) and internal (rest, prayer, food, meditation) means. Stein suggests that acts of willing (particularly willing that goes against our inclinations, attitudes and impulses) are the most costly in terms of life-power.
12. Meanings: a key determinant in shaping a motivation. Certain acts, experiences and feelings take on conscious or latent meanings and, in doing so, shape various motivations. Meanings seemed to be powerfully tied to values.
13. Motivant: something that brings about an act. Not all motivations are brought to ‘givenness’ – i.e., are brought about or fully developed into a given or present act.
14. Rationality: Stein suggests that there is always a rationality behind our acts. If an act cannot be explained vis-à-vis understandable meanings, it may be understood as irrational. To be clear, Stein is not referring here to ‘Western’ rationality. The presumption here is that all humans try to understand and explain their actions. Thus, there is a rationality behind the demand to be subservient to certain Earth Beings among indigenous groups which motivates their various political and spiritual practices.¹¹
15. Receptivity: the psyche’s openness to energy flows. Because there are more active and passive ways of experiencing, we can talk about experiences that expend life-power and those that have no real impact. Learning a new language, for example, involves a high expenditure of life-power and can be depleting. But once the language is ingrained, it involves little life-power expenditure. The psyche can also gain life-power from others or indeed from rest and food which recharges us.
16. Understanding: similar to rationality, Stein is clear that understanding acts and motivations can only be done retrospectively. In her terms, we need to re-enact the motivational complex wholesale which properly speaking, can never be fully done. Thus, understanding is never complete. See discussion of cause above
17. Values: deep-seated perspectives within our core-personality that shape our perception of what ‘should be’ and what we want to bring about. For Stein values are shaped by how we reject or accept our attitudes, impulses and inclinations. Values also seem to be key to how the ego shapes itself. They are a central expression of the ego’s free will – its capacity to judge by ‘fiat!’. Finally they seem to operate as primal orientations for various motivations: “Within the sense of anything recognised as valuable, there inheres the notion that it simultaneously confronts you as something that *ought to be*....whoever brings a value to givenness (along with its non-existence and the possibility of materialisation) should set himself the goal of its realisation” (43, my emphasis).
18. The will: the central notion of freedom grounding Stein’s conception of a choosing human subject. The will is the centrifugal force shaping itself vis-à-vis the various attitudes, inclinations and impulses that emerge within the psyche. It is a source of human judgement and the source of core

¹¹ There are some interesting parallels here between the work of the anthropologist Viveiros De Castro who argues for a universalist epistemology (we all think the same) but diverse ontologies (the worlds we think about are radically different).

values. It also embodies its own kind of power (will-power). Will power is distinct from but related to life-power.