

# EDITH STEIN, PATRON OF EUROPE. MEDITATION ON PHILOSOPHY AS TESTIMONY

Mátyás Szalay

Instituto de Filosofía Edith Stein, Granada

szalayster@gmail.com

## *Abstract*

I am going to argue that ‘giving a testimony’ in as much as it points to philosophical and religious truths in specific manner is a pillar of European identity. Through this detailed analysis of the act of ‘testifying’ I pretend to describe some aspects of the philosophical and religious relevance of this phenomenon, trying to demonstrate its essential relation to philosophy. In the end I hope to give a better reformulation of the question: in which sense exactly ‘testifying’ is an essential element of ‘being European’.

*Keywords:* Conversion, Europe, Martyrdom, Phenomenology of Testification, Truth.

**EDITH STEIN, PATRONA DE EUROPA.  
MEDITACION SOBRE LA FILOSOFÍA COMO TESTIMONIO**

*Resumen*

Argumentaré a favor de la idea de que “dar testimonio” no solamente apunta a verdades filosóficas y religiosas de una manera muy específica, sino que también es un pilar de la tradición europea. A través de un detallado análisis fenomenológico del acto de “testificar” pretendo describir algunos aspectos de la importancia filosófica y religiosa de este fenómeno, y así intentar demostrar su relación esencial con la filosofía. Por último, espero poder replantear mejor la Pregunta ¿En qué sentido exactamente es que “testificar” es un elemento esencial del “ser europeo”?

*Palabras clave:* conversión, Europa, fenomenología del testimonio, martirio, verdad.

“In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me”.

~Jn 18, 37

„Wieviel Wahrheit erträgt, wieviel Wahrheit wagt ein Geist? Das wurde für mich immer mehr der eigentliche Wertmesser. Irrtum ist nicht Blindheit, Irrtum ist Feigheit... Jede Errungenschaft, jeder Schritt vorwärts in der Erkenntnis folgt aus dem Mut, aus der Härte gegen sich, aus der Sauberkeit gegen sich”.

~Nietzsche

*For Mary Seifert with gratitude*

### *1. The European Crisis and an Exemplary Life*<sup>1</sup>

It is often proclaimed in these days that Europe is in a deep crisis. It is not easy to describe the real nature of this crisis, but it is certainly not far from the truth to claim that the economic difficulties with which she is normally identified are not more than symptoms.

Twenty years after the profound political changes in 1989 that rendered possible the political and economic union, arises the question with respect to the cultural and religious identity that constitutes the real fundament of the union, with growing urgency.

The European identity is based on the fidelity to certain values of the European culture. To be sure it is a genuine philosophical task –rather than that of the particular sciences– to elucidate in a systematic manner what constitutes a community in general and more specifically what it means to be European. The answer, or at least its most important part, depends on how to determine the image of human and divine person that served as fundament into the western civilization (Reale, 2004: chap. 1 & 5).

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Certainly after a historical analysis, it is not sufficient to name and describe the values that the European culture recognized and brought to consciousness and that serve since then as measures of action and community life. This elucidation is only convincing if we demonstrate that these values, even though manifested historically with the utmost clarity in Europe, are indeed universal values. The condition of validity of this affirmation depends on demonstrating that they form a unity, i.e. a hierarchy of values and how they relate existentially to specific (real) life.

The analysis of some exemplary lives could meet both of these requirements. It helps to make us more aware of the fundamental values of the European identity and therefore to mitigate the crisis of values that characterizes Europe “at present” (Wojtyła, 2005).

History is full of personalities that bear fundamental values of European culture. Of these excellent figures that gave testimony of the highest (i.e. spiritual) values with and through the sanctity of their life the Patrons of Europe deserve a special attention. One of them, Saint Edith Stein, is even more distinguished not only because she is closer to us in time but also because, as a philosopher, she can be of great help in making a systematic resume of what ‘being European’ is. This general term signifies distinct values present in different dimensions of life.

In the following short reflection I will limit myself to one aspect of the life and philosophical activity of Stein that offers an essential characteristic of her work and her life: the activity of testifying. I will argue that ‘giving a testimony’ in as much as it points to philosophical and religious truths in specific manner is a pillar of European identity. Through this detailed analysis of the act of ‘testifying’ I pretend to describe some aspects of the philosophical and religious relevance of this phenomenon, trying to demonstrate its essential relation to philosophy. In the end I hope to give a better reformulation of the question: in which sense exactly ‘testifying’ is an essential element of ‘being European’?

## 2. Edith Stein as Patron of Europe

Nothing can elucidate and transform our perception of values as profoundly as life of sanctity that is at the same time an internally invigorating and generating power of an authentic community. Perhaps this is one of the intuitions expressed in the act by which John Paul II proclaimed in October of 1999 (together with Saint Bridget of Sweden and Saint Catharine of Sienna) Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross as co-patronesses of Europe (John Paul II, 1999). The *Apostolic Letter* insists that Europe as spiritual unity is unthinkable without the Christian roots and values.

These three women living in different parts and different historical *époques* followed the footsteps of the Holy Mary. Thanks to their exemplary lives they not only contributed a great deal to reunite Europe politically but also made possible to comprehend the truth expressed in the Psalm 127: “*Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain*”.

More than the civic or moral values, ultimately speaking the spiritual values are the existential foundation of any community, since the central meaning of all true community is not only to contribute to the perfection of its political subjects, but to help to realize the plenitude of personhood according to its most profound desire. This desire can't be satisfied by any means offered by the political community for it has an explicitly spiritual nature.<sup>2</sup>

With respect to Edith Stein the Holy Father underlines that the Catholic philosopher of Jewish origin became a symbol of the cultural and religious human pilgrimage that manifests at the same time the deepest tragedy and the most beautiful hope of Europe. Edith Stein discovered the religious truths through philosophy and she was faithful to them to her martyrdom. John Paul II formulates it in this way:

2 Any community and any political leadership that renounces this most important responsibility and pretends to achieve a 'value-neutral political power' is not only self-deceiving and self-destructive but promotes a false ideology. Behind this argument there is a false anthropology that reduces men to a mere 'social animal' forgetting about the ultimate and most important source of human identity: assimilation to the divine through perfection in love.

Finally, Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, recently canonized, not only lived in various countries of Europe, but by her entire life as thinker, mystic and martyr, built a kind of bridge between her Jewish roots and her commitment to Christ, taking part in the dialogue with contemporary philosophical thought with sound intuition, and in the end forcefully proclaiming by her martyrdom the ways of God and man in the horrendous atrocity of the Shoah. She has thus become the symbol of a human, cultural and religious pilgrimage which embodies the deepest tragedy and the deepest hopes of Europe (John Paul II, 1999).

Edith Stein became the patroness of the European and universal Christian culture and thus orients with her example the ages to come not only because she appropriated through her extensive studies certain philosophical and theological knowledge but also because with her martyrdom she gave testimony of moral and spiritual values. Her testimony allows us to approach her person through empathy and penetrate in the experience that is expressed in her vital history and oeuvre in order to appropriate something of what has been manifested to her as objective reality and data.

### *3. General remarks on the notion of 'testifying'*

At first sight it seems to me that testifying is a complex 'social act' made up of several transitive and reflexive acts. These acts form a specific essential structure since the intransitive acts form the basis of the transitive acts (Pfänder, 1933). Let us see:

1. The intellectual grasping of what is the object of the 'process', i.e. what value is questioned and invites us to 'give a testimony'. The act of giving a testimony is a certain response to a value and appears to be necessary when the relevant value is obscured or obfuscated at a certain situation. This value is in a way always in relation with the (human or divine) person. The value-response consists in different

conscious acts like capturing and affirming the value.<sup>3</sup> Even though it is directed to a reality that transcends to the soul, these acts are internal ones.

2. The act of testifying is based on a free decision to carry out this act. The act itself of the free will occur in two dimensions: the first is a response to being affected by the value. It is understood as a voluntary collaboration and therefore as an affirmation of the affection by the value. It manifests itself as a conscious taking side in face of the value (*Stellungnahme*). The second dimension –on the basis of the first– is the decision to execute an act as a consequence of which the person is going to testify for the value at stake.<sup>4</sup>
3. ‘To testify’ is not a mere response to the value, but it is considered as a response in an intersubjective context as well; therefore ‘to give a testimony’ is only meaningful in the presence of a (human or divine) person or someone who is endowed with the capacity of understanding it as testimony. It is an act that requires another person’s understanding of: (1) what is the object of the testimony, and (2) what is at stake with respect to this precise act of testimony. The giving of a testimony presupposes the presence of a witness. Therefore, to testify, according to its form, is a social act that is adapted to a dialogue, or it is better to say, allows for a community with others in the light of the manifested truth.
4. In this last sense, to ‘testify’ includes various acts of empathy. These acts of empathy enable us to find the adequate form and expression of testifying for a truth or value according

3 Using the expresión of Scheler *Wertsicht*, to see the good and *Wertfühlen*, i.e. to feel the good.

4 With respect to the disctiction of the two dimensions of free will, von Hildebrand formulates it as follows: „In der freien Sanktionierung oder Verwerfung affektiver Antworten berühren wir den tiefsten Punkt der menschlichen Freiheit“. (Hildebrand, 1973: p.378).

to the witness. However attuned our testimony should be, it is only in the first place a realization, and only secondarily a communication of a truth or value. The latter aspect as preoccupation for the reception of the testified content is often not even explicitly present in the consciousness of the acting subject.

5. As pointed out above, to testify is not a spontaneous but rather a pre-pondered free act; therefore it includes acts by which one understands and evaluates the situation, the grade of the requirement presupposed by the value in question. It also includes the election among different possible responses –in general all the types of deliberation that Aristotle places under the term “prudence”.

In order to give a more subtle characterization of the subject-object relationship characteristic for testimony let us see the following considerations.

1. The act of ‘testifying’ reveals a value and it pretends to give evidence of its existence. The witness intends to prove the universal validity of the value and points to an order (*ordo amoris*) required by the value in question. By doing so, it renders obvious the objective nature of the value. It is clear that if the value is valid in a merely subjective sense, it renders meaningless any kind of testimony, which deprived of its transcendent power, becomes a one-dimensional expression completely submerged in a social construct. A ‘testimony’ as a promotion of mere subjective values is nothing else than a cunning act<sup>5</sup> by which the subject tries to impose his own ideas on others. Instead of a power that creates communion, it would only be a sophisticated manipulative mean to reassure one’s hegemony. Although there might be such

<sup>5</sup> “La astucia, que supone una habilidad especial para conseguir un fin, bueno o malo, por vías falsas, simuladas o aparentes” (Royo Marín, 1962: p. 504).



acts worth dismantling by philosophical analysis, authentic testimony is not related to manipulation but to sacrifice: it entails assuming the responsibility for a self-revealing reality to the extreme of giving one's life; it is especially this act through which both the excellence and the objectivity of the value or truth becomes obvious, for it is shown as something that calls for a personal response by which the subject surpasses the horizon of the merely subjective goods.

The *martyrium* of Edith Stein shows that testifying could communicate such objective value or truth, the dignity and importance of which surpasses that of one's life. The recognition and affirmation of a hierarchy between testified truth and meaning of life is an act pertaining to the essence of 'testifying'. Becoming aware of the existential consequences of testimony in lights of the value that calls for a testimony marks the difference between a mere world-view and the *fundamental attitude* characteristic of testifier. A unique serenity separates the two moments before and after the value-experience. It requires testimony of how the world-perception is transformed and enriched by having appropriated value or truth. It is enough to recall here on the second navigation of Plato that led to his philosophical conversion and finally enabled him to testify (Plato, *Phaidon*: 99b-d, 100b-e).<sup>6</sup>

2. In order to understand the relation between testifier and value it is helpful to evoke at this point the figure of John the Baptist who rejected the admiration of his person when assigned himself the role of a mere testifier of something greater to come: "I am baptizing you with water, for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Mt 3,11). This claim of John

6 According to Giovanni Reale, Plato's doctrine on the ideas (and especially his story of the second navigation) is the *Magna Charta* of the European spirit (Reale, 2004, pp.53-55).

the Baptist sheds light on an essential aspect of testimony: his words and acts fulfil their meaning when not considered in themselves but representing a value (or a person) of infinitely higher dignity.

To testify therefore entails both, the insight into the real nature of value as higher than any specific personal realization might reach, and the acceptance of a hierarchical order of values. According to this hierarchy the value of the testifier's life is transformed and closer to perfection the more it assimilates and affirms the transcendent value through testimony. The meaning of most social acts (like forgiveness or gratitude) is constituted on the basis of expressions of inner life; in the case of testimony, however, its meaning is in no way reducible to the act of the testifier's self-expression: the meaning that is established by the testimony *radically* surpasses the meaning that is contained in the subjective reality of the testifier, for the testimony essentially consists in pointing to a reality that is transcendent for the testifier. In short, even if the act of testifying is always a personal act, it is not a person that is primarily manifested and expressed in the testimony, but the reality and validity of the testified value.

Having grasped this essential principle we can turn to describe the proper attitude of testifier. His attitude should be formed on the basis that he necessarily appropriates the intuited value only partially and that therefore the reality and the meaning of this value is always beyond expression.

Only somebody who is fully conscious of this existential status in front of the values and thus humbled by this unbridgeable gulf is capable to give authentic testimony. It is thus required to be conscious of the difference between a *value for me* (merely subjective) and *value in itself*, for the testimony intends to secure the validity of the good in itself –even though it promotes a value of which the existential significance is expressed precisely in the testimony. In order to do so the attitude of the testifier should be characterized by what I would call an 'ontological humility'. This special kind of humility (different

although related to social-humility) that bases itself on the recognition of the ontological predicament of human person when faced with transcendence, is expressed by the words of John the Baptist: *cuius non sum dignus calciamente portare* (Mt 3,11).

#### 4. Counterparts of the Phenomena: What it is not 'to testify'?

##### a) To give a false testimony

One way of identifying the real nature of a given phenomenon is describing the phenomena or acts opposed to it. One of these acts in our case is *false testimony* whose formal structure is almost the same. It consists similar to the one described above that are prerequisites to and makes up the act of testifying. The essential difference stems from the intentional object that drifts away from what is the intrinsic principle of the transcendent value. The intentional object of false testimony comes to existence through the distortion of a real value or truth in itself –mostly by depriving it from its transcendence. It leads to equally false testimonies if 1) one doesn't express or describe a value or truth in a faithful way or 2) if one promotes a truth or value replacing it or 3) if one tries to mask or cover the objective value or truth that is called for at a concrete situation. These false testimonies are often motivated by avoiding the sacrifice that a true testimony would imply.

Some false testimonies are given on purpose, others result from ignorance of the real nature of the given value or truth. In any case, the moral value of testimony essentially depends on the objectivity and veracity of its intentional object.

##### b) To renounce to testify

To renounce to testify is certainly also opposed to authentic testimony. One should not get confused about the moral evaluation of this phenomenon by the argument, according to which "whoever does

not testify is not doing anything morally relevant". The renunciation of testimony is based on a moral choice that deliberately leaves out of consideration or explicitly rejects the objective exigency, call and demand of a value or truth to be realized through testimony. Whoever consciously *renounces* to testify (rather than is simply ignorant of such exigency) must have had a previous intuition into the existence of such an exigency. Here arises a question: could it ever be that the requirement to testify is overridden by another morally relevant aspect that makes renunciation morally acceptable? The response to this question depends on the status of the value within the hierarchical order of values, i.e. in the *ordo amoris* as it is called by Saint Augustine, of whom Stein and Scheler adopted the idea. In the case that there is another value that has higher dignity among the competing goods in the consciousness, it is certainly more prudent not to testify the lower value but rather to follow the distinct call of the higher value or truth.

It has to be stressed however that one can rightly talk about 'renouncing a testimony' only if there is an objective exigency that comes from the truth or value in question. In this case not to respond to it, is always already a response, namely a rejection that is of moral relevance.

We not only have to respond to the demand of value or truth that is jeopardized but at the same time we owe an answer to the (human or divine) person who forms the community for which this value or truth is a constitutive part. Thanks to this *intersubjective character*, to renounce to testify is by the same token always a response to a person (either human or divine). This negative 'response' possesses the same moral weight as the testimony itself: it is capable of characterizing (in this case negatively) a person with respect to her morality or, in the case of religious testimony, with respect to her faith. Both (to testify or to renounce to do so) reveal like no other act our moral status, for it shows one's disposition and fundamental attitude towards the sphere of values. Thus a testimony is never just a particular answer at a given moment, but a response that is one of the keenest and most telling expressions of who we really are.

### c) Betrayal

The phenomenon that is not only opposed, but explicitly contradicts a moral value of a testimony is betrayal. It is worth highlighting that betrayal, just like testimony, presupposes a certain comprehension of the objective nature of its intentional object. The betrayer of a country of one's faith or of one's friend does not deny necessarily that the subject is conscious of the *value in itself* of these entities, or of the value of remaining faithful to them. Strangely enough the act of what is strictly speaking betrayal can't follow from the ignorance of a value for it already presupposes recognition of the value or truth in question. If ignorance is excluded from the possible motives of betrayal, the traitor is rightly despised even by those who benefit of his shameful act, for he incidentally betrays himself by renouncing a value that is a constitutive part of his personal identity. The betrayal stems namely from the fact of taking an inner stand (*Stellungnahme*) against the somehow recognized value, and acting on this decision. This could be explained by the fact that a mere perception of value or a mere knowledge of truth does not necessarily go along with giving credit to or even less with the full recognition of them; the appropriation of value or truth requires additional attitudes concerned with *openness*. This openness leads to inner acts by which the person fully acknowledges the relevance and dignity of the object in question and adjusts its acts to it—even if it requires a personal sacrifice. In all other cases, the value or truth remains merely external in the sense that it is not (fully) integrated in the personally apprehended meaning of life. The betrayal is due therefore to a certain *value-blindness* of the person. Due to the lack of original openness the traitor misinterprets the self-giveness of value or truth in terms of merely subjective values and is therefore unable to respond to their exigency. This falsification of a higher value leads the traitor to prefer as principle of his action a lower and more convenient value that does not imply any sacrifice, courage, or need of personal transformation, growth and maturation.

## 5. *The types of testimony*

There are several aspects to be distinguished in the various types of testimony. Two of them, however, are essential and are worth special attention. The first considers which type of value occupies the centre of the act; thus the difference in the nature of values is reflected in the nature of the different corresponding acts. The second aspect refers to a bond between the testified value and the testifying subject.

1. Let us recall here the Schelerian typology. In the emotional life there are sensual, vital, psychic and religious values which form a hierarchy (*Wertangordnung*). Thus the moral value of testimony depends mainly on the dignity pertaining to the testified value. The religious testimony is therefore obviously of a higher order than the rest of the types, for religious values not only touch on some aspects of life but they concern life as such in the most comprehensive sense. Since religious values are eternal, the validity of their testimony is of trans-temporal and trans-historical relevance. Testifying religious values could rightly include the sacrifice of one's own life (Plato, *Symposium*: 179b; Aristotle, *NE*: 1169a), as the Greek term *μαρτυρία* suggests, for there are higher values than self-preservation, since self-love is a fundamental but in no way the highest expression of love.
2. The second criterion of typology is the relation between testifier and value. The quality of this relation depends on the grade the testifier has appropriated the given value or truth, i.e. in which dimension of his soul the value plays a constitutive role. This is decisive for the authenticity of the testimony. The authenticity of testimony is due to the fact that the given value is not just momentary but super-actually present and therefore continuously executes its influence in our conscious life. Such presence however goes along with a transformation of all dimensions of the soul: *emotional, volitional, intellectual* and finally *spiritual*. If there is a previous

inner response to the value or truth that is a fruit of 1) being emotionally moved by the object that 2) requires a firm decision about doing humble service to it, based on 3) what we recognized and acknowledged in profound contemplation, and finally 4) this response is given by the whole soul, by everything we are, then there is doubtless an *authentic testimony* independent of how it is perceived or judged by others. Thus only a highly integrated person endowed with a harmonious soul is able to give authentic testimony of the highest values. To testify, therefore, more than anything, requires perfection in love.

It is quite evident that the relation between person and testified value depends on the general attitude one has towards the world of values in general. I mean by attitude a certain directedness and inner stand that originates in the self and goes on to the perceived intentional object. There are spontaneous attitudes whose existence is limited to the moment; others are more anchored in the soul and appear habitually whenever a certain object or value is perceived. Some attitudes (even if they appear spontaneously) are previously evaluated in their content and therefore are based on reflection and careful deliberation on what is good and bad. They shape the body of our moral life. However the spine of it is what is called a *fundamental attitude*: an open disposition to the highest value (*summum bonum*). In order to existentially clarify rather than just elucidate them intellectually, the object and the nature of fundamental attitude require *contemplation*. The main moral difference among humans is marked by the issue of whether or not they have a fundamental attitude, of whether or not there is an inner disposition that is well founded and stems from a firm *decision* of being directed by the highest value in all relevant inner and external acts.

The acquisition of a fundamental attitude is therefore a decisive step in every human life. It requires what Plato rightly calls a complete turn of the soul (*periagoge oles tes psyches*), that consists in the elevation of the view from the various goods of the visible world to the highest good beyond sensible reality. In order to be realized

fully such a radical turn should be reinforced by (a) a deepening love and desire for the One that is worth of full devotion, and (b) deepening reflection toward the ultimate principle and source of all goods. Real philosophy thus bears this double responsibility of guiding the soul *to perfection in love and wisdom*, but it is most able to do so through philosophers (real lovers of wisdom) that by their personal example show how exactly these two dimensions belong together in concrete situation.

In the case of a successful philosophical education that starts and culminates in the acquisition of fundamental attitude, all the faculties of the soul are related to *summum bonum*, and therefore to the concrete value or truth that is perceived at a particular situation. If it is the fundamental attitude that directs the testimony, it is a radically different case since all transitive and intransitive functions of the soul are fully exercised. The functions that refer to the soul herself get enhanced by contemplation, whereas the functions directed to the external reality develop through virtuous actions. The highest grades of authentic testimony thus realize a harmonious unity between contemplative and active life.

#### *6. The prerequisite of giving a testimony: the search for wisdom and the revised and testified life*

In order to give an authentic testimony one should be aware of its moral prerequisites. I limit myself to highlighting only the three most important ones.

##### a) The recognition of the objective character of value

All that appears in a certain sense as value, could in principle be an object of testimony. Independently of what the content of the intentional object of this act might be, it should be the objective value (and not a merely subjective derivation of it) that the testimony is directed to in order to realize its *raison d'être*. On the other hand, the representation of the subjective dimension of the testified value is also important



since it helps us to see the immediate motivation of the act and gives an example of concrete value-response. Due to the personal character of testimony as a witness of it one can approach the reality of testified value through the acts of empathy. The subjective dimension of the value represented in the testimony serves however only as a way to get closer to the *objective* content. The real persuasive power of the testimony comes from the transmitted value in itself.

In the case the testifier is not able to capture the difference between a 'value merely for him' and the 'value in itself' and what follows, the testifier is unable to manifest the relation between himself and an objective good for himself (von Hildebrand, 2006) in the concrete act of giving a testimony. Hence he is going to end up inevitably deteriorating the real message of testimony.

In order to be fully aware of the difference between 'merely subjective good' and 'objective good for myself', we have to be exercised in the praxis of deciphering the meaning of life. These meditations depart from our value-experiences trying to find within the subjective experience a meaning that is not subjectively constituted but is an objective self-given data, and thus an undeniable element of real discovery. These discoveries of real transcendent content are decisive in any clarification of the personal meaning of life. This insight is fundamentally opposed to the affirmation (and its consequences) made by Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit*. The German philosopher claims that the only preoccupation of the *Dasein* is his own being, his own existence, the realization of his own self according to his own values.<sup>7</sup> On the contrary, the meaning and realization of it depends on the recognition and reinforcement of objective reality through acts of love and knowledge; existence comes to its fullness inasmuch it assumes objective reality and approaches values in themselves. Only an open existence that is conscious of an external and absolute measure external to herself is able to testify.

7 Heidegger formulates it like this: „Sorge drückt sich in der Formel aus: es geht dem Dasein in seinem Sein stets um sein Sein selbst“ (*Sein und Zeit*, 41.o., Bd. 6o. 243.; Bd 2o, 405-406.o.).

b) The open existence; fundamental attitude and *metanoia*

Any authentic testimony requires an existence that is open to a reality that is independent from her. This openness to objective truth and values as a measure of actions is a primary precondition for any participation in wisdom. According to Plato, wisdom is not only a set of knowledge on the ultimate principles (protology)<sup>8</sup> of being but it is also the highest virtue. Only the soul that is elevated by practical and spiritual virtues can be acquainted with the highest metaphysical principles.

Plato gives in the VI Book of the *Republic* a very detailed and somewhat intimidating description of all the high exigencies of being a true lover of wisdom. I mention this only to call attention to the fact that, according to him, the access to real philosophical knowledge concerning the highest metaphysical principles is only given through radical conversion (*periagoge oles tes psyches*). The Platonic idea of *metanoia* that is, according to the “Check Socrates” Jan Patočka, the spiritual foundation of Europe consists in elevating one’s sight from particular goods towards the Highest Good as ultimate source of them. This radical change affects all faculties of the soul. The personal recognition of the highest good, and a life faithful to this experience, culminates in the act of self-giving in unconditional love to the Highest Good, thus in a full transformation of the human person. Certainly the most beautiful and precise expression of this metamorphosis by love is the fundamental attitude of the Holy Mary (mother of mankind) manifested in the words of encounter: *Ecce ancilla Domini* (Lc 1,38).

The metamorphosis of the person, generated by the Highest Good that is most worthy of our love, leads to real wisdom. In the above mentioned text on the necessary virtues for philosophers we find the principle for philosophical activity: *diligere veritatem omnem*

8 Plato talks about 3 principles in his *II. Letter* 312 e. He mentions four in the well known analogy of the line, in *Republic* 509d-510a, and five in the *VII. Letter* 342 b-d. In order to get a better picture of how the principles are related to each other see the metaphor of the fingers (*Republic* VII, 546b-c y 522e), where the “to pepton” symbolizes the Idea of the Good (Mezei, 2004).

*et in omnibus*. This maxim directs and orders the inner and external acts towards wisdom and gives rise to authentic testimony as well. Testimony does not arise spontaneously but is rather fruit of virtuous life and reflection, a life in the self-less and unconditional service of whatever appears as significant truth within the consciousness. At the same time testifying (together with strict methodological and passionate existential search for the truth) is part of the complex service by which truth is realized in all dimensions of human life and activity. This is expressed in the idea that is perhaps the most valuable heritage of Platonic philosophy: ‘care for the soul’.

c) The care for the soul and the revised life

To testify certainly presupposes both spiritual purity and poverty. The purity allows to receptively recognize rather than (‘progressively’) invent values and to be at the disposal to follow their call. Such disposition of radical openness is a fruit of spiritual exercises that could be summarized under the Socratic term *care for the soul*. The Delphic oracle (*gnothi sauton*, know yourself) is doubtless one of the most important sources of European wisdom. The part of European culture that is fundamentally directed to therapy and salvation of soul stems from the dramatic intuition according to which the human being is more than just material reality (Plato, *Alcibiades*: 127d),<sup>9</sup>

9 Michel Foucault gives a remarkable interpretation of the Platonic expression: “*Epimelesthai* expresses something much more serious than the simple fact of paying attention. It involves various things: taking pains with one’s holdings and one’s health. It is always a real activity and not just attitude. It is used in reference to the activity of a farmer tending his fields, his cattle, and his house, or to the job of the king in taking care of his city and citizens, or to the worship of ancestors or gods, or as a medical term to signify the fact of caring. [...] The rest of the text is devoted to an analysis of this notion of *epimelesthai*, “taking pains with oneself”. It is divided into two questions: What is this self of which one has to take care, and of what does that care consist?”

“First, what is the self (129b)? Self is a reflective pronoun, and it has two meanings. Auto means ‘the same’, but it also conveys the notion of identity. The latter meaning shifts the question from ‘What is this self?’ to ‘What is the plateau on which I shall find my identity?’ Alcibiades tries to find the self in a dialectical movement. When you take care of the body, you don’t take care of the self. The self is not clothing, tools, or possessions. It is to be found in the principle which uses these tools, a principle not of the body but of the soul. You have to worry about your soul—that is the principle activity of

it is a soul moved by the profound desire to become similar to the divine. Since this *yearning* to participate in divine perfection could easily be degraded to a primitive *desire* to possess different concrete goods the care for the soul consists partially in revising consciousness. Revision concerns both past and future. One has to recollect one's self from all distractive engagements through moral evaluation of internal and external acts and attitudes in order to keep longing steadfast in the trail towards its right object: the supreme good that surpasses all other goods in dignity and power (Plato: *Republic* 509b). The habitual revision of the consciousness also aims to adjust one's attitudes to the nature of its object so that one loves everything according to its worth and dignity.

In short: the care for the soul prescribed by Plato for lover of wisdom is a prerequisite of testifying as far as it is (even in the greatest sacrifice) an expression of the *happiness of the soul* for being close to what it longed and yearned for. The authentic testimony, despite its dramatic form is essentially 'rejoicing in value'. This makes understandable that, in its most profound sense, testimony is an expression of the soul that experienced that its fulfilment and its most perfect realization is the act of love as gift of the self.

## 7. *The dimensions of testifying*

### a. The religious testimony as sanctity of life

The testimony is a constitutive element of religion and spiritual life, for faith is not a private affair, nor is it a mere emotional issue, but

caring for yourself. The care of the self is the care of the activity and not the care of the soul-as substance. [...] The second question is: How must we take care of this principle of activity, the soul? Of what does this care consist? One must know of what the soul consists. The soul cannot know itself except by looking at itself in a similar element, a mirror. Thus, it must contemplate the divine element. In this divine contemplation, the soul will be able to discover rules serve as a basis for behaviour and political action. The effort of the soul to know itself is the principle on which just political action can be founded, and Alcibiades will be a good politician insofar as he contemplates his soul in the divine element" (Martin, L.H., 1988: pp.16-49; cfr. Foucault, 1994).

rather a fundamental relation that constitutes and entails –in the case of true religious devotion– a radical transformation of all other relations of the ego (1) with the self, (2) with other persons, (3) with the world of life. In this sense any authentic testimony expresses an intrinsic intention to transform all the three types of basic personal relations through and by the newly discovered meaning of the divine. The testimony of faith reflects how the transcendent meaning is sedimented in the soul and is realized in relation to us, to others, and to nature. The public affirmations not only elucidate the truth and relevance of religious values, but also manifest and make them present.

The Holy Scripture gives evidence of how spiritual life is essentially testimonial for it declares that the work of salvation done by Christ is a testimony of the Father and the Holy Spirit (Jn 8, 1-59). The disciples and the whole Church are called to penetrate in the meaning of this mystery and at the same time to testify whatever meaning becomes evident.

Given the fact that testimony of faith refers to the whole of reality as well as to transcendent and eternal values and truths, its validity is certainly not limited to any special issue or to any specific moment. It tries to express the ceaseless presence of the divine in human reality. Thus the religious testimony comes to perfection when the love of God can freely transform one's way of life to the degree that this person becomes a real (however opaque) image and reflection of God: she/he becomes a vivid testimony in person.

## b. Philosophy as testimony

With respect to philosophical testimony I would like to highlight two points: one concerns the dimensions of philosophical testimony; the second gives a general characterization of its proper object.

### b.1. The election of life

Due to the actual cultural deficit manifested in loss of meaning and decadence that assails philosophy, a discipline that lost her dignity and prestige long ago, it is important to remind here that philosophy

in her original sense is not merely an intellectual activity but rather a form of life (Hadot, 1987).

Aristotle helps us to re-establish this lost meaning. In the footsteps of Socrates, the Philosopher distinguishes the activity of the wise man based on reality from that of the pseudo-philosopher whose teaching is limited to mere words. In this latter case, the sophist is preoccupied with the appearance of things instead of penetrating inside them and revealing their true reality. As his arguments are based only on superficial intuitions, they are often misleading and false. The sophist does not worry as much about the truth of his discourse as he does about being persuasive. Thus he is not even afraid to use questionable or false arguments. Aristotle affirms that sophism is in many respect similar to real philosophy for it uses the same methods and its objects are roughly the same too. In book  $\Delta$  of the *Metaphysics* the Greek philosopher pins down the main difference concerning the life the philosopher chooses to live. He formulates it like this:

So too there are certain properties peculiar to being as such, and it is about these that the philosopher has to investigate the truth. An indication of this may be mentioned: dialecticians and sophists assume the same guise as the philosopher, for sophistic is Wisdom which exists only in semblance, and dialecticians embrace all things in their dialectic, and being is common to all things; but evidently their dialectic embraces these subjects because these are proper to philosophy. For sophistic and dialectic turn on the same class of things as philosophy, but this differs from dialectic in the nature of the faculty required and from sophistic in respect of the purpose of the philosophic life. Dialectic is merely critical where philosophy claims to know, and sophistic is what appears to be philosophy but is not. (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*: 1004 b17-27).

In the case of the sophist the election of life is determined by the fact that he is a 'man of words'. He could assign good aims as far as his devotion remains within the limits of what is good, useful or pleasant for him, in a merely subjective sense.

His teaching is dedicated to this aim without any real devotion and substance even if always wrapped in nice words. Aristotle underlines that the sophist receives remuneration for his teaching. This indicates, firstly, that he is not so much motivated by his own interest nor by the original *thaumadzein* to investigate the nature of things themselves, and secondly, that the success of his work consists in the recognition of the others and his remuneration and not in the already joyful discovery of truth. The philosopher, on the contrary, is motivated by the truth itself; he wants to discover the ultimate principles and is thus not satisfied with the mere properties of the things but wants to know their substance. His teaching is reflected in his virtuous life by which he testifies: it is indeed the same desire of wisdom that is present in knowledge and in love.

## b.2. Ascension and descension. Philosophy as search for and transmission of truth

As affirmed above, philosophical testimony is not exhausted by its scientific activity. The specific philosophical testimony, however, reveals the truth in a rigorous systematic and argumentative way. The philosopher, when testifying, does it in two radically distinct, and nevertheless essentially related ways: first fighting against the difficulties presented by false and superficial opinions, appearances and prejudices, while trying to reveal the true nature of things; secondly, by transmitting the discovered truth especially in its reference to the last principles. According to Plato the philosopher is an intermediary, who rises from the cave after his radical conversion<sup>10</sup> to the true reality enlightened by the Sun, that is the One. The task of philosophy according to Plato's allegory is however more complex, for it shows that the philosopher should actively participate in the salvation of others, i.e. he should return and descend to the cave in order to guide his friends to wisdom. Transmitting the truth is an

<sup>10</sup> The perhaps most interesting chapter of Alasdair McIntyre's work on Edith Stein is the one on three conversions. The author compares Edith Stein's conversion and its philosophical consequences with the radical change in the philosophical and religious vision of her three contemporaries: Lukács, Reinach, and Rosenzweig. (McIntyre, 2006).

essential act of friendship even if it is most often not a glorified activity. On the contrary, the messenger of higher reality runs the risk of being considered dangerous and worthy of elimination (Plato, *Republic*: 518a).

Thus, philosophical testimony has always two interrelated objectives: ascent to the truth and descent to transmit it. While giving us an image of the difficulties of appropriating the truth, the testifying philosopher guides us, disciples in dialectic form, step by step. Philosophical testimony helps the object of our original intuition to appear for itself and by itself while in the ascension.

It is due to this double nature of philosophical testimony that philosophy is at the same time the fundament of particular sciences and guidance that completes their investigations and synthesizes their results, showing the ultimate consequences of their discoveries.

#### *8. The merit and the special vocation of phenomenology with respect to testifying*

In order to investigate in what measure phenomenology could contribute to a philosophy that essentially includes the act of testimony it is worth recalling here the *principle of phenomenology*. According to this philosophical tradition (and especially according to the *realistic phenomenology*) philosophy only reaches the height and dignity of wisdom and can encompass the ultimate principles if it returns to the *things themselves*. Instead of dedicating itself to interpret or to dismantle or improve theories of the history of philosophy or simply (by renouncing its scientific rigour) to become nothing but literature, or even to construct pretentious all-encompassing systems, philosophy should be preoccupied with revealing and describing the true nature of the things in themselves.<sup>11</sup>

11 The relevant expression of Husserl are the following ones: „Wir wollten auf den Sachen selbst zurückgehen“ (*Hua*, IX/1, 10:13); „von Reden und Meinungen wegkommen“ (*Hua*, III/1, 41:11) „weg von sachfremden Vorurteilen“ (*Hua*, III/1, 41:13); „weg von bloßen Worten und bloß symbolischen Wortverständnis“, „von entfernten, verschwommenen, uneigentlichen Anschauungen“ (*Hua*, IX/1, 10:5-13).



Edmund Husserl, the intellectual father of phenomenology and master of Edith Stein, prescribes in his epoch-making oeuvre, *Logische Untersuchungen* as authentic attitude of philosopher (i.e. of phenomenologist) the formula: „Zurück zu den Sachen selbst!” (Hua, 19/1, 10, 13) Later, in the § 24 of the *Ideen I* Husserl elaborates this fundamental idea of philosophical investigation and calls it the ‘principle of all principles’: “...principle of all principles: that every originally presentive intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition, that everything originally (so to speak in its personal “actuality”) offered to us in “intuition” is to be accepted simply as what it is presented as being, but also only within the limits in which it is presented there. We see indeed that each [theory] can only again draw its truth itself from originary data” (Hua III/1, 51, 1:9).<sup>12</sup>

Thus phenomenology intends to investigate and describe the phenomena according to the originary data, i.e. as it is given through intuition to consciousness by itself and through itself. Through its ‘appearance’, it is the thing itself that determines the limits of its comprehension and interpretation. In this sense phenomenology in as much as it remains faithful to this principle and returns to things themselves and how they are in themselves, could be considered as the adequate method of testifying. For any philosophy based on this principle and guided by it, fully coincides with and is an excellent expression of what was described above as essential to authentic testimony.

### 9. *The European tradition and philosophy as testimony*

I tried to shed some light above on the fact that the European tradition is profoundly anchored in the praxis of ‘care for the soul’. This preoccupation comes to its most perfect form and adequate

12 The original text goes like this: „Am Prinzip aller Prinzipien: dass jede originär gegebene Anschauung eine Rechtsquelle der Erkenntnis sei, dass alles, was sich uns in der Intuition originär, (sozusagen in seiner leiblichen Wirklichkeit) darbietet, einfach hinzunehmen sei, als was es sich gibt, aber nur in den Schranken, in denen es sich da gibt, kann uns keine erdenkliche Theorie irre machen.”

expression in the act of testifying that is a unique expression of love or more specifically of a complete gift of the self: “man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself” (*Gaudium et spes*: n.24).<sup>13</sup> Thus we can assert that the true European tradition can’t be sustained unless revived if it turns its back to its roots and does not promote testimonial life, i.e. life in communion based on truth and directed to the gift of the self in love. In other words, if European culture wants to reinforce its identity it should look for theoretical and practical remedy in the philosophy that testifies wisdom and the exemplary life of saints.

If one is after the essence of Europe, it is more probable that he will find a ‘European spirit’ –writes Edgar Morin. This European spirit –the best part of which is manifested in European culture– was given birth by testimonies of excellent figures devoted to the highest moral and religious values. Thus the destiny of European culture depends essentially on the recognition and affirmation of their deeds and ideas. As a first step, we should follow the footsteps of those personalities who are examples of unconditional gifts of themselves, like Edith Stein, co-patroness of Europe. Her philosophical and religious testimony represents an existential expression of the very essence of European identity.

<sup>13</sup> The original latin goes like this: *plene seipsum invenire non posse nisi per sincerum sui ipsius donum.*

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