



A Phenomenological *Actus Essendi*? Hedwig Conrad-Martius and Edith Stein on Finite Existence

Daniel Neumann¹ 

Accepted: 4 February 2023 / Published online: 27 February 2023
© The Author(s) 2023

Abstract

In later Edith Stein and Hedwig Conrad-Martius, finite existence appears to be necessarily intertwined with infinite being. In response to this observation, this paper puts particular focus on the experience of finite being in order to address the specifically phenomenological (i.e., experiential) aspects of Stein's and Conrad-Martius' metaphysics. As a consequence, instead of pointing to eternal or infinite being, finite experience is understood to – less specifically – transcend itself. Using the notion of *actus essendi* (priority of existence over essence), I identify two ideas as specifically characterizing this transcendence: non-ownership of time (in Conrad-Martius), by which is questioned the coherence of inner time consciousness, as well as non-ownership of sense (in Stein), stipulating that the sense one intuitively and intellectually experiences in reference to objects is discovered, rather than made. Subsequently, the paper discusses how Stein's and Conrad-Martius' metaphysics of finite existence is reflected in their critical assessments of Heidegger's existential finitude.

Keywords Edith Stein · Hedwig Conrad-Martius · Phenomenology · Metaphysics · Existence

Hedwig Conrad-Martius and Edith Stein have both developed unique accounts of what it means for a finite thing to exist. First and foremost, temporal existence is ontologically characterized by obtaining only from moment to moment, such that *real* duration cannot adequately be predicated of existing things. Only eternal being *is* actually (in the sense of being *in actu*). It remains what it is through, or even beyond time. For both Conrad-Martius and Stein, finite being is necessarily intertwined with

✉ Daniel Neumann
daniel.neumann@uni-paderborn.de

¹ Center for the History of Women Philosophers and Scientists, Paderborn University, Technologiepark 21, 31000 Paderborn, Germany

infinite or eternal being, whether as its image (*Abbild*), or its ontic opposite (see Stein, 2006: 45 and Conrad-Martius, 1963: 190). This observation serves as the starting point for this paper, which will investigate in what way a phenomenological account of finite being *as such* can be found in both phenomenologists. More precisely, what is the experience of the momentariness of existence in itself, without its relation to an infinite being that somehow grounds, preserves or, as Conrad-Martius puts it, “saves” (see Conrad-Martius, 1963: 169) it from moment to moment?

The finite being in question is thus anthropological and existential (i.e., mortal man): it is marked by its difference to infinite being, as well as by the finitude that its existence implies. What I want to show through a joint reading of Stein and Conrad-Martius is that these negative determinations of finite being can be conceived in positive terms when they are viewed through a phenomenological lens. In other words, I want to answer, with Stein and Conrad-Martius, the question of what it is like to finitely exist in the face of a transcendence that ontically and metaphysically surpasses the subject.¹ In the phenomenological context, this viewpoint runs counter to the existential phenomenology of Heidegger, where transcendence is related to one’s own finitude. The *tertium comparationis* here will be the respective notions of *Augenblick* in Stein and Conrad-Martius on the one hand, and Heidegger on the other.

The motivation behind inquiring into the experience of finite existence is thus threefold: Firstly, it allows for bringing into sharp view the specifically phenomenological aspects of Stein’s and Conrad-Martius’ metaphysics as they are here being discussed from a finite, that is, *experiential* point of view. Secondly, it allows for highlighting similarities between Conrad-Martius and Stein by focusing on the transience of temporal existence, which they both take to be central to their phenomenology of temporality, as opposed to their respective concepts of infinite or eternal being, whose actuality they understand quite differently.² Thirdly, the focus on finitude allows for assessing their difference to Heidegger’s existential philosophy, whose finite mode of existence both phenomenologists find to be, at its core, nihilistic and atheistic. This raises the question of how the experience of finite temporality, in both Conrad-Martius and Stein, points towards its own transcendence *without* taking the form of a belief in something extra-phenomenological: an *existential* “transcendence in immanence”.

To conceive of this transcendence, I will explore the role that the Thomistic concept of the *actus essendi* plays in Conrad-Martius and Stein.³ Simply put, the *actus essendi*, or act of being, can be understood as the fact that existence, and in the case of finite beings, temporal existence, is what characterizes existing beings over and above anything else, and especially more so than any essential features one may

¹ Whether this transcendence be specifically based on faith in a transcendent God or in the belief of an objective, perduring world is of secondary importance here.

² See Stein’s comments on this very issue in Stein (2006: 45). For a discussion of this difference in Stein’s and Conrad-Martius’ concepts of infinity and eternity see Hart (2003: 97–106).

³ While the use of this concept could be justified in the context of Conrad-Martius’ and especially Stein’s adoption of Thomistic ideas, here it is not developed out of a biographical or historical consideration but used as an interpretative tool. The *actus essendi*, as it is subsequently applied to a phenomenological understanding of the metaphysics of finitude, is thus not to be confused with Stein’s or Conrad-Martius’ interpretation of the philosophy of Aquinas.

ascribe to them. As Étienne Gilson, a neo-Thomist who was known to Stein (see Tommasi, 2003: 112) and possibly to Conrad-Martius puts it: „We do not say of any object that it *is* because it is a *being*, but we say, or should so conceive it, that it is a *being* because it *is*” (Gilson, 1994: 38f.).⁴ The most important feature of finite being therefore is its existence and the phenomenological task would then be to describe the role that *existence as such* plays in our experience of other temporal objects, as well as in our own finitude. Insofar as finite existence is only possible as unceasing actuality, a phenomenological account of temporality as perpetual *actus essendi* might bring us closer to what Conrad-Martius and Stein would consider the experience of finitude in itself; a finitude which is neither dialectically determined by eternity nor by nothingness. One of the key results here will be that finite experience, in Conrad-Martius and Stein, relies for its coherence on factors that constitutively transcend the experiencing ego: this will be addressed as the non-ownership of time and of sense, respectively.

This paper will proceed in four steps: In the first part, I will characterize finite temporality in Conrad-Martius as unceasing actuality. The questions here are: How is this actuality structured in itself? How does my experience of time as an extended flow of past, present and future align with or contradict the ontological fact of nowness? Can the ontic nowness of being be reconciled with this flow as *experienced finitude*? The second part focusses on Stein’s take on temporal existence, especially as it relates to the actualization of essences. Famously for Stein, finite being by itself already points to infinite being. The question here is how the experience of finitude prepares this dialectical move, and how it can be understood on its own terms. In the third part, I will discuss how both accounts can be understood as involving the *actus essendi*, that is, as philosophies of temporality in which the metaphysics of being form a direct part of experience. Fourthly, I will discuss how Conrad-Martius’ and Stein’s accounts of finitude differ from Heidegger’s existential philosophy, especially in light of their own criticism of it.

Conrad-Martius and Time as Unceasing Actuality

Hedwig Conrad-Martius’ philosophy radically pulls the rug from under our experience of time. Whereas we imagine time to be extended both into the past and the future based on an ever shifting “now,” ontically, the situation is much more precarious. According to Conrad-Martius, we temporally exist only for the fleeting moment in which our being is set over and against nothingness. We do not remain in time. Instead, we exist only in punctiform actuality. These moments of actual existence do not connect to afford us the seamless flow of time we experience. And this is necessarily so because time only ever *is* this specific moment which comprises the finite existence of beings. Time is a movement of discreet instances of actuality. Every extension of this moment beyond this very actuality is by nature purely imaginary, pertaining to our capacity to remember and expect, but not to our ontic being.

⁴ For a discussion of the differences in approach to Aquinas see Avé-Lallemant (2003: 75). For a hermeneutical approach to affinities between Stein and Conrad-Martius see Miron (2021).

Within the phenomenological tradition, this approach may seem unusual, especially considering that Husserl's investigations of inner time consciousness were concerned with bringing to light those structural features of temporal experience that Conrad-Martius deems to pertain to mere phenomenality. Her real-ontological approach focusses on the real being that is implicated in the passing of time. Viewed from the standpoint of ontic facticity, her suggestion is that we can speak of time only as the moment in which one's existence and time itself "touch" in a singular point (see Conrad-Martius, 1963: 113).⁵ Therefore, the presence that I experience does not properly "belong" to me but rather effects my momentary existence coming out of nothingness and being threatened, in its constant surging forth, to disappear into nothingness again.

This dramatic description serves to highlight the ultimate intention of Conrad-Martius' philosophy of temporality, which is to open our eyes to the *Augenblick* as the only pertinent form of reality, whereas projections and projects turn out to be precarious bridges into the nothingness of the inactual dimensions of past and future (see Conrad-Martius, 1963: 183). What we have to understand is the provisional character of these projections, not just because they represent a reality that is *not yet* actual, but because they are based on an imaginary concept of time, a time which can *never* become real in the way we envision it. What is real is rather God's sovereignty which presides over the unceasing actuality of finite being. To "authentically" experience time is to trust in the safeguarding of one's own existence from moment to moment:

Sobald die Kreatur die Angst und Gefahr der Momentaneität, die in der konstitutiven Spannung zwischen Sein und Nichtsein gründet, direkt und zeitlich überwinden will, in dem sie in die Zeit hinein sich zu sichern [zu ‚sorgen‘!] unternimmt, baut sie im *absoluten* Sinne ins Leere. Jedes solche in das Zeitliche und die Zeit hinein Bauen – und es *muß* und kann und darf geschehen, solange das Endgültige noch nicht da ist! – *bleibt* konstitutiv ein Provisorium, dessen Bestätigung *oder Durchstreichung* von Augenblick zu Augenblick Gottes Souveränität neu anheimgestellt werden muß. Denn nicht der zeitliche Bau kann und darf unsere Sicherung sein, sondern allein die Bereitschaft, Gottes Willen zu tun. Gerade das, wovor die Kreatur Angst hat, der Augenblick, ist ihre Rettung! Denn hier wird sie fort und fort vom ewigen Leben selbst geborgen. Hier ist alles möglich. Aber nur hier. (Conrad-Martius, 1963: 183)⁶

⁵ I will draw primarily on Conrad-Martius' early text on the ontology of time, initially published in two parts in 1927 and 1928, which was also known to Stein at the time of her writing *Finite and Eternal Being*. It is worth mentioning that Conrad-Martius, in a late monograph on time, expanded her views with a Neo-Aristotelian philosophy of nature (see Conrad-Martius, 1954). Many of the central ideas to be discussed here remain in place with one of the most important conceptual additions being a "trans-physical" sphere which explains the world's perpetual motion into existence (see Hart, 2020: 167–177).

⁶ "As soon as the creature wants to overcome the fear and danger of momentariness, founded in the constitutive tension between being and non-being, in a direct and temporal manner, by safeguarding itself ['concerning' itself!] in and into time, it builds, *absolutely speaking*, into the void. Every attempt to build (into) temporality – and it *must* and may happen, as long as the final has not arrived yet! – *remains* constitutively a stopgap, whose confirmation or annulation from moment to moment depends anew on God's sovereignty. For it is not the temporal dwelling that can and may save us, but only the readiness to do God's will. It is exactly what the creature is afraid of, the moment, which saves it! For here it is continu-

This passage, taken from the last pages of Conrad-Martius' early treatise on the ontology and metaphysics of time, opens a series of questions which the preceding investigation had only intimated. They all concern the experience of finitude and the complementary trust in time. How to live in the momentariness of actual existence as opposed to a continuous flow of time? What does the readiness to "do God's will" entail in terms of this momentariness? How does the present save us? At the end of the text, the real-ontological investigation thus takes a sharp existential turn, inevitably alluding to some Heideggerian ideas (more on that later), but without giving a full picture of what it means to live in accordance with the facts of ontic temporality. The task of the following is then to read some of the key notions of temporality in light of these existential concerns.

Importantly, Conrad-Martius strictly distinguishes between the actuality in which one's being is momentarily saved from nothingness (ontic now), and the momentary now of the living present (phenomenal now) (see 1963: 118f.). In trying to understand the implications of the ontic analysis for experience, we thus have to be careful not to conflate different levels of being. One cannot live through (*erleben*) the unceasing actuality as the passing of ontic time, whether by focusing on the present moment (*Augenblick*) or by observing how the content of the experienced now continuously changes. Thus, while it may seem as though Conrad-Martius derived her concept of ontic temporality from the transience of experience, it is rather the other way around: the momentary ontic actuality is the basis for any experience of duration. Time has to *be* in order to be experienced. To see how this is so, one has to consider how time is constituted by existence.

Here, it is essential to note that time should not be conceived of as a container to be filled up by changing and accumulating content. Existence is not *in* time as something encompassing it. Rather, time is the formal dimension which is constituted by the actual movement – or the movement of actuality – of being (see Conrad-Martius, 1963: 123). The momentary movement from nothingness to being itself is existence. In this sense, every being has *its own time* because no time can be comprehended though another, time is inseparable from existence. But this phrasing may still be misleading: it is not as if every entity exists in its own time, but that we can only speak of the entity (in a real-ontological sense) insofar as it is a becoming (*ein Werdendes*) which, in becoming, constitutes time (see Conrad-Martius, 1963: 140). To put it in extreme terms, (ontic) time is a consequence of finite existence. One may thus begin to see more clearly why the experienced "now" is not to be identified with the actuality of being: phenomenal time already acts as a medium in which a now makes sense *as now*: time is formally pre-constituted. By contrast, since ontic time is a consequence of finite existence, we cannot predict what time *is* without knowing the actual being constituting it. Of course, we can make general statements about the temporality of finite things, such as the fact that they have beginning and end, but this will not allow us to address their proper mode of temporal existence.

From these characterizations I want to extrapolate a key feature of finite being's existence, namely its "non-ownership" of time: Because time does not exist before

ously held by the eternal life itself. Here, everything is possible. But only here" (Conrad-Martius, 1963: 183; all translations are by the author).

the entity exists, existence “never reaches itself” in time. It cannot take possession of itself in a real way, but only phenomenally through what we might call with Husserl retention and protention. Even if the entity exists in its own time, insofar as time is a formal dimension of its own existence, it does not *have* it. Implicated here is a contradiction that has to do with the Conrad-Martius’ notion of substance: on the one hand, a finite entity, being a substance, exists on its own ground, but on the other hand, it remains, as actual being, constantly on the verge of nothingness. In other words, the self-subsistence that allows one to speak of the being of the substance is at the same time constantly threatened by non-existence.⁷ In existing, finite beings are inherently impermanent substances.

This is the point where the discussion can transition from the ontological to the existential level, by asking how the ontological contradiction between permanence and impermanence translates into experience. We may start by noting the difference between the idea of “passage” in ontic and in phenomenal time. Phenomenally, the passage of time, as a series of now moments, is framed by an immediate past and future. In other words, the now moment is determined by what came before it and what comes after it, to the point where we can think of this now as infinitesimally small, being the line that separates, or rather connects, past and future. Constituting passage are not so much a series of infinitely small now moments, but rather an extended series of actions which, as requiring retention and protention, phenomenally imply past and future. It is not the present moment as such that passes in phenomenal time because to phenomenally conceive of this moment, one has to grasp what is already beyond it.

The passage of ontic time is the direct opposite: here, what passes are the now moments and only these. Ontic time is made up of moments of actuality, and any form of potentiality, such as phenomenal expectation or remembrance, is to be radically excluded from it. As Conrad-Martius stresses, it is only in the form of ontic time that we grasp the present *as such* (see 1963: 124). But what does this present actually comprise? The problem is of course that as soon as we try to envision or imagine this actual present, we do so in phenomenal terms. Any moment of actuality could potentially be separated into smaller moments. The real movement of time is not beholden to the time we can measure or imagine. One could even make the case that we are fundamentally unable to intuit the time that Conrad-Martius designates as ontic, seeing as we are so accustomed to the passage of time from past to future or future to past.

This may be one of the reasons why in the course of the investigation, the difference and incommensurability between ontic and phenomenal time only ever increases. In one of the rare moments in which an interaction or a transition between both levels is intimated, Conrad-Martius states that the real passage of time is experienced as the past being irretrievable, or rather, the unattainability of the past is a *consequence* of the ontic passage of time (see 1963: 135). This hint may afford us some further

⁷ It is interesting to note that Conrad-Martius’ use of “being” and “existence” is somewhat ambiguous in its relation to entities. On the one hand, it is entities which exist, but on the other, it is *existence itself* that the entities (almost or barely) reach (see Conrad-Martius 1963: 106f.). Likewise, the author is very emphatic that substance underlies its own existence, yet actually existing entities are said to only touch *being itself* in a single point (see Conrad-Martius, 1963: 113).

considerations about the relationship between ontic time and experienced finitude. Is there a causal connection suggested here? It would seem to me that the unattainable past cannot be considered a *direct* effect of ontic passage of time – seeing that we do not have a concept of the ontic past, which is rather simply *nothing* – but only an indirect one. Because real existence can only ever be actual, what is inactual cannot be real and is therefore unattainable. Of course, Conrad-Martius would not deny that we can “attain” the past by remembering what is not actual anymore, or that the past in the form of habit and the future in the form of expectation have a real effect on the present (see 1963: 130 and 136). But this present constitutes a phenomenal now. By contrast, in terms of ontic time, one has to say that *we cannot even attain our own present*, that what one calls in phenomenology the “living present” flies in the face of the ontic situation.⁸

To live with the knowledge of this unattainability changes our perspective, and this is most pertinent to the experience of finitude. To experience the actuality of existence, I have to bracket the protentive-retentive structure of the present. Radical unattainability excludes everything but the actual present, i.e. the *Augenblick*. The question is how we can phenomenologically investigate this present. Can there be an *epoché* directed towards ontic actuality? My suggestion is that the *actus essendi* can be helpful in conceiving of such an *epoché*, and therefore be of use in understanding Conrad-Martius’ philosophy of temporality in experiential terms. The *actus essendi* affords a view of being which most clearly brings into focus the facticity of (dis)continuous, actual becoming, abstaining as much as possible from the unfolding of being in phenomenal terms. It is the “absolute” fact of existence that most clearly refers to the ontic structure of finite existence as Conrad-Martius describes it.⁹

This will be further discussed in the third part. In the second part, I will consider Edith Stein’s take on finite existence, which, in its focus on the difference between essence and existence, affords us a different approach to the *actus essendi*.

Edith Stein on Temporal Existence and Non-Temporal Essence

Similar to Conrad-Martius, Edith Stein’s considerations on temporality demarcate an absolute limit between presence and non-presence, a limit from which the main ideas about finite existence can be unfolded. It is again a nothingness in the face of which we grasp our own finitude. Stein understands this nothingness not as excluding existence proper, but as fundamentally marking it: insofar as I am a temporal being, I constantly find myself between being and nothingness, as well as – and this is crucial – between actuality and potentiality. While in Conrad-Martius, actuality is opposed to nothingness, in Stein, it is opposed to potentiality. What is potential is related to the being’s essence, that which the being is in itself over and above its temporal realiza-

⁸ In this sense, one could say that Conrad-Martius anticipates Derrida’s critique of Husserl’s self-presence, although the ensuing impossibility to be present to oneself is interpreted quite differently.

⁹ This aligns, as far as I can see, with Irene Breuer’s reading of the *actus essendi* in Conrad-Martius, which refers to a potential to exist that is not reducible to the thing’s essence. It is the act of being with which the entity exists out of its own ground, in other words, with which it actualizes a potential that is based on its substantiality, but independent of its essence (see Breuer, 2021: 384).

tion. One of the main tasks of this part will be to investigate how finite experience is understood as unfolding one's essence, and how essence and finitude are related more broadly.

To begin delving into these issues, it is useful to consider Stein's notion of *Augenblick*, which is equally important as it is in Conrad-Martius. As we saw above, the *Augenblick* turned out to be the most authentic mode in which finite existence manifests itself. In the *Augenblick* we are, to speak with Conrad-Martius, closest to God, and therefore closest to our own real being. A similar thought is to be found in Stein:

Das ‚aktuelle Sein‘ ist in dem Augenblick, in dem es ist, etwas von der Art des Seins schlechthin, des vollen, das keinen Wandel der Zeit kennt. Aber weil es nur für einen Augenblick ist, ist es auch im Augenblick nicht volles Sein, seine Hinfälligkeit steckt schon in dem augenblicklichen Sein, dieses selbst ist nur ein ‚Analogon‘ des ewigen Seins, das unwandelbar und darum in jedem Augenblick volles Sein ist: d. h. ein ‚Abbild‘, das Ähnlichkeit mit dem Urbild hat, aber weit mehr Unähnlichkeit. (2006: 42)¹⁰

In the *Augenblick*, finite being is similar (or, to use a Thomist term that is also in line with Stein's discussion, "analogous") to eternal being.¹¹ For this instant, it does not change but completely is *what* it is. All the potential of the finite entity finds its utmost expression in the instant as it could not be any more actual. But then again, in the *Augenblick*, finite being is only *like* eternal being, a mere image of it, despite its being fully actual. Why is this so? This is the case, as Stein says, because it is only actual *for* this instant. Thus, even though finite being is fully actual, its actuality is threatened and even fractured from the inside out. Compared to God's existence *in actu*, the actuality of finite beings is merely the most extreme case of potentiality, being momentarily actualized.

The actuality of finite beings can be established in ontological as well as experiential terms. To start with the latter, Stein finds that a finitely existing entity experiences being under a double aspect, namely as being *and* as non-being. If I focus on my own temporal mode of existence, I notice that the being I am now is always already different (see Jani, 2021). Here, it is important to note that Stein does not conceive of this in terms of a *cogito* or a *pure I* that would itself remain unaffected by what it observes. On the contrary, I *am* the very being that I understand to be in constant change, I am existentially implicated in the simultaneous present and non-present of my experience. In other words, I am "swept along with" the time that I understand to pass from moment to moment. From this mediation arises – as its opposite – the idea of a "pure being" that subsists beyond change. The pure actuality of eternal being is analogous to the "impure" actuality I experience as my own.

¹⁰ Actual being is, in the moment in which it is, akin to being as such, whose fullness does not change through time. But because it is only for the moment, it is not full being in the moment either, its fugacity is already implied in its momentary being, itself merely an 'analog' to eternal being, which is immutable and thus full being in every moment: i.e., an image, having similarity with the archetype, but being overall much more dissimilar to it.

¹¹ For more on the relationship between scholastic and transcendental philosophy regarding truth see Jani (2021).

In ontological terms, my actuality is impure because it is based on, and arising out of, potentiality. For Stein there is a scale ranging from pure actuality, pertaining to God only, to pure potentiality corresponding to unformed matter (something which by definition cannot be actual) (see Jani, 2021: 46). Somewhere in between these two extremes are finitely existing beings such as humans. Humans successively unfold their individual essence in accordance with their already actualized abilities, their “life force” (*Lebenskraft*) and their surroundings (see Stein, 2005: 262f.).¹² In a general sense then, my actuality is impure because it is only ever a partial expression of the essence that I strive to unfold. While “I am here” in the present, this “me” is not all that it can be: I have not realized all of my correlative potential – which is impossible, as essence and existence pertain to different levels of being (*Seinsebenen*). This also means that existence, as a realization of essence, cannot fully “reach itself,” a motive that we have already encountered in Conrad-Martius.

But how exactly does this necessary incompleteness translate itself into experience? How do I experience myself as continuously unfolding my essence? And how is this essence in turn affected by my existence? In following this question, I will take up an important distinction between Stein’s and Husserl’s concept of essence which Daniele de Santis has recently alluded to. To put it shortly, as a result of his eidetic method of finding the essences as the invariants of perceived and imagined objects, Husserl develops a notion of essences as static. They are static because we come to understand objects of experience as being correlative to theses unchanging essences (see De Santis, 2021b: 250). The correlation between essences and the objects they are essences of cannot become subject to change as it is the static or invariant features of the object that allows us to intuit the essence in the first place.

By contrast, Stein conceives of the essence as dynamic because it is itself subject to change: the essence does not just comprise an unchanging set of properties, but also those features that pertain to the subject insofar as it is changing (see De Santis, 2021b: 250). In terms of finitely existing beings, one finds in Edith Stein the idea that a person has an unchanging essential core that makes them what they are, as well as essential features which appear in the empirical unfolding of the person.¹³ The idea that there is an essence that dynamically shapes my temporal experience is one of the ways in which Stein answers Conrad-Martius’ conundrum of momentary finite existence: while I actually exist only from moment to moment, and while my being is only ever given to me for a point in time, I experience how an “immemorial past,” namely my essence (as well as other essences), finds expression, for instance in my current act of joy (see Stein, 2006: 51), thereby undergirding the actuality of ontic (or empirical) existence.

What gives actual existence its coherence, what stops the “pure I” from collapsing into empty actuality, is itself non-temporal, that is, essential. My feeling of joy is not simply the expression of my singularity. Joy is something in itself, ultimately it is

¹² I cannot here delve further into Stein’s anthropology of the person.

¹³ As a historical side note, the concept of “core of the person” does not derive from Husserl’s invariance of essences but has to do with Stein’s reading of Jean Hering’s *Jahrbuch* text see Hering (1921), and possibly his dissertation (see De Santis 2021a: 444f.).

the sense that makes every instance of joy what it is.¹⁴ When I feel joy, I partake in a general sense that I share with others, as it is the same for each of us to be joyful. And yet, this joy is not akin to a Platonic idea that I merely “happen to realize”. In as much as I am able to feel this joy, it has to be considered part of my essence as well, for I am prone to a certain kind of joy under certain circumstances. In other words, what realizes itself in and through my existence is simultaneously general and individual. But one has to be more specific here.

The joy (or joyfulness) as a general sense of joyful acts on the one hand, and the joy as part of my essence on the other, refer to two different meanings of potentiality: I am potentially happy, or joy has a potential being, because I can *actually* become joyous (because of my essence). But I can actually become joyous because there is a general sense in which joy can be actualized. Stein finds this “joy in itself” to be adequately rendered by Aristotle’s term of *to ti en einai*, “that what is was to be,” seeing that this expression suspends the difference between past, present and future (see Stein, 2006: 88f.). This gives us a somewhat more concise idea of the non-temporality that becomes temporally actualized: on the one hand, my experience of joy, when regarded according to the “pure I” of experience, can itself be separated into discontinuous now-moments that I successively live through (see Stein, 2006: 51–57). When regarded, on the other hand, as the actualization of “joyfulness as such,” my experience turns out to be coherent because it is both of the general sense of joy *and* it unfolds the personal sense in which this joy is typical for me, or arises out of the singular circumstances that make me a joyous individual. The phenomenological question then is: how can I describe the way that this general and individual sense is at work in my experience? And how does this sense bridge the discontinuous moments of actuality that make up my finite existence?

While in *Ewiges und endliches Sein*, Edith Stein is primarily concerned with the possibility of finite beings to cognize and participate in the non-temporal being of essences and their metaphysical status, declaring that we come to know essences *from out of our own temporality* (see 2006: 98), the question I am concerned with here is rather how these essences affect, or even constitute, our sense of temporality. One can see Stein reflecting on this issue in a fragment entitled *Wort, Wahrheit, Sinn und Sprache*. Here, we find a distinction which corresponds to the difference between the general sense (e.g., of joy) and its individual actualization, namely the distinction between the individual sense that is implicated in my intuition (*Anschauungssinn*), for instance of a tree, and the objective or general sense of the essence “tree” (see Stein, 2014: 76). In the fragment, Stein describes how we come to grasp the objective sense through our individual, incommensurable intuitions, our *Anschauungssinn* (see 2014: 78).¹⁵ What I want to unpack here is that the non-temporal, sense-conferring essences

¹⁴ In technical terms, joy is an essentiality that is realized in joyful acts. Since I cannot go into Stein’s reading of Jean Hering from whom she adopts the terminology, I will try to describe these ontological ideas in more general terms. Likewise, I cannot consider here the extensive ontological vocabulary that Stein develops to argue for the relation between eternal and finite forms of sense, for a succinct account see Jani (2018, 157–165) and Borden Sharkey (2016).

¹⁵ A more thorough discussion would also have to consider how objective sense can be expressed or grasped through verbalization and language proper, the specifics of which I cannot consider here.

do not simply pertain to an ideal realm beyond experience, but that, by contrast, our individual, incommensurable intuitions are already informed by them.

To see this more clearly, let us consider as an example the act of seeing a tree. When I perceive the tree, what I live through is not merely a series of discontinuous moments of actuality or a series of disjointed sensual impressions correlative to a “pure I”. Instead, what I perceive already contains an *Anschauungssinn*, it has a sense that informs the aspects of my intuition. The color of the leaves, the swaying of the twigs and the roots that have begun to grow above the ground – all of these characteristics are part of what it is to be a tree. What I successively experience in my perception of the tree refers to an objective sense, that of the tree as such. The more I see of *this* tree, and the more trees I see throughout the course of my life, the better I become acquainted with the objective sense of the tree, a sense which does not depend on my perceptions and which is never actualized in itself but only in intuitions, words and thoughts. The essence “tree” in itself as objective sense is actualized and more or less abstractly explicated by perceptual and intellectual acts (see Stein, 2014:, 77f.).

Our experience is thus, according to Edith Stein, interspersed with a metaphysics of sense which we discover, rather than create (see 2016: 93). We experience these essences from out of our own temporality, but it is important to see that they also structure our experience. I can only see a *tree* because there is an objective sense in which a tree is a tree, giving coherence to what would otherwise be a senseless series of impressions. The “pure I” of actual experience is shown by Stein to be reliant on non-temporal objectivity, informing its noematic contents. As Mette Lebech notes regarding the metaphysics of Edith Stein, humans experience themselves “as open to the eternal meaning of being” (Lebech, 2015: 144). In parallel to the idea of a non-ownership of temporality in Conrad-Martius, I want to talk here of a non-ownership of sense.

As the discussion of Edith Stein’s metaphysics has shown, our finite existence is actual in a twofold sense: as receiving its being from moment to moment, but also in the sense of actualizing essences. The two aspects of actuality refer to one another: without meaning, existence would be incomprehensible. Conversely, sense would not exist without a finite entity that intuits and experiences it. But we must not forget that according to Stein, we can only actualize essences because our own being is *in actu*, because it is sustained from moment to moment. How does our being *in actu* relate to the actualization of essences? And how can we therefore be said to actualize essences *ourselves*? These questions will now be addressed in a joint discussion of the *actus essendi* in Conrad-Martius and Stein.

Finite Existence and *Actus Essendi*

Above, I have characterized the *actus essendi* as the idea that finite beings primarily *are* insofar as they exist, and only secondarily because they are *something* (have an essence). We can see how in both Conrad-Martius and Stein, this metaphysical prioritization holds true for finite existence which only ever *is* for the *Augenblick* in which it is being sustained. The general question arising here is how the momentariness of existence informs experience. In Stein, this question specifically takes the form of

the relationship between the actuality of existence and the actualization of essences. In Conrad-Martius, the question is how we phenomenally relate to ontic time. Both phenomenologists thus converge towards the problem of *how sense structures, but also hides, the passing of time*. Consequently, by focusing on the passage of time, that is, by becoming aware of the unceasing *acts of being*, I can now discuss Stein's and Conrad-Martius' phenomenological accounts of finitude based on the two concepts of non-ownership established in the last section.

In Conrad-Martius, I have found the idea of a "non-ownership of time," which meant that existence, insofar as it is set over and against nothingness, can never reach itself. Analogously in Stein, what appeared was a "non-ownership of sense," the objectivity that enables us to have meaningful and coherent experiences we discover, rather than create ourselves.¹⁶ Because essences pertain to a different way of being (*Seinsweise*) than existence, I can never fully realize objective essences, nor my own. This is another way in which existence cannot "reach itself". But what does this metaphorical phrase mean in ontological and phenomenological terms? It seems that if one wants to characterize finite experience, it is exactly this unattainability that needs to be elucidated.

What exactly is unattainable? We have seen in Conrad-Martius that it is not just the past which, real-ontologically, has passed in an absolute sense, but the present as well. I find myself in a present which constitutively escapes me in that it changes in the very moment that I try to grasp it as *my presence*. As soon as I do so, for instance by relating the tree I see back to me, I am not confronting the actual (ontic) situation anymore but have started to think in phenomenal or imaginary terms, conceiving of myself as the instance that knows itself to see a tree *at this moment*. The implicit reflexivity of experience relating back to the experiencer, of being the experience *of someone*, falls beyond the realm of what Conrad-Martius and Stein would consider finite existence in its actuality. My suggestion of a phenomenological *actus essendi* can help to see why this is so, namely by directing our attention to the fact that the contents of experience themselves do not cease to surge forth into actuality, thereby questioning, or even fracturing, our noematic appropriation of them.¹⁷

To make my idea of a phenomenological account of finite experience more cogent, I will return to the example of the tree. What do we see when we perceive the tree ontically, that is, *in actu*? According to Conrad-Martius, because we do not "reach our present" in the sense just discussed, what appears are moments of actuality, or a discontinuous unfolding of existence. In experiential terms, this does not necessarily mean that our perception, so understood, would be devoid of sense. But it means that *ontically*, our perception of the tree is felt to be afforded by the tree itself, not by our ability to see it. Above we have seen why this is so: the time *in which* the tree exists

¹⁶ With Thomas Gricoski, one could also grasp this non-ownership as the over-determination of actual objects referring simultaneously to essential, actual and mental being (see Gricoski, 2020: 28f.). In this way, the pluralistic nature of Stein's ontology would be directly inscribed in its experience.

¹⁷ In an investigation of the idea of reality in Conrad-Martius, Hans Rainer Sepp makes a similar point: Conrad-Martius problematizes *how* the real can be given without being given *for* consciousness, or as *a priori* correlative to it (which does not imply a suspension, but an extension of the correlation between consciousness and being, addressing in the correlation what itself is not correlative) (see Sepp, 2020: 199f.).

is not an empty container or an inner form of our intuition, but a formal dimension of the existence of the tree. One could also say that the temporal existence of the tree is a direct consequence of its *actus essendi*. By understanding the tree to discontinuously exist *in actu*, we become simultaneously aware of the fact that our perception of the tree depends on it existing independently of us *and* that we correlatively exist from moment to moment. Experiencing the tree's actuality implies our own.

How is the tree's independence conveyed? What about the perception of the tree actually corresponds to our experience of its *actus essendi*? One would have to say that it is nothing specifically *in* our perception that is thus conveyed. The continuous, adumbrated appearance of the tree does not directly lead us to the ruptured movement of actuality. Rather, we have to consider the correlation between the tree and ourselves. Thinking in terms of intentionality, it seems intuitive to understand my perception as being *continuously motivated* by my engagement with the object, whether the tree "appears from different sides" when I walk around it or it "stays the same" when I simply observe it. But in terms of the *actus essendi*, it is *the tree* that continuously asserts itself in my perception.

Trying to conceive of this in phenomenological terms, one may say that we have to *bracket our protentions* in order to experience this assertion. In other words, to experience that the tree actually exists from out of its own ground,¹⁸ I have to abstain from anticipating its existence based on my intentional engagement with it. Supposing that protentions are a structural feature of inner time consciousness which, as such, cannot be bracketed, one could also say that we would have to continuously strike out (*durchstreichen*) our immediate anticipation so that the tree can come into view as actually existing. This consideration allows me to give a more complete picture of what the *Augenblick* in the sense of Conrad-Martius consists in. It is not just that it constitutes the salvation of existence which is momentarily being saved from nothingness. In the *Augenblick*, a finitely existing being is able to understand itself as co-existing with others whose actual presence, like its own, depends on the *actus essendi* which both asserts and – happening *as* and *for* a moment – immediately sublates the being's existence.¹⁹

While in Conrad-Martius, what is thus most salient in the experience of finite existence is the non-ownership of time, in Stein, the discussion of experience turned around the non-ownership of sense. There is a direct implication for temporality here as well, since what gives a series of experienced events its meaning is not strictly based on the structure of inner time consciousness, but on the recognition – in intuitive and abstract terms – of a sense which is independent of its actualization. In the discussion above, we have seen how two different essential aspects are at play here, namely an objective sense (e.g., the tree in itself, or "treeness") and my individual essence. To get a better understanding of the non-ownership of sense, in the following, I will bring both aspects together by asking how we *individually actualize general essences*. In other words, the question is how the very generality of sense is

¹⁸ This would correspond to Conrad-Martius' most general definition of substance (see Conrad-Martius, 1957: 97). The relationship between substance, essence and ontic time cannot be explored here further.

¹⁹ A related problem is of course in how far *faith* might play into this experience as the trust that one's existence is being continuously saved. This topic will be touched upon in the fourth part.

experienced as afforded by our own potential. Importantly, this does not simply concern the question of how essences “show up in consciousness,” but how the intuitive sense we experience is a product of *what* we are and *what* the reality we experience is.

Let us get a fuller view of this difference between individuality and generality: on the one hand, sense in itself is unattainable (what was already addressed as its non-ownership). It is not the whatness of the *tree in general* that is instantiated by ourselves in the manner in which – Platonically speaking – an individual tree would participate in the idea of tree. On the other hand, even though the sense is experienced as objective, insofar as sense *as such* cannot be actualized, it is myself that creates or instantiates it. Stein is adamant about the fact that essences as such are ineffectual (*unwirksam*) and partake in themselves, as we have already observed, neither in potentiality, nor in actuality. Instead, what informs my intuition and thinking is something that “corresponds to” (*entspricht*) the essence as such (see Stein, 2006: 68). As essences cannot be attained, we can only make sense by *making* sense through our intuitions and intellections. Yet the sense we thus “make” is only meaningful (*sinnvoll*) when it correlates to objective sense, that is, to the essence.

How then do finite thinking and eternal sense correlate? To answer this question, one could look to the manner in which Stein describes mental being to perfectly coincide with the essential being it grasps. As long as thinking coincides in its results with the essence in question, it partakes in the timelessness of what it thinks (see Stein, 2006: 285). In this sense, the problem of correlation would be resolved as the adequacy between thought and essence, or mental and essential being.²⁰ But if we consequently want to think this through in terms of finite existence, a problem would remain: how is the timelessness characterizing adequate thinking to be translated back into experience? How do I *temporally experience* the objectivity of sense? It is here that the *actus essendi* may find its phenomenological application, namely if we focus on the existence of the individual things *as being informed by general sense*. In other words, instead of thinking about an eternal sense pre-structuring finite experience, we may consider how the finite things we experience themselves actualize, or enact, this sense *in existing*.

What actually changes about our experience when we thus consider the *actus essendi*? In Conrad-Martius, the application of this concept led to the idea of unceasing actuality: insofar as I experience the thing as existing out of its own ground, I come to view it not as a continuously modified noema, but as an independent entity asserting itself in my experience. With Stein, the *actus essendi* affords a different, yet analogous perspective: here, things gain a new sense of stability and independence as they unceasingly actualize one and the same objective sense. Importantly, we have seen that this is not a direct actualization. Because the timeless essences merely *correlate* with our experience, this is still a phenomenological problem. It is only through my ever shifting experiencing that the object of intuition refers, in its ever-changing appearance, to one and the same sense. In other words, as beings

²⁰ This would have to be further grounded in Stein’s understanding of objective sense as being the eternal *logos* which allows for directly relating God’s thinking and finite understanding. As this theological issue falls outside the spectrum of this investigation, it cannot here be considered further.

in actu ourselves, we remain reliant on the continuity of our experience to share in non-temporality. How then is timeless sense intuitively experienced? Considering the *actus essendi*, one may also ask: how is the continuous fact of existence expressive of the non-temporal essence?

My suggestion here would be that the *actus essendi* directs our attention away from the fact that the tree appears in the context of my own experience towards the idea that, insofar as the appearing tree is *of one and the same essence*, it attains a timeless quality. The tree appears at a remove from the way I perceive it insofar as it seems to *resist* simply being a part of my experience. This resistance can be seen as a consequence of the tree's continuous appearance *not* referring to my perception, but to an objective essence. In other words, in the context of Stein's non-ownership of sense, the *actus essendi* modifies our experience by displacing the objects of intuition which are seen to continuously refer to an objective sense. What is thus modified more specifically is the *Anschauungssinn* which above was described as my singular intuition being informed by a general sense. We can now say more specifically *how* this general sense informs my intuition: as the intuited objects seem to resist being simply part of my individual experience, they appear individuated by a sense that *does not belong to me*, whose actualization I merely witness. I experience it as not belonging to me insofar as the unceasing appearance does not refer to my perception, but to a general essence. I experience the tree *to be what it is*, independently of whether or not it appears to me. Yet this sense of non-ownership can only be grasped from out of my own temporality.

It could be said then that one has to become the bystander of one's own experiencing to grasp the non-temporal quality of sense. By contrast, the sense that the "pure I" of transcendental phenomenology makes will necessarily remain correlative to its own experience. Likewise, in Conrad-Martius, the temporal independence of the experienced things comes into view if one ceases to view them from out of the immanence of one's experience, minding instead the constant surging forth of the act of being, or the fact that finite existence is only ever momentarily *in actu*. The very finitude of existence shapes our phenomenological engagement with questions of sense, essence and temporality. Insofar as it can only be investigated from one's own *finite perspective*, the ontology that Stein and Conrad-Martius develop is necessarily metaphysical. The being in question is always related to the actuality of one's existence. This methodological supposition is shared with Heidegger's existential phenomenology, which equally presupposes that metaphysical (or fundamental-ontological) questions imply the finitude of existence. In the last part, I will highlight some decisive differences in Stein's, Conrad-Martius' and Heidegger's idea of finitude.

Finitude: Stein and Conrad-Martius Versus Heidegger

The concepts of non-ownership of time and sense have been established as two key ideas in relation to Conrad-Martius' and Stein's engagement with finite existence. Taken together, they present a phenomenological account whose difference from that of Heidegger has been emphasized by both authors. This section will explore these differences to give a more complete view on the transcendence involved in

finite experience, which has notably emerged in the previous discussion in connection with the *Augenblick*. The main line of criticism directed by both authors against Heidegger's sense of transcendence is, to use the concepts established beforehand, its *lack* of sense of non-ownership (of time and sense).²¹ In Heidegger's *Being and Time*, sense is exclusively related to *Dasein's* own being, thereby disfiguring (*verzeichnen*) any approach to a general metaphysics of being. Here is Stein on Heidegger's limited idea of *sense*:

Heidegger begründet sein Ausgehen von der Analyse des Daseins damit, daß man nach dem Sinn des Seins nur ein Seiendes fragen könne, zu dessen Sinn ein Seinsverständnis gehöre. Und weil das ‚Dasein‘ nicht nur für sein eigenes Sein Verständnis habe, sondern auch für andersgeartetes, darum müsse man mit der Daseinsanalyse beginnen. Folgt aber nicht aus dem Begründungssatz gerade das Entgegengesetzte? Weil der Mensch nicht nur für sein eigenes Sein, sondern auch für andersartiges Verständnis hat, darum ist er nicht auf sein eigenes Sein als den einzig möglichen Weg zum Sinn des Seins angewiesen. (see Stein, 2006: 481).²²

Here we find a distinction that will be important in Conrad-Martius' critique of Heidegger as well, between a *sense-of* and a *sense-for*. There is a sense *of* different kinds of being, that is, different kinds of entities (such as plants and crystals) each have a metaphysically distinct meaning. Yet in Heidegger, there is only one kind of being *for which* there is sense. The problem with Heidegger's philosophy of sense, then, is that the sense-of collapses into the sense-for. In other words, the only kind of sense we can ascribe to beings is that sense which is *for us*. Of course, this could be read as a tautology: the only sense I can make or recognize is the one that is *for me*, that I am able to make or experience. But with the idea of a non-ownership of sense, we have already seen that the picture is more complicated: I can, in finitely existing, participate in a timeless sense which is not *for me*, but which is nonetheless attainable and which is *of something*, i.e., different entities.

It is this very sense that remains out of reach when sense is, as Stein puts it, reduced to the understanding of *Dasein* (2006: 482). By contrast, according to her account, the thing *has and is* a sense that it reveals in its outer appearance (Stein 2006: 482). Because Heidegger is only concerned with the sense that is identical to understanding, the disinterested perspective necessary for a "sense in itself" to come into view never gets developed. In the preceding section, I have shown that one of the

²¹ As a preliminary statement, it needs to be stressed that I cannot develop the problem of finitude between Heidegger and the two phenomenologists from both sides. Even though Stein's and Conrad-Martius' criticism of Being and Time could be questioned and problematized by countervailing readings of Heidegger, here I will restrict myself to discussing some of their most important concerns about his existential philosophy, specifically as they pertain to the idea of finite existence developed in the preceding discussion.

²² "Heidegger justifies his starting point of the analysis of *Dasein* by stating that one can only inquire into the sense of being in the case of a being which can understand being. And since *Dasein* does not only understand the sense of its own being, but that of others as well, one has to start with its analysis. But doesn't this rationale entail the opposite? Because man does not just understand his own, but also other being, he does not have to rely on his own being as the only possible route to the sense of being".

ways that this disinterestedness can be addressed in Stein is in considering how existing things, in their *actus essendi*, continuously refer to an objective sense which both guides our intuition of them and intimates the idea that this guidance is due to a sense we, as phenomenological subjects, merely discover. This is, roughly, a first line of Stein's critique, regarding the hermeneutical position developed in *Being and Time*.

A second, existential line concerns the philosophy of temporality proper. Stein observes that in line with the reduction of sense to the understanding of *Dasein*, the meaning of time itself is reduced to one's own finitude which is marked by the certainty of death. Whether or not Stein here wrongfully interprets Heidegger's concept of *Angst* in psychological terms, the important point to note is that for her, the ultimate measure of time is not to be found in one's own existence (2006: 59f.).²³ For Stein, all accounts which try to link time exclusively to finite existence are doomed to fail, whether in the form of *Dasein*'s ecstatic temporality in *Being and Time* or as the subjective time that transcendently pre-forms experience as expounded in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. By contrast, above I have discussed how finitude, as precarious existence from moment to moment, is undergirded by a sense that enables the meaningful continuity of experience. Insofar as we realize our participating in this general sense, we have already moved beyond the domain of finitude. As Mette Lebech succinctly puts it: "Heidegger's attempt to reduce the human being to its finitude is intelligible only as an impossible attempt to derive what is constituted from constitution itself" (2015: 156).

Both lines of critique, the hermeneutical as well as the existential one, are echoed in Conrad-Martius' review of Heidegger's *Being and Time*.²⁴ Both the idea of a genuinely different mode of being of non-human entities, and thereby different forms of objective sense, as well as the non-reducibility of being to (finite) time are central points of concern for Conrad-Martius:

Wie kann die gleiche Philosophie, die das Eigentliche menschlichen Wesens in die *Existenz* setzt und damit an dem innersten, tiefsten und zugleich höchsten Punkt unserer Wirklichkeit [eben dem Ich] das *Sein* selber mit seiner objektiven und unauflösbaren Eigenschwere zum Grund- und Eckstein macht, wie kann die gleiche Philosophie die ganze Welt doch wiederum *entwirklichen*, sie auf das selber allerdings existenzial festgemachte Ich *zurückwerfen* und die *Zeit*, dieses flüchtigste, dieses ewig von sich selber fortfliehende Gebilde zur Urkategorie allen und jeglichen Seins erheben? In der endgültigen [wie ja schon der Titel andeutet] Gleichsetzung von *Sein* und *Zeit* offenbart sich allerdings diese Philosophie bewußt und ausdrücklich in ihrem zutiefst *nihilistischen* Charakter. Man muß einmal der erschütternden Paradoxie, die in der absoluten Gleichsetzung von *Sein* und *Zeit* liegt, voll ins Gesicht sehen, um das bis auf den

²³ On Stein's reception of Heidegger's *being-towards-death* see Jani (2012: 97–103) and Orr (2014: 571–573).

²⁴ While Conrad-Martius' text is the earlier of the two critiques of Heidegger, I find it unproblematic to discuss it after Stein, as I understand both assessments to grow out of the authors' respective metaphysical phenomenology. That they come to view Heideggerian finitude in similar critical terms is then due to the affinities between their concepts of finite existence, as the preceding discussion intended to show.

letzten Grund destruktive Wesen der Heideggerschen Weltanschauung zu begreifen. (1963: 185)²⁵

Indeed, from Conrad-Martius' perspective, to equate being with time would be to reduce it to the unceasing actuality and volatility we encountered above. There, we have also seen that she distinguishes a phenomenal time making up the lived time of past, present and future, which is not easily aligned with, or even traced back to, ontic time. Now, it would not seem to me as if Conrad-Martius would simply equate the temporality of *Dasein* with this phenomenal time. On the contrary, insofar as Heidegger grounds *Dasein* in its own being, he also thinks temporality from out of a real-ontological basis. The problem is that *Dasein* remains the *sole* entity that exists from out of its own ground, whereas other beings merely appear as occurrent and available. Similar to Stein, what Conrad-Martius misses here is an emphatic sense in which real things *reveal themselves*. Almost tragically, it is the possibility to conceive of this real encounter which Heidegger has fathomed only to obstruct its discussion once and for all by restricting the investigation to *Dasein's* being (see Conrad-Martius, 1963: 185; see also Conrad-Martius, 1965: 372f.).²⁶

The most fundamental agreement between Conrad-Martius and Stein concerns a puzzlement about the resoluteness of this restraint. Whence this finitude? As observed initially, one of the decisive moments in Stein's and Conrad-Martius' discussion of finitude is that it points by itself to an infinity beyond it.²⁷ And this is exactly the moment lacking in Heidegger, where transcendence refers to the hermeneutical abilities of *Dasein*. Whereas Heidegger's understanding of the *Augenblick*, at least in *Being and Time*, could be understood to ultimately refer to one's mortality, as the moment in which resoluteness may take hold (see Polt, 2021: 498), in Stein and Conrad-Martius, the *Augenblick* does not confront me with my finitude, but with what transcends it and simultaneously serves as the basis of its experience: the ontic time, through whose punctiform actuality I continually exist, and the essential sense which reverberates throughout the sense I make through words and intuitions.

This is why the *Augenblick* should not be understood here as a now-moment wedged in between a continuous stream of similar moments. Both Stein and Conrad-Martius attribute existential significance to the *Augenblick* because it is *in the form this moment* that I can know myself perpetually saved (Conrad-Martius), or as standing in some relation to eternal being. However, the *Augenblick* does not refer primarily to my existence, but to the very transcendence of the world opened up by it. Thereby articulated is a sense of reality that is phenomenologically undergirded not

²⁵ "How can the same philosophy, which places the own most of human essence in *existence*, thereby making, at the innermost, deepest and also highest point of our reality [namely the I], *being* itself with its objective and irreducibly weight, the head- and cornerstone, how can this same philosophy *de-realize* the whole world on the other hand, project it back onto the however existentially determined I and raise *time*, this most volatile, eternally self-fleeing structure, to the status of the primary category of all being? In the final [as the title already intimates] equation of *being* and *time*, this philosophy explicitly reveals itself in its *nihilistic* character. One has to face up to the harrowing paradox which lies in the absolute equation of being and time in order to grasp the fundamentally destructive nature of Heidegger's ideology".

²⁶ For another description of Conrad-Martius's critic of Heidegger see Jani (2022: 51–55).

²⁷ One can find this exact idea in Stein (2006: 45) and Conrad-Martius (1963: 190).

by an investigation into consciousness and its structures, but by the certainty that, in each and every moment, my experiencing relies on something else, time and sense, that informs it.

One may then raise the question of what demarcates or limits the *Augenblick*, if not another similar moment in time, and what the *Augenblick* is, if not an illuminative moment of one's own existence. As a tentative answer, I would say that the *Augenblick* in Stein and Conrad-Martius is (despite its name) constitutively open-ended because it refers me to the ontic flow of time and the overarching realm of sense, safeguarding or even enabling my experiencing. Recognizing or reflecting on this transcendence might yield a change in the way I perceive and make sense of the world, but this change does not, in the last instance, refer to myself, or my existence. Finitude, in the sense of mortality, does not have the last word. One could take Conrad-Martius' idea that finite being knows itself, in the *Augenblick*, to be momentarily saved, as constituting another form of finitude, not demarcated by one's mortality, but by the ability to partake in an infinity of sense and time. While neither Stein nor Conrad-Martius conflate finite experience with any form of infinity, they both view the contraction of finite existence into a point – into the *Augenblick* – as a way for finite existence to refer to something surpassing it, instead of to a form *through which* existence surpasses itself.

Acknowledgements I would like to thank the Center for the History of Women Philosophers and Scientists, led by Ruth E. Hagengruber, for providing me with the research material needed to write this article.

Funding Open Access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

References

- Avé-Lallemant, E. (2003). Edith Stein und Hedwig Conrad-Martius. *Begegnung in Leben und Werk*. In B. Beckmann, & H.-B. Gerl-Falkovitz (eds.), *Edith Stein Themen – Bezüge – Dokumente*, 66–88. Königshausen & Neumann.
- Borden Sharkey, S. (2016). Edith Stein's Use of Hering's *Wesenheit* to move through phenomenology to metaphysics. *Discipline Filosofiche*, 26(1), 193–204.
- Breuer, I. (2021). Conrad-Martius: Sein, Wesen, Existenz. In Auseinandersetzung mit der Ontologie und Metaphysik Aristoteles', Thomas von Aquins und Husserls *HORIZON Studies in Phenomenology*, 10(2), 360–397.
- Conrad-Martius, H. (1954). *Die Zeit*. Kösel.
- Conrad-Martius, H. (1957). *Das Sein*. Kösel.
- Conrad-Martius, H. (1963). Heideggers ‚Sein und Zeit‘. In *Schriften zur Philosophie* I, 185–193. Kösel.

- Conrad-Martius, H. (1965). Phänomenologie und Spekulation. In *Schriften zur Philosophie III* (pp. 370–384). Kösel.
- De Santis, D. (2021a). Core of the essence and core of the person. Jean Hering and a hidden source of Edith Stein's early ontology. *HORIZON. Studies in Phenomenology* 10(2): 441–462.
- De Santis, D. (2021b). Edith Stein on a different motive that led Husserl to transcendental idealism. In R. K. B. Parker (ed.), *The Idealism-Realism Debate Among Edmund Husserl's Early Followers and Critics* (pp. 239–259). Springer.
- Gilson, E. (1994). *The Christian philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Notre Dame University Press.
- Gricoski, T. (2020). *Being unfolded, Edith Stein on the meaning of being*. The Catholic University of America Press.
- Hart, J. (2003). Notes on temporality, contingency, and eternal being: Aspects of Edith Stein's phenomenological theology. In B. Beckmann, & H.-B. Gerl-Falkovitz (eds.), *Edith Stein Themen – Bezüge – Dokumente* (pp. 97–106). Verlag Königshausen & Neumann.
- Hart, J. (2020). *Hedwig Conrad-Martius' ontological phenomenology*. Springer.
- Hering, J. (1921). Bemerkungen über das Wesen, die Wesenheit und die Idee. *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*, 4, 495–551.
- Jani, A. (2012). Die Suche nach der modernen Metaphysik. Edith Steins Heidegger-Exzerpte, eine Kritik der Metaphysik des Daseins. *Edith Stein Jahrbuch*, 81–109.
- Jani, A. (2018). Wesensanalyse bei Edith Stein. Eine Differenzierung des Problems der formalen Ontologie. *Edith Stein Jahrbuch*, 150–166.
- Jani, A. (2021). From the Husserlian transcendental idealism to the question on being. An original linkage between phenomenology and theology in Edith Stein's thinking. *Forum Philosophicum*, 1, 85–98.
- Jani, A. (2022). *The ontological roots of Phenomenology. Rethinking the history of phenomenology and its religious turn*. Lexington Books.
- Lebech, M. (2015). *The philosophy of Edith Stein. From phenomenology to metaphysics*. Peter Lang.
- Miron, R. (2021). A Philosophical Resonance. Hedwig Conrad-Martius versus Edith Stein. In R. Miron (auth.), *Hedwig Conrad-Martius. The Phenomenological Gateway to Reality* pp. 183–208). Springer.
- Orr, J. (2014). The fullness of life: Death, finitude, and life-philosophy in Edith Stein's critique of the early Heidegger. *Heythrop Journal*, 55(4), 565–575.
- Polt, R. (2021). Moment (Augenblick). In M. Wrathall (Ed.), *The Cambridge Heidegger lexicon* (pp. 497–499). Cambridge University Press.
- Sepp, H. R. (2020). Conrad-Martius über Realität. In Hans Rainer Sepp (ed.), *Natur und Kosmos. Entwürfe der frühen Phänomenologie* (pp. 196–210). Nordhausen: Traugott Bautz.
- Stein, E. (2005). *Potenz und Akt. Studien zu einer Philosophie des Seins (Edith Stein Gesamtausgabe 10)*. Herder.
- Stein, E. (2006). *Endliches und ewiges Sein. Versuch eines Aufstiegs zum Sinn des Seins (Edith Stein Gesamtausgabe 11/12)*. Herder.
- Stein, E. (2014). Wort, Wahrheit, Sinn und Sprache. Fragment (ca. 1922). In *Freiheit und Gnade und weitere Beiträge zu Phänomenologie und Ontologie: (1917 bis 1937) (Edith Stein Gesamtausgabe 9)* (pp. 73–84). Herder.
- Tommasi, F. (2003). ... Verschiedene Sprache reden... ein Dialog zwischen Phänomenologie und mittelalterlicher Scholastik im Werk Edith Steins. In B. Beckmann, & H.-B. Gerl-Falkovitz (eds.), *Edith Stein Themen – Bezüge – Dokumente* (pp. 107–133). Königshausen & Neumann.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Springer Nature or its licensor (e.g. a society or other partner) holds exclusive rights to this article under a publishing agreement with the author(s) or other rightsholder(s); author self-archiving of the accepted manuscript version of this article is solely governed by the terms of such publishing agreement and applicable law.