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## **Theodor Lipps on the Concept of *Einfühlung* (Empathy)**

### **1. Introduction**

Ah, empathy! Perhaps no other concept in philosophy and psychology has experienced such tumult in the past 100 years. “Empathy” enters the English psychological and philosophical literature in 1909 as Edward Titchener’s preferred English rendering of *Einfühlung*<sup>1</sup>. *Einfühlung* had been in use in the German psychological literature dating back to Robert Vischer’s coining the term in 1873<sup>2</sup> and has older roots in the German Romanticism of the earlier 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>3</sup>. In aesthetics, empathy was meant to denote how we understand works of art by feeling our way into the meaning they present us. The details of what I am experiencing when I do this, what psychological mechanisms are at work in empathy, and how—or even if—empathy arises in human development were hotly debated. By 1910, the term was in such wide use that Moritz Geiger delivered an address to the fourth meeting of the Congress for Experimental Psychology entitled, “On the essence and meaning of empathy”<sup>4</sup>. Already in this lecture, regarding the various uses of empathy, Geiger observes that “more than one controversy would dissolve

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Edward TITCHENER, *Lectures on the experimental psychology of the thought-processes*, New York, MacMillan, 1909, p. 21.

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Robert VISCHER, “On the optical sense of form: a contribution to aesthetics”, In *Empathy, form, and space: problems in German aesthetics 1873-1893*, Translated with introduction by Harry Francis Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikononou, Santa Monica, CA, The Getty Center Publication Programs, 1994, p. 89-123.

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Jørgen HUNSDAHL, “Concerning *Einfühlung* (empathy): a conceptual analysis of its origin and early development”, *Journal of the history of behavioral sciences*, 3, no. 2, 1967, p. 180-191. Gustav JAHODA, “Theodor Lipps and the shift from ‘sympathy’ to ‘empathy’”, *Journal of the history of behavioral sciences*, 41, no. 2, 2005, p. 151-163.

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Moritz GEIGER, “On the essence and meaning of empathy, part I” translated by Florian Gödel and Massimiliano Aragona, *Dialogues in Philosophy, Mental and Neuro Sciences*, 8, no. 1, 2015, p. 19-31; and Moritz GEIGER, “On the essence and meaning of empathy, part II” translated by Florian Gödel and Massimiliano Aragona, *Dialogues in Philosophy, Mental and Neuro Sciences*, 8, no. 2, 2015, p. 75-86.

readily by pointing out that with their claims the discussants were taking positions on different questions”<sup>5</sup>. Things have not gotten in better in the last 100 years. In 2009, C.D. Batson observed eight distinct studies using eight different definitions of empathy<sup>6</sup>. I must add to this story of empathy’s somewhat convoluted past that the term’s present vernacular meaning—implying a prosocial feeling toward the other person—bears little to no resemblance to its technical, phenomenological use.

Theodor Lipps, the Munich psychologist and philosopher, developed one of the most influential accounts of empathy in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, the prospects of understanding the theory of empathy in his work are just as daunting as the prospects of trying to establish one theory in the field at large. One of the difficulties that confronts an author wishing to elucidate Lipps’s usage of empathy in a single essay is that Lipps himself might not have a single account of it. He uses the term to explain our emotional interactions with works of art<sup>7</sup> and to account for the source of our knowledge of other egos<sup>8</sup>. Karsten Steuber observes that Lipps speaks of intellectual empathy, aesthetic empathy, general and specific empathy, apperceptive empathy, and empirical empathy and uses empathy to “refer to any of the subject’s

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Moritz GEIGER, “On the essence and meaning of empathy, part I”, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

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C.D. BATSON, “These things called empathy: eight related but distinct phenomena”, In Jean DECETY and William ICKES (dir) *The social neuroscience of empathy*, p. 3-15, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2009.

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Theodor LIPPS, *Ästhetik: Grundlegung der Ästhetik*, Hamburg and Leipzig, Leopold Voss, 1903.

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Theodor LIPPS, “Das Wissen von fremden Ichen”, *Psychologie Untersuchungen*, 1, no. 4, 1907, p. 694-722. English edition: Theodor LIPPS, “The knowledge of other egos” translated by Marco Cavallaro and edited with introduction by Timothy Burns, *New yearbook for phenomenology and phenomenological philosophy*, forthcoming [the page numbers given for this text refer to the pagination of the 1907 version]. Theodor LIPPS, *Leitfaden der Psychologie*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., Leipzig, Wilhelm Engelmann, 1903, p. 187.

contributions to the constitution of a recognizable world”<sup>9</sup>. Thus must a scholar exercise his or her judgment regarding where to begin and where to end with Lipps’s theory of empathy.

Knowing little of the debates regarding aesthetics at the inception of German psychology, I will choose to focus on Lipps’s theory of empathy as the source of our knowledge of other egos. The goal of this essay is to explicate Lipps’s theory of empathy as how we experience foreign selves and to examine its reception amongst phenomenological philosophers. I proceed in two parts. section two contains an extended explication of Lipps’s theory of empathy. Section three considers various objections against Lipps’s theory, beginning with a reconstruction of Edith Stein’s objection that he confuses the feeling of oneness with empathy. I will argue that Stein is mistaken. The third section concludes with an consideration of several other objections of the phenomenological variety.

## 2. Lipps on Knowledge of Other Selves

In the 1903 edition of *Leitfaden der Psychologie*, Lipps identifies three domains of human knowledge. He writes: “I know of things, of myself, and of other egos”<sup>10</sup>. Perception is the source of knowledge about things, inner perception the source of self-knowledge, and empathy (*Einfühlung*) is the source of knowledge of other egos<sup>11</sup>. I noted above that Titchener coined “empathy” to translate *Einfühlung*. However, a literal, and perhaps more suitable, translation of the term would be “feeling-into”. The advantage of the literal translation is in its

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Karsten STEUBER, *Rediscovering empathy: agency, folk psychology, and the human sciences*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2006, p. 9 n.8.

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Theodor LIPPS, *Leitfaden der Psychologie* 1<sup>st</sup> ed., Leipzig, Wilhelm Engelmann, 1903, p. 187. My translation.

11

*Ibid.*

showing the reader that *Einfühlung* is meant to express that we understand the mental lives of other subjects by feeling our way into them. Lipps writes that, through empathy, “I experience, in me, the inner state that I see expressed in the other”<sup>12</sup>. How this occurs is a complex story.

Lipps is at pains to describe how we experience the mental lives of other persons, even though we cannot perceive them. For Lipps, I grasp your anger when I perceive, for instance, your face redden, your jaw tighten, and your fist clench. I do not, however, perceive your anger. He writes: “We cannot do this. Anger, friendliness, and sadness cannot be sensuously perceived. On the contrary, what these words mean we know only from ourselves”<sup>13</sup>. This is important to note because it differentiates his theory of empathy from later phenomenological developments by Edmund Husserl and Edith Stein. Stein, especially, argues that “empathy is a kind of act of perceiving *sui generis*”<sup>14</sup>. According to Lipps’s theory, if empathy were a form of perception, it would provide us with knowledge of things, not other egos (*fremden Ichen*). Even though I *experience* or *grasp* the other ego, I do not *perceive* it or its experiences. Lipps continues: “The grasping of the sensory appearance is, *at the same time*, the having-present [*Gegenwärtighaben*] of the psychical, in such a way that the sensible seems to immediately include the excitation of the non-sensible within us”<sup>15</sup>. In other words, when we perceive another human person, there are two simultaneous, non-identical but inseparable acts taking place—sensuous perception of her body and an “in-felt” grasp of her imperceptible but nonetheless experienced psyche.

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Theodor LIPPS, “The knowledge of other egos”, *op. cit.*, p. 719.

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*Ibid.* p. 713.

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Edith STEIN, *On the problem of empathy*, translated by Waltraut Stein, Washington D.C., ICS Publications, 1989, p. 11.

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Theodor LIPPS, “The knowledge of other egos”, *op. cit.*, p. 714.

In the experience of another person's anger, I grasp two distinct objects and these have different sources. Here is Lipps: "The object of sensory perception is extracted from the external world, the inner excitation, by contrast, originates from the only source out of which it can originate, myself"<sup>16</sup>. The person's body, qua thing, is perceived just as any other physical object is. The person's anger is not perceived; the external world is not its experiential source. I am.

It is instructive to note here that Lipps dubs empathy an "instinct"<sup>17</sup>. It is the name for the instinct that binds together my visual perception of another person's gesture, my kinaesthetic awareness of my own gesture, and the consciousness that my gesture is the lived through expression of my emotion<sup>18</sup>. Empathy turns perceived gestures into life expressions (*Lebensäußerungen*), "expression[s] of specific psychical experiences"<sup>19</sup>. As an instinct, it "is a product of two factors. One is the instinct, or the instinctive impulse, of the expression of life. The other is the instinct of imitation"<sup>20</sup>.

Let us begin with expression. Lipps notes that when one says that a gesture *expresses* anger we do not mean that "the gesture ensues *as a consequence* of the anger. Instead, it means that the anger *calls the gesture into being*, it lets it emerge from itself, or, ... the anger externalizes itself in it"<sup>21</sup>. There is an inner relationship between my gestures and my emotions.

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16

*Ibid.*, p. 714.

17

*Ibid.*, p. 713.

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*Ibid.*, p. 712-713.

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*Ibid.*, p. 713.

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*Ibid.*, p. 713.

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The gesture is not added onto an inner feeling as some appendage to it. Rather, the externalization of my anger in the angry face takes the form of an activity (*Tätigkeit*)<sup>22</sup>. This is not to be confused with a volitional activity though. It is not something I plan out in advance and then execute. It is, alternatively, an instinctive activity (*Triebtätigkeit*) and is an “immediate conscious experience”<sup>23</sup>. Lipps writes: “I live through myself immediately as active when I make an angry face”<sup>24</sup>. He continues: “Hereby, I identify an activity that, as emerging out of the anger, aims at the gesture and accomplishes itself in the production of the gesture”<sup>25</sup>. When I experience my emotions, I experience that they tend toward expression in or through gestures. This is an example of the broader tendency toward fulfillment in all experiences that Lipps makes note of in *Leitfaden der Psychologie*<sup>26</sup>.

The astute reader will notice that this is all well and good as for the relationship between my own gestures and my own emotions. However, there are puzzles to be solved as regards my experience of *other people's* gestures and emotions. The first puzzle has to do with the relationship between the gesture that I perceive the other person making and the one that I make in similar situations. I do not, under normal circumstances, perceive my gestures. I experience

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22 *Ibid.*, p. 714.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 715.

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Ibid.*

Theodor LIPPS, *Leitfaden*, *op. cit.*, p. 163ff. This is probably something that Lipps takes up from Edmund Husserl. See Dermot MORAN, “The problem of empathy: Lipps, Scheler, Husserl, and Stein”, In Thomas KELLY and Phillip ROSEMAN (dirs) *Amor amicitiae, on the love that is friendship: essays in medieval thought and beyond in honor of the Rev. Professor James McEvoy*, Leuven and Dudley, Peeters, 2004, p. 281.

them kinesthetically. How do I bridge the gap between my gesture as felt and the foreign gesture as seen? The second puzzle has to do with Lipps's insistence that *I* am the source of empathy. In other words, that "I immediately live through *my activity* in the perception of the other's gesture"<sup>27</sup>. How do I find *my activity* in the perceptual experience of an object outside of myself—the other person's body? Lipps introduces the instinct of imitation to solve these puzzles.

As Lipps sees it, the existence of an instinct of imitation is uncontroversial, and he cites the well-known contagious nature of yawning as his primary example even though this is just one example of a broader tendency to imitate gestures that I observe in others<sup>28</sup>. He writes: "Now, by the grasping of another's gesture I immediately live through the tendency to produce the gesture"<sup>29</sup>. Because of the aforementioned instinct of expression, this instinctive impulse toward imitation drives in me the production of the same emotions that the gesture would produce were I making it on my own and not imitating it. "Thus, in the *other's* gesture I also become conscious of *myself* as tending toward my own production of the same gesture"<sup>30</sup>. Such a tendency, Lipps insists, "is always co-given, as such, in perceiving and grasping the gesture"<sup>31</sup>.

When we combine these two impulses—expression and imitation—we find the solution to the two puzzles mentioned above. Lipps writes:

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*Ibid.*, p. 715. My emphasis.

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*Ibid.*, p. 716.

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*Ibid.*, p. 716.

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*Ibid.*, p. 717. Emphasis in the original.

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*Ibid.*, p. 717.

“I see the other’s gesture and grasp it mentally, or I am grasping in it. And while being in it, there is a tendency in me to produce this gesture, i.e., the tendency to carry out a particular bodily activity. However, this tendency is again, as was just said, one and the same thing as the feeling of anger, it is immediately tied to this emotional state”<sup>32</sup>.

When I perceive another person making an angry gesture, I am instinctively impelled to imitate the gesture. I may or may not actually relinquish myself to this impulse<sup>33</sup>, nonetheless I feel myself driven toward imitating this gesture. The impulse to imitate the gesture produces a kinaesthetic image of the same in me, and this is tied to, and produces, an emotion by means of the instinct of expression. Thus, the combination of expression and imitation are meant to bridge the gap between the optically perceived gesture and the kinesthetically felt gesture.

The second puzzle—how do I find *my activity* in the perceptual experience of an object outside of myself?— is solved in a similar manner. Owing to the instincts of imitation and expression, the perception of another person’s gesture excites *in me* a particular emotion. “So, the emotion has been attached to the perceived gesture by virtue of the impulse to imitate the gesture, and precisely not as an accessory but as something that directly belongs to it”<sup>34</sup>. The case of empathically experienced emotions is different though than my own emotions since “I live through the tendency to expression again, but not as arising from my emotion, but rather as founded in the perception of the gesture in another’s body”<sup>35</sup>. This is a critical point. I experience an emotion; that emotion is in me, but I know that it belongs to the other person because I live through it as being founded in the perception of the other’s body and not as being founded in my

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32

*Ibid.*, p. 717.

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*Ibid.*, p. 716.

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*Ibid.*, p. 718.

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*Ibid.*, p. 719.



inner experience or as issuing from my own gesture. Empathy is, for Lipps, a form of objectified self-experience<sup>36</sup>. In his 1903 “‘Empathy’, inward imitation, and sense feelings”, we find a similar note regarding aesthetic empathy: “Aesthetic satisfaction consists in this; that it is satisfaction in an object, which yet, just so far as it is an object of satisfaction, is not an object but myself; or it is satisfaction in a self which yet, just so far as it is aesthetically enjoyed is not myself but something objective”<sup>37</sup>. For Lipps, I can only be acquainted with emotions on the basis of my own inner experience. Thus, the emotion that I grasp as founded in the perception of the other’s body can only be, in truth, *my activity*.

### 3. The Phenomenological Reception of Lipps’s Theory

The phenomenological school of philosophy is easily one of the most influential philosophical movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Phenomenology really emerged onto the scene with the 1900/1901 publication of Edmund Husserl’s two volume *Logical Investigations* and his move to the University of Göttingen. In 1916, Husserl would move Albert Ludwigs University in Freiburg to serve as full professor until his retirement in 1928. However, the Göttingen years, from 1901 to 1916, were some of phenomenology’s most fruitful. During this time, Husserl’s work spread like wildfire through the German academy and drew some of the brightest students of the day to work with him in Göttingen. His work was especially popular in Munich where, in

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*Ibid.*, p. 714.

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Theodor LIPPS, “‘Empathy’, inner imitation, and sense feelings” translated by E.F. CARRITT, E.F. CARRITT (dir.), *Philosophies of beauty from Socrates to Robert Bridges: being the sources of aesthetic theory*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1947, p. 253.

1895, Lipps had established the Academic Society for Psychology (*Akademischer Verein für Psychologie*)<sup>38</sup>.

Lipps's student, Johannes Daubert, was the first to introduce Husserl's work in Munich<sup>39</sup>. Husserl was invited to address the Society in 1904, and in 1905 Daubert and Adolf Reinach began taking courses with Husserl in Göttingen. This opened the flood gates, and a wave of students from Munich moved to Göttingen to study phenomenology at the feet of the master. The influence was not only one-way; Lipps also exerted an influence on phenomenology. According to Edith Stein, it was from Theodor Lipps that Husserl adopted the use of the term *Einfühlung*<sup>40</sup>, explorations of which occupy a central place in his research manuscripts from 1905 to 1935<sup>41</sup>. In truth, it is in phenomenology that Lipps's arguments regarding empathy were most influential. Interest in empathy seems to have fizzled out in experimental psychology in Germany after 1913, yet Husserl, Stein, and Scheler each devoted considerable effort to the concept in their works and Lipps influenced each. For instance, all three assimilated into their work Lipps's criticisms of the theory that empathy rests on an inference from analogy. Their reception of his positive account of *Einfühlung*, though, was overwhelmingly negative. In what follows, I will

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Alessandro SALICE, "The phenomenology of the Munich and Göttingen circles", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (dir), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/phenomenology-mg/>, accessed 19 June 2017.

39

Karl SCHUHMAN, "Introduction: Johannes Daubert's lecture 'On the psychology of apperception and judgment' from July 1902", *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* 2, 2002, p. 338-339. See also Reinhold SMID, "An early interpretation of Husserl's phenomenology: Johannes Daubert and the *Logical Investigations*", *Husserl Studies* 2, 1985, p. 267-290.

40

Edith STEIN, *Life in a Jewish family: her unfinished autobiographical account*, translated by J. Koeppel, Washington D.C., ICS Publications, 1986, p. 269.

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See HUSSERL 1973a, 1973b, and 1973c.

review their reception of his theory and offer my own observations on the cogency of their protests. Some, but not all, of their objections are justified.

### 3.1 Einfühlung or Einsföhlung?

In *On the problem of empathy*, Stein accuses Lipps's theory of empathy of confusing two distinct acts. She writes that he confuses "being drawn into the experience at first given objectively and fulfilling its implied tendencies" with "the transition from non-primordial [*nicht-originäre*] to primordial [*originären*] experience"<sup>42</sup>. The accusation is that Lipps confuses experience of foreign individuals with a feeling of oneness with the other person. Stein writes: "We do not agree that there is a complete coincidence with the remembered, expected, or empathized 'I,' that they become one"<sup>43</sup>. Later, contrasting Lipps's notions of "positive" and "negative" empathy, she declares that Lipps's theory identifies the former with cases where "the tendency of the empathic experience to become a primordial experience" is realized and the latter with cases where something prevents the empathized experience's becoming primordial<sup>44</sup>.

A brief aside on the term, primordial, is in order before we return to Stein's criticism. Primordial, in the sense in which she is using the term here, indicates the mode of givenness of the experience, that the experience is being lived through in the first-person perspective, that the experience *is mine*. The primordial/non-primordial distinction can also apply to the mode of givenness of an object of experience. For instance, as I look out my office door at this moment, I perceive a burgundy couch. The burgundy couch is primordially present in this experience.

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Edith STEIN, *Empathy*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

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*Ibid.*, p. 12-13.

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*Ibid.*, p. 15.

Perception has this feature, that its objects are given to consciousness in the flesh, primordially. I may also close my eyes and recall the couch. When I do so, the object of my memory—the couch—is not itself present in the experience in the same way. An image of the couch, as I recall it, is present in memory. The couch’s presence is non-primordial. To combine these two senses of primordial and non-primordial, we may say the following. My perceiving the couch—qua perceiving—is a primordial experience with primordial content. My remembering the couch—qua remembering—is a primordial experience with non-primordial content.

To return to Stein’s criticism, she argues that Lipps wrongly confuses empathy (*Einfühlung*) with a feeling of oneness (*Einsfühlung*). She writes: “Lipps says that as long as empathy is complete ... there is no distinction between our own and the foreign ‘I,’ that they are one”<sup>45</sup>. Max Scheler adopts Stein’s criticism of Lipps in the second edition of *On the nature of sympathy*<sup>46</sup>.

However, Steuber calls Stein’s reading of Lipps a “common misconception”<sup>47</sup>. Yet, is this a misunderstanding? Lipps writes in various places:

“So far as I thus feel myself active in the observed object, I at the same time feel myself free, light, proud, in it. This is aesthetic imitation and also aesthetic empathy. Here all emphasis must be laid on the ‘identity’ which exists for my consciousness. This must be taken quite strictly”<sup>48</sup>.

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*Ibid.*, p. 16.

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Max SCHELER, *On the nature of sympathy*, translated by Peter Heath, New Brunswick, New Jersey, Transaction Publishers, 2008, p. 14ff.

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Karsten STEUBER, *Rediscovering empathy*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

48

Theodor LIPPS, “‘Empathy’, inner imitation, and sense feeling”, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

“Contrariwise in the aesthetic imitation this opposition is absolutely overcome. The two are made one. The mere idea disappears and is replaced by my actual feeling. And so it comes about that I feel myself carrying out the movement in the other’s movement”<sup>49</sup>.

“This means that what I take out from me is, or I myself am, objectified, and that which is nothing other than a piece of the external world, like any other piece of the external world or occurrence in it, is animated. It has been animated in the sense that *I have put my soul inside it*”<sup>50</sup>.

“This is what is meant by Empathy: that the distinction between the self and the object disappears or rather does not yet exist”<sup>51</sup>.

And Geiger, a student of Lipps, in describing Lipps’s theory, writes:

“[I]n this full empathy the experience is rather as such: There aren’t two existing things, as long as I live in this foreign anger. There is not my ego and at the same time another ego, which is located in its respective spatial place and body. I live in the foreign body and feel myself inside it. Only subsequent reflection makes effective the separation between me and the foreign beings”<sup>52</sup>.

If this is, in fact, a misunderstanding, his interpreters might be forgiven. Lipps does appear to assert that empathy involves an identity between the empathizing and empathized egos. Its being a common misconception might be taken as evidence for its being a reasonable interpretation of the available facts.

I would like to take a closer look at Stein’s denunciation of Lipps on this point though. The objection revolves around his having overlooked the distinction between my experiences and another person’s, in other words his apparently ignoring the primordial/non-primordial distinction. This is evident when she cashes out the impact of her reading of Lipps’s theory. She

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*Ibid.*, p. 255.

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Theodor LIPPS, “The knowledge of other egos”, *op. cit.*, p. 714. My emphasis.

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Theodor LIPPS, “‘Empathy’, inward imitation, and sense feelings”, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

52

Moritz GEIGER, “On the essence and meaning of empathy, part I”, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

claims that it would result in the suspension of the distinction between my I and the foreign I as well as the distinction between my experience and the experience of others. It is also manifest in her diagnosis of where Lipps went awry, viz., in “the confusion of self-forgetfulness, through which I can surrender myself to any object, with a dissolution of the ‘I’ in the object”<sup>53</sup>. The “self-forgetfulness” she describes here may best be understood in the experience of becoming enthralled in a movie. When the film ends, you realize that for two hours you have not noticed what has been going on around you; indeed you have not even noticed that you were in a theater. You were simply *in* the film, living through it. In such cases, Stein would point out that there has not been any merging of my ego with the characters of the film, or the acrobat to use Lipps’s famous example. I have been “at” the subject of the other experience—as she put it—living through the other’s experiences *as belonging to her*<sup>54</sup>. The primordial/non-primordial distinction is always in play<sup>55</sup>. It seems, therefore, that Stein’s objection that Lipps has confused *Einfühlung* with *Einsfühlung* stands or falls with whether or not his account involves the dissolution of the distinction between own and foreign experiences.

It is my contention that Lipps does not want to collapse this distinction. For instance, consider a passage from “The knowledge of other egos” quoted above: “I live through the tendency to expression again, but not as arising from my emotion, but rather as founded in the

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Edith STEIN, *Empathy*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

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*Ibid.*, p. 16.

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This is an essential point in Stein’s own theory of empathy, which I cannot develop in this essay. However, I must point out that the essential difference between empathy and other primordial acts with non-primordial content—such as memory, expectation, and fantasy—is that in empathy the empathizing I and the empathized I are non-identical, while in memory, there is a consciousness of identity between the remembering I and the remembered I. See STEIN, 1989, p. 8-11.

perception of the gesture in another's body"<sup>56</sup>. What Lipps asserts here is that, when I empathize another's anger for instance, the tendency to imitate the other's gesture gives rise to a feeling of anger in me, but this anger that arises in me is importantly different from instances where I am, myself, angry. Empathized emotions are founded in perception of the other's body; my emotions are not.

Furthermore, Geiger notes that Lipps claims empathized emotions lack the 'effectiveness' (*Wirkungsfähigkeit*) of our own emotions<sup>57</sup>. When referencing the ineffectiveness of empathized emotions, Geiger is discussing Lipps's 1904, "*Weiteres zur 'Einfühlung'*"<sup>58</sup> and distinguishing the view of Lipps from those who argued empathized emotions were imagined—for instance Witasek, Volkelt, and Prandtl<sup>59</sup>. The relevant quotation from Geiger reads:

“When we experience the wrath of Michelangelo's Moses, this anger does not oppose us objectively, but we are in it. We live in this anger. It has the full self-giveness (*Selbstgegebenheit*) of anger which we ourselves tend to have, even if for other reasons it is not as effective as anger in everyday life.”<sup>60</sup>

This claim is similar to what Stein would say about the motivation of empathized feelings. Non-primordial, empathized emotions lack the motivational content of primordial emotions. Therefore, we see two ways in which Lipps attempts to maintain the distinction between my emotions and empathized emotions and thus also between my own and foreign experience. 1)

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Theodor LIPPS, “The knowledge of other egos”, *op. cit.*, p. 719.

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Moritz GEIGER, “On the essence and meaning of empathy, part I”, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

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Theodor LIPPS, “*Weiteres zur 'Einfühlung'*”, *Archiv für die gesamte Psychologie*, 4, 1904, p. 465-519.

59

Moritz GEIGER, “On the essence and meaning of empathy, part I”, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

60

Moritz GEIGER, “*Über das Wesen und die Bedeutung der Einfühlung*”, In F. Schumann (dir) *IV. Kongress für experimentelle Psychologie*, Leipzig, J.A. Barth, 1910, p. 36. My translation.

The latter have a different ground than the former. 2) My emotions are effective (in that they *affect me*) in my lived experience but empathized ones are not. Notice that I have said that Lipps *attempts* to maintain the distinction in question. As we consider a closely related objection, I will argue that this attempt, in fact, fails.

### 3.2 More Phenomenological Criticisms

In 1903, Lipps identifies *Einfühlung* as one of three sources of human knowledge. His theory of empathy is supposed to account for our knowledge of other selves. But does it? A closer look at his theory gives rise to the objection that empathy, as he describes it, results in self-understanding and not knowledge of other selves. Per Lipps, we only know of mental and emotional states from our own experience<sup>61</sup>. Thus, it is no surprise to discover him saying: “Psychologically considered, other human beings are duplications of myself”<sup>62</sup>. Other egos can only be duplications of my ego because I only know *of egos* and *of egoic life* from my own case.

In empathy, I am supposed to experience the other’s emotional state in me. Above, I noted that Lipps appears to try to argue that, although the experience is *in me*, I can still identify it as belonging to another ego. The ground of my knowing that the experience belongs to the other is two-fold: 1) empathized feelings are grounded in my perception of the other’s body and 2) empathized feelings lack the motivational effectiveness of own-feelings. Still, Lipps cannot escape the fact that what one experiences in empathy are, in fact, *one’s own* psychological states

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Theodor LIPPS, “The knowledge of other egos”, *op. cit.*, p. 713.

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Theodor LIPPS, “Ästhetische Einfühlung”, *Zeitschrift für Psychologie und Physiologie der Sinnesorgane* 22, 1900, p. 418, quoted in Søren OVERGAARD and Dan ZAHAVI, “Empathy without isomorphism: a phenomenological account”, In Jean DECETY (dir) *Empathy: from bench to bedside*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2012, p. 9. See also Geiger’s description in Moritz GEIGER, “On the essence and meaning of empathy, part I”, *op. cit.*, p. 23.



that, because of the instinct of empathy, one attributes to the other. In other words, the object of empathic experience are psychological states belonging to the *empathizer* and not the *empathizee*. They are then *attributed to* the empathizee. As Overgaard and Zahavi write when discussing a similar theory advanced by Alvin Goldman: “But this seems de facto to imprison me within my own mind and prevent me from ever encountering *others*”<sup>63</sup>. On an account of empathy grounded in simulation, one never actually experiences other’s mental lives.

One apparent response would be to say that the attribution of empathized experiences to others is justified on the basis of an inference from analogy. The reply might run something like this. I perceive the other making a particular gesture. The instincts of imitation expression take over resulting in an empathized emotion in me. I then infer that because this is what I feel, and the other appears to be like me, it is probably what she also feels. However, this response will not do. Lipps himself spends a considerable amount of time criticizing that precise argument.

I will briefly review one of Lipps’s many criticisms of the inference from analogy position because understanding Lipps’s own criticism may strengthen the objection we are considering against his own theory<sup>64</sup>. Lipps writes that, “analogical inferences claim that, since I once found A and B together, also in new cases where I find A again I will think of the past B as existing, and not a fundamentally different B<sub>i</sub>”<sup>65</sup>. Consider what the inference from analogy theory must say about a case of empathizing another’s anger. When I am angry, what I find in the expression (A), is *my* anger (B). Therefore, all at which I can ever arrive at again, via

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Søren OVERGAARD and Dan ZAHAVI, “Empathy without isomorphism”, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

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Lipps spends a great deal of ink criticizing the argument that empathy rests on an inference from analogy. See Theodor LIPPS, “The knowledge of other egos”, *op. cit.*, p. 697-712.

65

*Ibid.*, p. 708.

analogous inference anyway, is *my* anger. When I see an expression of anger A at another place in the world (on the physical body over there), the only justified inference from analogy would be to expect to feel the same B again, viz., *my own anger*. Lipps is adamant that my experience of anger and its expression in my gesture does not acquaint me with *anger as such*, only my own anger<sup>66</sup>. To arrive at the anger of another, one has to infer to a fundamentally different B<sub>i</sub>. In other words, inference from analogy could only ever arrive at self-knowledge, not the knowledge of other selves.

Not only would it be unwise to try and save Lipps's theory by appealing to a theory which he rejects but also his criticisms of the theory of analogical inference seem to apply to his own account of empathy. Recall that Lipps insists that I am only aware of mental states from my own case. Then how, we must ask, can empathy provide me with knowledge of other selves? Imitation and expression give rise in me to a feeling that I attribute to the other. The only justifiable basis for attributing this state to the other is an analogous inference that would be justified because the feeling is grounded in my perception of the other's body, that the feeling lacks the motivational effectiveness that my own feelings normally carry, and the other appears similar to me in relevant ways. Despite these justifications, the attribution is still based on analogous inference and arrives at self-understanding, not knowledge of other selves. It should now be clear that, although Lipps does not try to collapse the distinction between primordial and non-primordial experience, his account of the operation of empathy cannot sustain a difference between them.

The final criticism I would like to consider is the possibility that Lipps's account of empathy commits the logical fallacy of begging the question. He presupposes what he sets out to

explain. Empathy is supposed to be the source of our knowledge of other selves; however, Husserl charges that Lipps focuses too much on expression without realizing that expression, as such, only makes sense if the other is already an embodied subject:

“One sees Lipps is entirely fixated on the problem of the expression of mental expressions and is blind to the fact that the perception of another mainly requires an understanding of the living body as a living body, and above all of the relationship between body and subject in the sense of the spiritual subject. First, embodiment must be established then it can be constituted foreign spirituality that is expressed physically.”<sup>67</sup>

In other words, Lipps’s theory cannot propose to explain that we experience other egos through their expressed mental states because to call something an expression already presupposes that one is dealing with an embodied subject.

Scheler levels a similar complaint against Lipps’s theory—and against any theory of empathy that is based on imitation. He argues that imitation, as explanatory of the way in which we understand others’ mental states, “presupposes some kind of acquaintance with the other’s experience and therefore cannot explain what it is here supposed to do”.<sup>68</sup> His point is that, if empathy is meant to explain how I understand or experience others’ mental states, then saying that I do so by some kind of imitation will not suffice. My understanding of your mental state cannot be based on imitation unless I am already familiar with it. Conceptually speaking, imitation always requires previous acquaintance with that which is to be imitated; otherwise, it is *not imitation*.

Lipps’s potential response to this objection is to maintain that it is not the other’s mental state which is imitated. Rather, I imitate the other’s bodily gesture and because of the close

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Edmund HUSSERL, *Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Erster Teil.*, *op. cit.*, p. 74, n. 3. My translation.

68

Max SCHELER, *Sympathy*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

connection between mental states and their expression this gives rise to a similar experience *in me* that counts as an understanding of the other's mental state. This reply will not do either. On this account, we simply return to the previous objection. The empathizer does not actually experience foreign selves. She arrives at experiences *of her own*, which are posited as being like the others' experiences. And what can justify this supposition of likeness apart from something like an inference from analogy, which Lipps himself strongly rejects and for good reason?

Therefore, Lipps's theory seems to hit an impasse. On the one hand, it appears to beg the question. On the other hand—if it does not beg the question—it leads to self-knowledge rather than the knowledge of other selves that it promised. And finally, the response that would let Lipps assert that his account of empathy does lead to knowledge of other selves is blocked by his own devastating arguments against appeals to an inference from analogy.

#### **4. Conclusion**

One might be tempted to ask: If Lipps got it so wrong, why bother writing about him or his theories? Why not consign him to the dustbin of history like so many before him? The answer is that, to do so, would be to miss one of the truly influential thinkers of the early twentieth century. While I am critical of his theory of empathy, Lipps's influence cannot be denied. The Munich psychologist and philosopher produced some of the most outstanding students of his day; Alexander Pfänder, Moritz Geiger, Theodor Conrad, Adolph Reinach, Gerda Walter, and Johannes Daubert to name a few. He is one of the giants of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century German academy, and we all stand on his shoulders.

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