

KNOWING BY HEART

Northwestern University
Studies in Phenomenology
and
Existential Philosophy

General Editor Anthony J. Steinbock



KNOWING BY HEART

Loving as Participation
and Critique

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Northwestern University Press
Evanston, Illinois

Northwestern University Press
www.nupress.northwestern.edu

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Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Steinbock, Anthony J., author.

Title: Knowing by heart : loving as participation and critique / Anthony J Steinbock.

Other titles: Northwestern University studies in phenomenology & existential philosophy.

Description: Evanston, Illinois : Northwestern University Press, 2021. |

Series: Northwestern University Studies in phenomenology and existential philosophy | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021011089 | ISBN 9780810144026 (paperback) |

ISBN 9780810144033 (cloth) | ISBN 9780810144040 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Love. | Emotions and cognition.

Classification: LCC BD436 .S764 2021 | DDC 128.46—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021011089>

To my grandchildren, Reuben and Lars

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Acknowledgments

I am indebted to many people who have contributed in various ways to this work. My longtime friend, Art Luther, passed away as this book was nearing completion. Even in his last months, he would eagerly greet these topics with unparalleled sensitivity and insight, and hours would fly by in discussion, especially when we would try out new coffees in Portland. It is my hope that this work “runs true” and “stays real,” as he would say. I am especially grateful to my wife, Leslie Brown, who has helped me see this project through from beginning to end in innumerable ways, from conversations on the book to her generous final proofreading. Some of these ideas were also hammered out with my cycling partner, Thomas Price. Enduring several drafts, but also lending a patient ear while interval training in all seasons, he has become, perhaps unwittingly, a practiced “cychologist.” I have benefited from detailed comments by Jeff Bloechl. A most subtle and discerning thinker, he has offered perceptive observations on every chapter, while holding remarkably to the spirit of the work—observations to which I have tried to do justice throughout this book. I have also benefited from Ed Casey’s careful attention to several chapters of this book, through his in-depth commentaries and invaluable suggestions. I have profited, too, from Sara Heinämaa’s detailed comments on some early chapters. This work is all the better for having received such assiduous attention. My sincere thanks also go to others who have read earlier versions of the manuscript, and from whose comments I have benefited: Nita de Olivera, Ignacio Quepons, and Mohsen Saber. My appreciation also extends to Caleb Faul, who expertly and diligently prepared the bibliography, and to Matt Clemons for his meticulous work in compiling the index. Some of the themes developed in this book were presented and discussed in the Phenomenology Research Group. I am grateful to all the participants, and would especially like to acknowledge Andrew Barrette, Jackie Berg, Micah Klarich, Emilia Russo, Mohsen Saber, and Hora Zabarjadi Sar. I would like to thank my copy editor, Paul Mendelson, and the managing editor at NUP, Anne Gendler, for their advice and expertise. Finally, I am especially indebted to Trevor Perri for urging me to pursue the project with Northwestern University Press, and for his diligence in conducting me through the process.

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The Schema of the Heart

The heart figures pervasively in human experience, and as more than a physiological pump. The expression “heart” as it occurs in the English language is already telling. For example, when someone is generous, we might say that she has a big heart; if she is unmoved, she has a heart of stone. If someone is uncaring or dispassionate, he might be said to have a cold heart, and if he is caring, a warm heart. We might hear “Oh, have a heart!” if we want the person to be compassionate; or to an unkind act, we might object: “That was heartless!” A sympathetic and touching comment can be heartfelt, while those who are insensitive to the needs of others are hard-hearted.

This is especially the case in more intimate interpersonal relations. If we love others deeply, we love them with all our heart; if we are disappointed in love, we might experience a broken heart. If we miss our sweetheart terribly, our heart aches, while we might communicate a personal tragedy with a heavy heart. Our relations with events are also expressive of the heart. For instance, if we are really discouraged about something, our heart sinks. If we become nervous or frightened, we might find our heart in our throat. If we give up all hope, we lose heart. When we talk about what matters to us most, or if we speak sincerely, we speak from the heart.

The heart also comes to expression in our individual lives. If I am transparent about my feelings, I wear my heart on my sleeve. When I undergo a considerable transformation about an important decision or significantly transform my life, I have a change of heart (which is more than simply a change of mind). If I remember something so well that I don’t even have to think about it, I have it down by heart. Indeed, *recordar* (in Spanish), “to remember,” has as its root *corazón*, “heart”—suggesting that the epistemic act of remembering takes place through the heart.

Already in everyday speech, the heart resonates with the character of the person and as the center of the emotions. Broadly speaking, whether the expressions mentioned above refer to a possession or lack, whether they are positive or negative, they point to an experiential reality that covers a peculiar kind of knowing, a distinctive kind of cognition through feelings, signified under the general rubric, “heart.”

The significance of the heart is not only peculiar to everyday expressions. An earlier study has shown the pervasiveness of the heart across

many cultures and times: in the academy of medicine, in Western antiquity, in the thought of the ancient Egyptians, in rituals in ancient Mexico, and in the spiritual life of India.¹ For example, in the Path section of the Shabaka Stone, dating perhaps to the Old Kingdom or even as far back as the first dynasty in Egypt, the cosmology/theogony presents Path as the creator of the life of the gods through the heart (*'ib*) and the tongue. But it is the heart that “causes all cognition to originate, and it is the tongue that repeats the thought of the heart.”²

In Aztec metaphysics, before it was reinterpreted by the Spaniards in terms of Greek and Roman mythologies, *teyolia* was one of three vital forces in the cosmos, and was present in humans, animals, plants, mountains, wind, rivers, and towns—though in human beings, it was concentrated primarily in the heart.³ Thus, it was possible to speak of a town-heart, a mountain-heart, an earth-heart, so that earthquakes became associated with the motion and sound of a beating heart. In this sense, the beating human heart is merely an aspect of the vitalizing force.⁴ According to León-Portilla, in Nahuatl, *yóllotl* (heart) is derived from the same root as *ollin* (movement).⁵ Moreover, “heart,” “movement,” and “soul” shared a common linguistic and experiential root, he contends, so that for the ancient Mexicans, life (and “to live,” *yoli*), which were symbolized by the heart, were inconceivable without movement.⁶ For the Tojolabal culture (in southern Mexico), the virtue of the true leader is to be able to listen to or understand from or with the heart.⁷ In a related manner, in Hopi spiritual experience, the modality of existence called “manifesting,” or what David Abram calls the gathering itself toward manifestation within the depths of all sensible phenomena, occurs in the heart of humans, plants, animals, and nature.⁸ Furthermore, the fourth center of the living body of humans (and of the earth) for the Hopi was the heart. If they felt the good life, they were of One Heart, but if they let evil feelings enter, they were of Two Hearts.⁹ Thus, to be right is to have a right heart.¹⁰

While the heart is the point of contact between the soul and body, with the heart being the most sentient part of the body, according to the yoga philosophy of Patañjali, the heart cannot be located by an anatomical analysis of the body; rather, it is determined by following the feelings (of happiness, sadness, etc.).¹¹ By practicing *śamīyama* (meditation, concentration) on the heart, we can acquire knowledge of the mind (*chitta*).¹² Furthermore, in traditional Chinese thought, not only is the expression *xin* (心), or “heart-mind,” tied to the cognitive dimension of feelings and emotions, the heart has a striking relation to emotions in Chinese philosophy, especially in Confucian thought and Daoism.¹³

The Abrahamic tradition is well known for connecting the heart to

loving and to the core of the person. For example, the term “heart” (לֵב/*lev*) and its variations occur close to six hundred times in the Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible; in the New Testament, the term “heart” (καρδία) and its variations appear around 150 times; and in the Quran, the term “heart” (*qalb*) appears 131 times.¹⁴ These occurrences suggest that the heart has a special place in Abrahamic spirituality. In the Tanakh, for instance, the heart often connotes moral tenor, the interior life of the person, or spiritual cognition. In certain Jewish mystical traditions, understanding is knowing infused by heart, a “heart to understand” and an understanding by heart.¹⁵ Furthermore, a repentant person is said to have a contrite and crushed heart (Ps. 51:19) (*zu brochenkeit; lev nishvar/לב־נִשְׁבַּר*).¹⁶ This is related in the Tanakh to the notion of humility and genuine service to God as the circumcision of the heart.¹⁷ In the Eastern Orthodox Church, and in Hesychast spirituality specifically, the prayer of the heart (or the “Jesus prayer”) is a meditative prayer that is usually attached to the rhythm of breathing.¹⁸ Here, it is spiritual quiet that becomes infused (divinely) in the psychosomatic process.¹⁹ In early Christian experience, the heart is already connected to divinity, as expressed in Augustine’s opening of the *Confessions*; namely, the heart is restless until it finds its quiet in God.²⁰ And in later Catholic Christianity, an extravagance of loving evident in selfless, unprotected devotion characterizes the sacred heart.²¹ In Islamic mystical experience, it is the heart at the center of personhood that comprehends or perceives in its own way, and is peculiar to a vast array of spiritual experiences.²²

All this is to say that the heart has had a profound role in human experience, historically and cross-culturally. However, its cognitive dimension as a sphere of evidence and as holding a central place in the human person, while patent at other times and in various cultures, has been obfuscated in modern Western social imaginaries and epistemologies. The heart still tends to be identified with subjective sentiments, which are either tallied on the side of sensibility and instinct, or made meaningful by being subordinated to a rational calculus or by needing reason as their chaperone. Even today, cognitive psychology and cognitive behavioral therapy have pushed the term “cognition” in an objectivist, quasi-scientific direction. In either case, the heart and its own cognitive dimension are granted no distinctive purchase in this dualism of reason and sensibility.²³

On the one hand, viewed from the side of reason, the heart can be said to be nonrational. But this doesn’t mean that the heart doesn’t have its own styles of cognition and evidence, as this sphere of givenness bears on value. Rationality is not the sole province of cognition, and it is misleading to expand reason now to say that it covers everything. That is

the problem. There is another province of cognition or “knowing” that is peculiar to the heart, and just because it is nonrational doesn’t mean that it is non-knowing or lacks evidence.²⁴

From the side of sensibility, even though the heart has its own *cognitive* dimension as it bears on value, this does not mean that it is averse to feeling. It exhibits its own structural a priori as neither founded upon perception nor reduced to basic instincts, nor is its own kind of cognition derived from a judgment.²⁵ This is not to say that rationality is somehow insignificant. It is one way of critically assessing our experiences and thoughts.

However, the dualism between rationality and sensibility has tended to shove the heart to the side of sensibility merely, to maintain that the heart is devoid of spirit, and to oversee the operations of the heart by making sure it is under the correct tutelage of reason. In this way, reason has been allowed to colonize the heart where evidence and the spiritual becoming of person and social relations are concerned.

This dualism has had disastrous implications and consequences when rationality gets associated with the human, the male, the adult, the white, progress, advancement, meaning, history, and so on; everything else (nonhuman, women, children, non-“white” races, etc.) is either suspect, insignificant, dangerous, or only becomes meaningful by aligning itself with that model of rationality.²⁶ American film noir has often exploited this identification of the emotions with alienation, the other or stranger, the erotic, and the uncontrollable, especially through key jazz scenes and the appearance of African Americans, as well as through the image of the femme fatale.²⁷ But film noir has also explored the possibility of retrieving a distinctive order of the heart, while not advocating a return to traditional modern and classical male virtues of rationality and courage, on the one hand, or countering reason’s naturalistic and dualistic counterpart of sheer instinct, on the other.²⁸

My point in these observations is that there is another dimension of evidence and cognition that is peculiar to the heart, and that it has its own mode of critique (see chapter 6).²⁹ As Pascal already noted, the heart has its own order and language, and the intellect has its own.³⁰ Again, I am not advocating the negation of rationality; in order to live most fully, we need *to think* and *to think critically*. But the latter should not rule out another dimension of human personal experience, which has been excluded in terms of evidence, and which has its own kind of cognitive awareness or knowing, critical discernment, and evidential givenness; we also need *to feel* and *to feel discerningly*.

The heart is neither strictly material nor strictly formal, nor a mixture of the two. The heart is a distinctive structure that has been brought

into being in and through the acts and functions of the human person. A recent group has highlighted early stirrings of the heart in first-generation students of the phenomenological tradition, phenomenologists such as Gerda Walther, Hedwig Conrad-Martius, and Edith Stein.³¹ Walther, for example, was one of the first phenomenologists to investigate the experience of the mystics systematically, and also to explore phenomenologically (along with Max Scheler) the role of feeling in the constitution of community.³² For Conrad-Martius, living beings are qualified distinctively as human both by becoming aware of their own mastery and self-consciousness, and by virtue of the heart or *Gemüt*—and not by being *rational* animals.³³ Perhaps better-known among these early phenomenologists is Stein. Conducting her philosophical studies as Edmund Husserl's assistant with her original doctoral work on empathy, then later entering the community of the Discalced Carmelite nuns, and meeting her untimely death at the hands of Nazis in Auschwitz, Stein paved a path to the heart.³⁴ Elodie Boulil argues persuasively that for Stein, the heart was not only allied with an encompassing form of interiority, but is able to overcome the traditional dualism of the cognitive and emotional dimensions of our experience.³⁵

In a broad sense, and also repudiating the traditional dualism of reason and sensibility, S. Strasser understands *das Gemüt* as a distinctive experiential structure where the person is concerned. *Das Gemüt*—which can be translated as “heart,” but also as mood, feeling, heartiness, affective attunement, and so on—in relation to the person, is the most tender, vulnerable, individual aspect of a person.³⁶ Dietrich von Hildebrand uses the term “heart” in a very specific sense, namely, to evoke only the deepest personal core of loving. For her part, the contemporary phenomenologist Natalie Depraz advances a “cardio-phenomenology” in order to describe a heart-system. The heart-system is more integrative than the brain-system, and she understands the bodily-emotional dimension and its lived-temporality as an intrinsic part of the cognitive system.³⁷ Other figures in the contemporary phenomenological tradition, like Jean-Luc Marion, Michel Henry, and Claude Romano, also harken implicitly and gesture evocatively to similar configurations of the heart.³⁸

While I share some overlap with these authors, among other contemporary thinkers, in distinction to Strasser, Hildebrand, and Depraz, I understand “heart” as the vast schema that covers feelings and feeling-states, a schema that ranges from the deepest loving to affects and felt conditions. More specifically, what von Hildebrand understands as the “affective sphere,” I understand as integrated into the broad schema of the heart; and what he takes to be the heart, I take to be the *emotional* core of the person. Accordingly, for me, the heart is relevant even to a

being who experiences the barest affective pains and pleasures, or to one who feels sadness or contentment; it does so because such a being already participates in infinite personal or divine loving merely *by* experiencing bodily pains and pleasures, sadness or contentment.

As relating to the person, the heart is more than a dimension or sphere; it is what I call a *schema*.³⁹ It expresses *in its own way* the whole of human experience. I reserve other terms commonly associated with this schema (such as feelings, emotions, passions, etc.) for discriminations that make up the schema of the heart. By “schema,” I mean an articulated dimensionality of relations and interrelations. It is a dimensionality that has its own structures of cognition, of intentionality and non-intentionality, which are irreducible to a presentational style of cognition that is characteristic of judicative or perceptual knowing.

This book continues to describe different kinds of givenness and modes of evidence peculiar to vertical experiencing that I have undertaken in previous works. The particular kind of vertical givenness or *verticality* that I treat here is revelation or revelatory givenness—the revelation of another as person and the self-revelation as person. In terms of a more general phenomenology of verticality, I began this project with a description of religious experiencing (epiphany) and continued with a phenomenology of the emotions, specifically, interpersonal emotions.⁴⁰

Knowing by Heart renews the latter efforts, and focuses on loving and hating. In a previous work dealing with interpersonal emotions—emotions that open the moral sphere (not emotions that are normatively good or bad)—I attempted to show the distinctive structure of evidence peculiar to the emotional sphere of experience.⁴¹ These modes of givenness concerned the revelation of the person: the revelation of others and the revelation of myself. Specifically, I showed the ways in which the emotions as moral emotions are not founded in a presentational style of givenness of a perceptual type (“objectivating acts,” to use Husserl’s phrase), but have their own distinctive structure of givenness and evidence. They have their peculiar relation to otherness, their own temporal structures, and their own modalities and modalizations of evidence. Furthermore, since the emotions are constitutive of persons at least as much as perception and rationality are, they can not only speak to, but can be transformative of our social imaginaries, and have a positive role in our social, political, economic, and ecological practices. The attempt then was, as it is now, to reclaim the evidence of the heart.

Although following upon my earlier book *Moral Emotions*, this work, *Knowing by Heart*, which deals with loving and hating in the schema of the heart, is actually at the foundation of that previous work as well as of the investigation into the structure of the vertical givenness of revelation. I

emphasize this because experiences ranging from shame to trust, from hope to repentance, from pride to humility all presuppose loving in some way. My brief description of loving in *Moral Emotions* served as a marker for a field of experiences that are foundational for other experiences of the heart. My goal in the present volume is to elaborate upon and clarify what I call the encompassing schema of the heart in order to situate loving and hating. The following chapters do not sketch the history of the concept of love and hate in philosophy and literature; nor do they give a mapping of all the different things we call love.⁴² Rather, my attempt is to describe a distinctive mode of givenness and evidence of the heart in interpersonal experience, and to prepare a way to understand, in another work, vocational experience.

In the first chapter I describe feelings and feeling-states, and I suggest how feelings and feeling-states are related. The reader who wishes to circumvent this more technical discussion concerning the essential distinctions between “feelings” and “feeling-states,” and the description of how they are related through an auto-affection, can pass over this chapter and move directly to chapter 2 and the phenomenological point of departure of the beloved. It is important to note, however, that feelings have their own kind of intentional structure and evidence, are dynamic movements, and are irreducible to feeling-states, which are static. Emotions are kinds of feelings, and loving and hating are preeminent examples of such act-movements. States and conditions like being sad, being angry, hatred, being in love, and being joyful are examples of feeling-states.

The subsequent chapters focus on phenomenological descriptions of loving, and in relation to loving, hating. They trace an arc from loving as participation to loving as critique. In chapter 2, I begin with the phenomenology of the beloved as a first-person perspective point of departure, which in a qualified way is a second-person perspective. In chapter 3 I describe loving as “participating being,” in distinction to perceptual and judicative life as a participation in being. Chapter 4 is a further elaboration of this participating being by examining erotic participation that links lived-body to lived-body (and not, e.g., enjoyment that joins lived-body to world). Since participation in being can be naive, I take up the necessity of critique in chapter 5. But because participating being (loving) has a different tenor, structure, and import, I address a unique style of critique peculiar to the schema of the heart, namely, the *discernment* of the heart, in chapter 6. Chapter 7 then explores the normative dimensions that are peculiar to loving, namely, loving as responsive. Thus, by focusing on loving as participating being, I consider the challenge of normative critique within the heart, where critique is to be understood as a discernment of the heart, not of, but from loving. It is from this norma-

tive dimension of loving that I consider the movement of hating and its relation to loving. This yields a description of loving and hating in chapter 8, and in particular of how hating is founded in loving as *contrary* to loving; it also elicits further descriptions of modalities of hating such as slovenliness, indifference, and resentment. I conclude by showing the relation between the experiences of loving and hating and that of the problem of vocational experience and exemplarity.