

**PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE HUMAN PERSON AND HIERARCHY OF
VALUES IN PHILOSOPHY OF MAX SCHELER**

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ABSTRACT

This paper is focused on understanding the phenomenology of the human person and their hierarchy of values in the light of Max Scheler's philosophy. This paper presents the discussion of findings in logical presentation through organized themes to understand the phenomenology of the human person in the philosophical point of view. These themes include the Philosophy of Max Scheler, Person, Phenomenological Reduction, Distinction Between Goods and Values, Intentional Feelings, and Hierarchy of Values. The Phenomenology of Hierarchy of Values in the Philosophy of Max Scheler shows that values are phenomena that are given in experience. As such, there are world of objective values that serves as standard for moral action determined by emotional intuitive act of preference and subordination by the human person. This is contrary to the claim of Emmanuel Kant that morality is formal a priori or purely intellectually subjective without any material or objective correlation. Contrary to the claim of post modernism wherein everything is tentative, the human person reflects in his heart the microcosm of the hierarchy of values and the richness of the world of values. The human person is the center of all acts against the backdrop of the world of values. The value-person-types ground this contention wherein values would give the final stamp to the question of the creativity of meaning as regards human existence.

Keywords: *phenomenology of human person, hierarchy of values, philosophy of Max Scheler*

Scheler's Conception of Phenomenology

Max Scheler's philosophy belongs to what we call the phenomenological movement stemming from Edmund Husserl. Scheler applied Husserl's phenomenological method to man's emotional life and values. In his monumental work, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, Scheler developed a phenomenological theory of ethics and of person based on a non-rational, intuitive grasp of values.

The phenomenological movement, however, can only be understood in opposition to Kant. Both Husserl and Scheler do not agree with Kant for according to the latter, cognition can only be adequately explained in terms of formal a priori. The formal a priori is a Kantian attitude which expresses "hostility," "distrust," and "angst" of the world that is in dire need of rational formation and organization. The problem then becomes one of guaranteeing cognition without appealing to anything extrinsic to the cognitive operation itself. Husserl and so with Scheler find formal a priori inadequate and unsustainable. For Husserl and Scheler, it is not enough to say that knowledge has its absolute a priori laws. There is also a priori necessity on the objective side, the objective essence, which is to say that a priori is also material or non-formal. The mind is not only necessitated by laws of its functioning which are physiological, and by laws of thought which are logical, but also laws governing the object which are ontological. For both Husserl and Scheler, objective essences can be grasped in an intuition which comes at the end of phenomenological investigation. Up to this point, Scheler and Husserl are in agreement. However, Scheler has pushed further the frontiers of phenomenological investigation and goes beyond Husserl's strict rationalism.

Scheler has come forth with an entirely ground-breaking conceptualization of values and of person and their function in the *kairos* of the moral moment. He breaks through the traditional cognitive intellect and sense and has developed a phenomenological theory of values and ethics based on non-rational but intuitive grasp of essential values, and in particular, moral values. For Scheler, a priori extends far beyond the use of reason; he includes feeling nature within

the cognitive constitution of man, and therefore posits the so-called emotional a priori. It is through the emotional a priori that values are intuitively grasped. An objective, absolute and eternal order of values is disclosed to the intentional feeling because “the intellect is as blind to values as the ear and auditory sense to color.” The objective order of values is grasped through an a priori order of the heart (*ordere du coeur*) which is inaccessible to understanding. What is always and everywhere given in a value experience is what Scheler calls a priori or unchanging essence of value revealed by the insight of what is felt. It has manifested itself in the order of the heart in its intentional character. This is made possible by virtue of the spiritual act in man, the person. It is through the person that man acquires a dynamic openness to the discovery of the world of values or phenomena, and it is made manifest in the heart through its emotional intentionality.

Scheler’s view of the nature of person takes a fundamental turn that has opened a new horizon in the discussion of contemporary anthropology *vis-à-vis* ethical values. The analysis of the human person as the person’s existence consists solely in the execution or “acting out.” This view of the human person is also an implicit critique of the fledgling phenomenological movement that began to be formed by Edmund Husserl at the beginning of the 20th century, and for whom the human sphere of personhood was only secondary to the human transcendental ego. Scheler’s brand of phenomenology at this point deviates from that of Husserl especially on the notion of transcendental subjectivism. This deviation is a crucial point in the appraisal of Scheler’s phenomenological insight of the person and of values. Husserl himself finds dissatisfaction in grounding his philosophy on the phenomena of experience which have historical variations. “Husserl has realized that in uncovering the abstraction upon which the objective sciences depend and in thereby revealing the life-world, phenomenology seems not to offer as much a map of the essences as historical communities with all the variations in intuition that such communities possess. In other words, there is not one life-world but many.” Husserl remarks, “We have the embarrassment of wondering what else can be undertaken scientifically as something that can be established once and for all and for everyone.” Our own experienced life-world turns out not to form the final ground to scientific objectivity

but must itself be grounded in a non-relative, non-historical source, hence, in the constitutive activity of a Transcendental Ego.

It is from this vantage point that Scheler recognizes that phenomenology is always in danger of reducing itself to transcendental subjectivism. In other words, if the human being is essentially egological as Husserl believed, and if the ego is conceived to be purely rational ego without feelings, then the human being would be without values except those given in rationality. In contrast with antecedent phenomenological conception of the human consciousness as “pure”, Scheler holds that a pure consciousness by itself is a fiction. Scheler remonstrates that we have no other experiences of it in our consciousness other than that it is of a person. The egological consideration of human being gives much precedence to reason, while on personhood to emotional intuition of values.

Person

Scheler described his main work on ethics as being primarily concerned with the person. This statement may have been intended as a response to critics who have falsely construed Scheler’s ethics as a one-sided preoccupation with abstract values.

The person for Scheler is not a substance. The person in his actions transcends all the psychic and physical realms of man and frees itself from the clutches of the environment. As such, person cannot be objectified, “for every attempt to objectify it leads to a de-personalized being.” It is thus of his essence that it can never be an object. The person is not a thing. The person is, above all, outside the entire sphere of thingness. The person, through the execution of his acts, experiences himself at the same time, i.e., being the concrete unity of all possible acts. He exists solely in the pursuit of his acts. The person is the concrete act-center in the sense that in each act the whole person appears. And since there are different acts of consciousness, the person varies in each act and retains in each act certain uniqueness: this uniqueness is called the qualitative direction. This is that which a person has, and which makes him different from another person. The identity of the person lies in the qualitative direction of this

pure becoming other, that is, a development of becoming oneself by becoming other than one's present self. Such development may either enhance the person, as in the direction of love, or destroy him, as in that of resentment or hate. "Scheler proposes that the person is the 'performer' of acts, but it exists only in performing acts as setting them in motion, and is in continual actuality." The essence of the person exists and lives only in the performance of the intentional acts. Scheler describes the person as fully present in every single act being lived, but not exhaustively present. The person, as a loving person who is simultaneously present as source, is the center of other possible acts. The person is never given as a finished product, but rather is a dynamic orientation towards the rich dimension of values, and particularly moral values. Acts are correlated with intentional objects, the unity of acts to the unity of objects. The former is called the person, and the latter is the objective order of values. For every person there belongs a world, while at the same time, through the intentional performance of the acts he is involved in the objective order of values.

Phenomenological Reduction

The person's emotional life has an *a priori* structure which is independent from reason: "The heart possesses, in its own area of competence, a strict analogue of logic, which it does not borrow from the logic of understanding. The emotional dimension of spirit – feeling, preferring, loving, hating and willing – has an original *a priori* content which does not preclude it from the realm of thinking and which ethics has shown to be quite independent of logic. There is an *a priori* 'order of the heart' (*ordre du coeur*) or logic of the heart (*logique du coeur*) as Blaise Pascal succinctly phrases it. The person as the spiritual center of intentional acts assumes direction and guidance in accordance with the goal of values. The act of inhibiting and releasing vital energies is called guidance, while the act of presenting values is called direction. This is called the act of ideation in which the man grasps *a priori* qualities of objects or values. It is the capacity to separate essence from existence. The height of values depends on the strength of impulses. It is through the emphatic 'NO' of man, as spiritual being, that he asserts his freedom against his propensity to be swayed by reality which appears as a resistance. Man, as a human person, can freely offer his life for the

sake of higher spiritual values. Phenomenological reduction assumes an expanded meaning; it is not merely suspension of prejudice but an existential attempt to cancel organic drive and passions that block the spiritual insight to the realm of essences. Phenomenological reduction or bracketing is an expression of a loving attitude that opens man to the richness of essential objective hierarchy of values.

Distinction between Goods and Values

In establishing the hierarchical order of values, Scheler makes distinction between goods and values. According to Scheler, “goods are according to their essence things of values.” In other words, they are things in which values are realized, and they are regarded as carriers of values. Values are qualities experienced in things, but values are not to be identified with them. “Value-qualities do not change with the changes of things.” One example of “good” is human relationship which carries the value of friendship. The “value of friendship” is not annihilated or destroyed even when historical relationships are betrayed. To illustrate this, examples of goods are foods, opera and painting. Food carries the value of nutrition, opera and painting aesthetic fulfillment. Persons pursue goods for the values they carry. However, one must not conflate values with goods. The spoiling of a food is not the destruction of the value it carries. The same is true when a friend turns traitor, the value of friendship does not perish. In fact, one is indignant when a friend acts treacherously, and quite so because he values friendship. In other words, even if the carriers of values undergo transformation, the values they carry are not affected. This sets forth the distinctness of values from their carriers.

Man can think of value-qualities without making reference to their specific bearers just as one can think of a certain color independently of its bearer. Value-qualities such as sublime, beautiful, charming and whole are conceivable without thinking of them as properties of man or of things. To simplify, “agreeableness” is a genuine feature of a savory fruit, but this quality “agreeableness” is in no way reducible to mere taste-sensation. It conserves certain independence and distinctness from its bearer. This distinction is more evident in the sphere of higher values, for instance, in ethics and in

aesthetics. All values, as a consequence, are material or non-formal qualities. They are independent of the different forms in which they reveal themselves to the human person. Scheler explains: All values (including values good and evil) are non-formal qualities possessing a determinate order of ranks with respect to higher and lower. The order is independent of the form of being into which they enter, no matter of what instance - if they present themselves to us as purely objective qualities, as members of value-complexes (i.e., the being agreeable of something to the being beautiful of something), or as the value that a thing has.

This showed again the difference between goods and values. The experience of value is different from the experience of its carrier. Man can experience the beauty of nature without being able to point out specifically where the beauty resides. The Good Samaritan, for instance, was sensitive to the value of charity. The value of charity is grasped without the Samaritan being able to point out what specific quality of the injured stranger prompted him to extend a helping hand.

Scheler value-theory is, in fact, an eloquent appeal to sensitivity and openness to the variety of value-experiences in life. He believes that the world is permeated with values because it participates in the infinite value of God. The world itself is the residence of values. They make themselves apparent through intentional feelings. It is through intentional feelings that values unfold themselves from concealment.

Intentional Feelings

Scheler's phenomenological method showed that values are the intentional objects of feelings. Just as color is given directly to vision, values are given directly to feelings. The feeling nature of man is found to be included within the constitution of human consciousness. Values are discovered as a priori grounds of cognitive emotion. They are the objective essential properties that warrant our designating the objects as good. What is always and everywhere immediately given in any value-experience is what Scheler calls "*a priori*" or unchanging essence of the value revealed by the insight of what is preferred, felt and loved. Values are genuine objects and contents of feelings. Such

value-contents of feelings are pre-given to any act of consciousness like love, preference and sympathy. Values are given only in intentional acts as their intentional correlates.

Scheler then showed that there are large numbers of feelings that have objective character and differ fundamentally from subjective feelings. These feelings that have an objective character are called intentional feelings. They are basically directed towards objects, though not empirical objects but values. On the other hand, feeling-states are merely psychological conditions or individual moods as indicated by subjective states like depression, elatedness, illness or health. This is the case when one asks himself: "Why am I in this or that mood today?" or "What is it that causes my sadness or joy?" These feeling-states are connected with causal objects through simple contents of sensing, representing or perceiving. Hence, they are always mediate, meaning, they are not originally related to their objects. Their relation with their objects is often deemed as causal relation, that is, its possibility takes place only after rationalization as to what causes the existence of such feeling-states. On the other hand, intentional feelings originally intend their own kind of objects, namely, values.

The theory of intentionality shows that man is not passive recipient of impressions around him. "There is an original relatedness, a directedness of feeling toward something objective." Feelings point towards their objects, that is to say, values. In turn, values are correlates of intentional feelings. Values are not merely valuations. They are essences or phenomena or the so-called a priori grounds of feelings. A priori in the sense that they are self-evident, they testify to themselves. But to arrive at a deeper analysis, mere execution of intentional acts does not constitute the grandeur of the human person. The person, in Schelerian point of view, is not a static essence that merely exists to perform certain acts. Rather, it makes up the actualization of the spirit in a way that it is open to growth and development by way of deeper insighting, penetration and elaboration as guided by intuition of essences. Such guidance by way of original intuition of essences is termed by Scheler as functionalization of essence. This functionalization of essence is a dynamic dimension of ideation where conceptual thinking is concerned, but it is also operative at a deeper

level. It serves as grounding for both rational and volitional activity. "The functionalization of essential insight enables us to understand that there can be an evolution and growth of reason itself, that is to say, of its property in a priori rules of selection and function." This is a level which Scheler identifies as emotional. And this includes feeling orientations, like sympathy, loving, hating, preferring, resentment, are all involved in the disclosure of the world of values.

The person is directed essentially toward moral values in order to develop into a complete person by act-responses to these values. The person stands not only in cognitive relation to the objective sphere of values by his special faculty of emotional "value-feeling" but he stands in a correlative practical relation to them insofar as they demand his response and carry the note of "oughtness." In Scheler's phenomenological investigation, he examines that people make preferences and subordinations despite the various personalities and cultural backgrounds that they have. In the preferences that they make, the hierarchy of values is unraveled and revealed. Scheler then contends that there exists an a priori hierarchy of values independent of human value-judgment.

Hierarchy of Values

The objective order of values is reflected in every man's heart. The human heart is the seat of the "*ordo amoris*" and as a result, it is a kind of microcosm of the whole objective world of values. This hierarchy of values cannot be empirically deduced, but is revealed in the person's act of preference, i.e., through intuitive preference evidence. Since this hierarchy is absolute and beyond all historical changes, it constitutes an absolute reference system in ethics, according to which the variations of ethos and all moral changes in history are to be measured and evaluated.

The graded hierarchy of values contains the following four classes:

Pleasure Values. On this lowest level we find the axiological series of the pleasant and unpleasant, or the agreeable and the disagreeable. This class of values corresponds to the function of sensorial feelings

along with their modes of enjoyment and suffering as well as affective states of sensibility, namely, pleasure and pain.

Vital Values. The second axiological modality consists of the values of vital feeling. They range from the noble to the vulgar or common and encompass also the good in the sense of excellent, capable, as opposed to bad rather than to evil. Derivative values of this modality are those pertaining to the general well-being of the individual and the community.

Spiritual Values. The third modality consists of spiritual values, which are characterized by their independence from the whole sphere of the body and the environment. The superior status of this class manifests itself in the clear evidence that one is obliged to sacrifice vital values to them. We grasp spiritual values in spiritual feeling and spiritual acts of preferring, loving and hating.

The value-modality of the holy and unholy. These values appear only in objects which are given intentionally as “absolute objects.” The value-modality of the holy is independent of what different times and different peoples have held to be holy.

The preferring and subordinating of values do not denote acts of the will but rather acts of emotional cognition. Preferring one value to another does not mean choosing it. Choosing a value is an act subsequent to preferring. A certain value as higher than another is intuited in the very act of preferring. Scheler reminds us that the relative rank of a value is a matter of intuitive insight. It can never be logically deduced but is comprehended in acts of “preferring” and “subordinating” by means of “intuitive preference-evidence.” The person can also widen his value horizon and discover new values by cultivating and developing acts of proper “preferring” and “subordinating” of values. Person’s values are absolute values. Absolute values are felt in pure feeling, preferring and loving; that is, in feelings which are, as the literal meaning of the absolute indicates, ‘detached from sensibility’.

Every circumstance in which man is required to make decisions involves reaching out to higher values. Scheler enumerates five

characteristics which serve as criteria to distinguish higher values from lower ones, namely: (1) The more enduring in time the values are, the higher they are. (2) The less susceptible the values are to extension and divisibility, the higher they are. (3) The less the values are grounded on other values, the higher they are. (4) The deeper the satisfaction that they yield, the higher they are. (5) Finally, the values are higher to the degree in which the experiencing of them is independent of certain carriers of feeling and preferring. Applying these five criteria, we shall understand why there exists an order of value-ranks beginning with pleasure-values, ascending to vital values and spiritual values, and reaching the apex of the hierarchy in the value-modality of the holy. They are not logically deduced but they are comprehended through the person's intuitive act of preference-evidence.

CONCLUSION

The person as the unity of acts is never given as a finished product but rather a dynamic orientation towards the rich dimension of values particularly of moral values. The intuition of values is unique to the person; it indicates his innate potentiality of continuous becoming as a man-project. Responding to the scale of values through intuitive preference-evidence reveals the enormous capacity of the person to actualize himself in a way that he is open to growth and development through continuous response of his acts to the objective order of values. The identity of the person consists in the qualitative direction of the pure becoming the other, that is, a development of becoming oneself by becoming other than one's present self. Such development may either enhance the person, as in the direction of love, or destroy him, as in that of resentment or hate. It is in the process of realizing his ethical personal dignity by doing the right preferential options that man finds his sublime fulfillment. This clarifies Max Scheler's contention that ethics must do justice to the irreplaceable self-value and dignity of the individual person as the bearer of all values in ever changing moral world. This is the framework of reference wherein Scheler has insisted that his *magnus opus Formalismus* be characterized as ethical personalism.

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