

## On Scheler's Affective Intentionality<sup>1</sup>

### Sobre la Intencionalidad Afectiva de Scheler

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#### Abstract

The following essay was first given as a virtual lecture on April 12, 2018 to La Salle University. The scope of the lecture was expository and had two aims. First, I explained how Scheler's affective intentionality undergirds moral theorizing. Second, I explained Scheler's value rankings disclosed in affective intentionality. Overall, I hoped to convey to the audience how unique Scheler's position in the history of ethics is.

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For the purposes of this lecture, I've decided to go back to Scheler's *Formalism in Ethics*, and try to explicate in brief his account of affective intentionality. To start, let's unpack why I call it *affective intentionality*. I call it affective intentionality given the wide range of affective studies that one hears about in cultural studies, literature, and other humanities disciplines. The fact that Scheler (and William James) regard intentional feeling as the first moment of ontological and epistemological contact and relation with the world only undergirds that this type of intentionality informs all later abstractions and constructions in epistemology, moral theory, and subsequent interpretations of the human person (Scheler, *Formalism*, 1973, p. 68). "[T]here is a *primacy* of the givenness of contents of values over any other acts of consciousness," and as we will see "without feeling, there are no values (Frings, 2001, p. 25)". Moreover, the adjective *affective* contains a depth of this ontological relationship that "intentional feeling" doesn't fully convey. This is largely due to the success of how cognitive scientists have understood intentionality.

The problem of intentionality has been understood by asking the question: Why do my thoughts have representational content and why do my linguistic utterances have semantic content? In asking that question, the uncritical assumption of mind and world and all of its variants (subject and object, thoughts in the head, and public meanings of language outside my head) resonate. In English, *being about something* denotes an ontological separation and divide between the person and the world at large. Every first year graduate student that survives a phenomenology or pragmatism seminar knows full well how Heidegger, Dewey and a host of other phenomenologists attempt to overcome the reifications of our natural language regarding the ontological divide between mind and world since Descartes inaugurated modernity with that divide between *res extensa* and *res cogitans*. I need not belabor the point with those in this room. Needless to say, for

us as students and scholars of phenomenology, we are drawn to relational ontologies of the person that emphasize the interplay, relationship, being-in-the-worldness, the very interconnections between noesis and noema. Consciousness and experience are terms of relation, and this is the subject of all our phenomenological efforts: to never lose experience to reifications of the natural attitude. The same is true of moral experience.

Like all phenomenologists, Scheler assumes the pre-intelligibility of the world as a *logos* that permeates the universe, and phenomenology describes the interconnections between feeling acts and intended objects. These relations are described as interconnections. Like essences, interconnections are *given*, which means “they are intuited”, and they are a priori not the objects of understanding, or of rationality; they are not like Hume’s *relation of ideas*. Instead, interconnections in which an immediate grasp of essences takes place are a priori because of the “*logos* of the universe” (Scheler, Formalism, 1973, p. 68). This *logos* then funnels all the way down the cosmos into the human person and makes possible the elucidation of these interconnections.

Value-intuition (*Wert-Erschauung*) that comes to the fore in feeling, basically in love and hate, as well as moral cognition of the interconnections of values, i.e. their being-higher and being-lower. This cognition occurs in *special* functions and acts which are *toto caelo* different from all perception and thinking. These functions and acts supply the only possible *access* to the world of values. It is not only in “inner perception” or observation, but also in the felt and lived affair with the world... in preferring and rejecting, in loving and hating, i.e. in the course of *performing* such intentional functions and acts that values and their order flash before us! (Scheler, Formalism, 1973, p. 68)

Scheler places value-qualities in relationship to intentional feeling acts. The “essence of moral values” is found “through *feeling*; and feeling is found with man, as are all laws pertaining to acts of value-feeling, preferring, loving, hating, etc.” (Scheler, Formalism, 1973, p. 271). As we see in

the above passage, these value-intuitions access value content in an order of the heart, the *ordo amoris*. Values flash forth on an intuitive level because for Scheler phenomenology is a method of describing an immediate apprehension of meaning in intuition, not mediated by anything else (Scheler, Formalism, 1973, p. 48). In this way, Scheler's description of these special intentional feeling acts apprehends truth "independent of causal explanation" (Scheler, Formalism, 1973, p. 49). For this reason, describing affective intentionality becomes a form of *transcendental phenomenology*. The connection of intentional feeling is "present in all feelings of value," and it's "an original relatedness, a directedness of feeling to something objective, namely, values" (Scheler, Formalism, 1973, p. 257).

Phenomenological descriptions are trying to get to the original originating sense of the pre-rational and pre-cognitive modes of consciousness on which later theorizing relies (Scheler, Formalism, 1973, p. 255). Scheler borrows from the Pascalian theme. The heart has its own reasons. For us, we can say that Scheler's project of describing affective intentionality is a *reversal* of priority in Western ethics. Affective intentionality undergirds moral epistemology and the metaethical project of analyzing moral language. Discerning these values in feeling and their relative order, Scheler inverts the traditional Western bias from Plato onward that reason masters emotional life. Instead, value experience is "completely inaccessible to reason" and the eternal "order and laws contained in this experience are as exact and evident as those of logic and mathematics" (Scheler, Formalism, 1973, p. 255). The phenomenological discernment of these laws from describing affective intentionality is, then, the goal of ethics. As Scheler says, "*all* of ethics would reach its completion in the discovery of the laws of love and hate, which, in regard to the degree of their absoluteness, apriority, and originality go beyond the laws of preferring and

those obtaining among the value-qualities” (Scheler, *Formalism*, 1973, p. 261). Thus, I should say that affective intentionality consists of all of the following: the stratification and layers of intentional feeling, the laws of preferring, and the movement and creative openness of higher modes of love, and being closed off and blinded by lower feelings of hate. In this lecture, I talk about the first two, but will leave alone a treatment about love and hate for another time.

Scheler distinguishes two levels of feeling. It is within emotional life that values are first given to us. As such, these two levels navigate the initial primordial contact we have with values. For Scheler, there are intentional feelings (*Fühlen*); these are a “feeling of something” (*Fühlen von etwas*). The feeling of something is the immanent relation taken to the correlate of the emotion. It is here that values give themselves without mediation. In other words, values must be able to give themselves to “feeling-consciousness.” This feeling-consciousness is where values are felt and apprehended intuitively in their givenness. To say that values are given in the *feeling of something* doesn't mean that values exist only insofar as “they are felt or can be felt” (Scheler, *Formalism*, 1973, p. 244). Instead, in the phenomenological feeling values are given as distinct from their felt reality. Feeling acts, then, play “a disclosing role in our value-comprehension” (Scheler, *Formalism*, 1973, p. 261).

By contrast, feeling-states (*Gefühlszustände*) are mediated. For example, pain is a feeling-state (*Gefühlen*). It is reactionary and is caused by something. I have to investigate why I experience the pain. The pain in my tooth is caused by the erosion of enamel and exposure of a nerve-ending. It does not manifest immanently and immediately as one experiences value-ception (*Wertnehmung*). Accordingly, it is vitally necessary that we do not identify the givenness of values with feeling-states. Otherwise, we would lose out on the “objectivity of values.” If we did make that identification, then those feelings would be contingent, capable of being influenced in

any number of causal ways. Hence, the division between intentional feeling and feeling-states secures the independent objectivity in the former which without that level of feelings, we could not report on the phenomenological givenness of moral experience in general if such givenness occurred in feeling-states.

Let us now transition to a description of those levels of intentional feeling that correspond to the order of value rankings: sensible feeling to sensible values, utility values to values of usefulness and unusefulness, vital feeling to vital values, psychic feeling to values of truth, beauty, and morality, and spiritual feeling to the order of Holy values and the absolute dignity of the person<sup>3</sup>.

Scheler distinguishes four levels of feeling while I adopt Frings's positing of five levels. These five levels of feeling correspond to the different levels of givenness of the value rankings. In other words, Scheler describes the types of depth of feeling constitutive of human life. As he puts them,

I find this phenomenal character of the depth of feeling to be essentially connected with four well-delineated levels of feeling [though I am positing five] that correspond to the structure of our entire human experience. These are (1) *sensible feelings*, or "feelings of sensation", (2) *feelings of the lived-body* (as states) and feelings of life (as functions), (3) *pure psychic feelings*

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<sup>3</sup> Manfred Frings has made the argument that between sensible and vital there exists values of utility. For example, see his *The Mind of Max Scheler* (pp. 28-29). This argument has had a profound effect that many secondary sources simply list the utility values as a fifth rank even though only the four modes of intentional feeling (sensible, vital, psychic, and spiritual) are listed at the end of the second chapter in Scheler's *Formalism*. (p. 110). I will include this value ranking as I am convinced by Frings's scholarship. In addition, the substitution of utility values and life values is spelled out in the latter half of Scheler's *Ressentiment*. Peter Spader's *Scheler Ethical Personalism: Its Logic, Development, and Promise* (2002) is one source that doesn't uncritically reproduce Frings's call for a fifth value-ranking of utility values. Spader's discussion of the value-rankings, however, is sorrowfully lacking. The most prominent place in that work where values-rankings could be discussed with more detail occurs on pp. 122-123 in which he simply just reproduces two and half pages worth of the Formalism text to speak for itself rather than developing the text's complexity.

(pure feelings of the ego), and (4) *spiritual feelings* (feelings of the personality). (Scheler, Formalism, 1973, p. 332)

Next, no level is reducible to another level of affective intentionality. Let me describe sensible feelings and those characteristics Scheler attributes to them.

Sensible feelings are localized and extended in certain parts of the body. Scheler thinks of these sensations as not acts, or even functions as we have already outlined. Instead, these are experienced through identifiable units of organs in the lived body. Scheler describes them as states. They can extend throughout the body and affect more parts of the lived body. The most immediate example Scheler uses is pain, but he also includes forms of sensible agreeableness in eating, drinking, touching and lust among his other examples. Sensible feelings are never objectless, but we cannot adjust our ray of regard to them. The objects can change from location to location. If I am pricked in my arm with a pin, I will experience pain, but the same would be true if I had pricked my toe. In this way, they do not occur at the level of intentionality, and therefore are outside the realm of phenomenological attention. In his words, "Purely sensible feelings therefore lack even the most primitive form of intentionality" (Scheler, Formalism, 1973, p. 333).

Given that sensible feeling is non-intentional, it cannot be given to the person. Instead, Scheler observes that sensible feelings only relate "to the *ego* in a *doubly indirect* manner" (Scheler, Formalism, 1973, p. 334). Instead sensible feelings are only relative to life, but not persons (Frings, 2001, p. 26). Sensible feelings are not attached to the ego as, say, sadness, grief or woe. Moreover, these feelings do not fill out the psychophysical union of the body-ego. They do not relate to the lived-body as an emotional shade. Instead, sensible feelings are given as founded on some part of the lived-body. They are passive in this respect. Though I experience sensible feelings where they occur like all lifeforms, all organisms for Scheler prefer pleasure and comfort over and against pain and discomfort (Frings, 2001, p. 31).

Finally, these are the lowest feelings since they are exclusively factual. They are undergone, but do not point to any emotive remembering or re-feeling as the higher feelings require. In Scheler, the love I have for a person is re-felt or re-experienced in someone else as a mutual understanding, and it is the very basis of the intersubjectivity of value. This includes moments of any psychic feeling that I have never experienced but can nonetheless apprehend by reliving, remembering and expecting it. Here, however, the sensible feelings are not constituted in this way. It is possible to call up from memory a sensible feeling by remembering the stimuli that gave rise to that sensible feeling. Yet, this is a new sensible feeling. Only the sensations I experienced relate to their object present to them even if it is recalled.

Sensible feelings are causally determined as states that they are not disturbed by attention to them, nor do they have any continuity of sense. To have a continuity of sense, sensible feelings would have to occur at an intentional level. “There are no interconnections of fulfillment among them” (Scheler, *Formalism*, 1973, p. 335). In addition, no matter how much I focus on the experience of the pin prick pain, it will be the same. Likewise, sensible feelings are subjected to the changes of the environment upon us. They are the most contingent and only admit of some control. For instance, I will always encounter some objects in sensible states as agreeable, but I cannot control the fact that they will occur. I can, however, change the conditions under which I experience agreeable pleasure for instance.

Next, I posit the feelings of self-interest and disinterest. These are separate from the agreeable and disagreeable sensible feelings that intend values of pleasure and displeasure. The feelings of self-interest give rise to values of utility and its absence by suggesting that these feelings only understand the immediate instrumentality of some good or person as it relates to my

immediate interest and self-preservation. Unlike vital feeling, then, the feelings of self-interest provide no depth nor understanding about the conditions under which such feelings are sated. In his *Ressentiment*, Scheler provides a description of the “ethos of industrialism” and its “utility values” are exalted over vital values (Scheler, 2010, pp. 115-116). This modality of affective intentionality, then, renders every useful thing – even people – as objects of immediate use.

Vital feelings concern the lived-body, but Scheler observes that vital feeling participates “in the total extension of the lived body but has no special extension in it” (Scheler, 1973, p. 338). Sensible feelings take place within a specific organ unit. However, vital feelings involve the whole lived-body. Vital feelings include comfort, discomfort, health, illness, fatigue and vigor just to name a few. They involve the lived-body at a deeper level than simply pleasure. Vital feelings exhibit a unitary character “that does not possess the manifold form of extensionality belonging to sensible feelings” (Scheler, 1973, p. 339). Though it should also be said that vital feelings may still be present in an experience while we are paying attention to sensible feeling. I may feel incredibly vigorous after a run even though I periodically experience a muscle spasm. I might not even notice the lingering sensation of pain due to the more enduring vital feeling.

Thus, the striking difference is that sensible feelings are what Scheler calls “dead states” whereas vital feeling is always functional and intentional in character. The dead states of sensible feelings only can hint at or symbolize certain states in organs and tissues of the body. This is remarkably different than vital feeling itself. Within vital feeling, we have access to so much more due to the functional and intentional character of these feelings. As Scheler puts it,

In a vital feeling, on the other hand, we feel our life itself, its “growth,” its “decline,” its “illness,” its “health,” and its “future”; i.e. something is given to us in this feeling. And this holds for both the vital feeling that is directed toward our own life and the vital feeling that is

directed toward the outer world and other living beings through post-feeling and fellow feeling through vital sympathy. (Scheler, 1973, p. 340)

In a very real concrete way, vital feeling is the start in which values start to be intended in feeling. We come to know a more holistic picture of our orientation in a very bodily way in relation to the physical world. Moreover, we can also pick up on the value-content of the surrounding environment. We pick up on the “freshness of the forest” and come to know “the living power of the trees”— or the nurturing power of rolling fields of wheat in Southern Illinois. It is also the start of the foundation of feelings of community. Scheler provides the example of passionate love. This differs from lust as a sensible feeling, and it is the start of love in which we start to help bring others to their own enhancement and fruition.

Vitality is the expressive givenness of life itself and the relation such givenness manifests in our experience with particular relevance to our bodies—this is what Scheler calls the intentional character of vital feelings. The intentional character of vital feelings is of “special importance in that vital feelings can evidentially indicate the vital *meaning of value* of events and processes within and outside my body” (Scheler, 1973, p. 341). Vital feelings can indicate the sense of an event or process, and as Scheler notes, this is quite distinct than epistemic moments of comprehension and representation. Vital feelings can reveal anticipated dangers, disadvantages or advantages in the environment, and this also further distances them from sensible feelings. Sensible feelings, as we know, require the presence of the stimuli to engender them. Vital feelings can anticipate these dangers for instance since the value of the stimuli, event or process is given prior to its arrival. In this way, Scheler finds this value-giving quality in vital feelings present in

anxiety, disgust, shame, appetite, aversion, vital sympathy and vital aversion<sup>4</sup>. In this way, vital feelings in their anticipatory orientation share in a futural sense. They are concerned with and point to “the value of what is *coming*” (Scheler, 1973, p. 342).

As we proceed up from the lower to higher modes of affective intentionality, Scheler can draw more and more upon phenomenology. Affective feelings take on more givenness and meaning as they approach the height of the person. In ascending the stratified layers, the mode of givenness becomes more independent from the lived-body of both sensible and vital feelings. In this way, the givenness of psychic feelings is originally an “ego-quality.” There is no necessity on the part of the givenness to enter through the lived-body, nor do psychic feelings become states by entering through the lived-body<sup>5</sup>. For example, “a deep feeling of sorrow in no way participates in extension” (Scheler, 1973, p. 342) as ill-feeling suggests in the lived-body on the part of its being a vital feeling. What’s more, psychic feelings can only be felt at the level of being a person (Frings, 2001, p. 26). However, Scheler does remind us that the variety of the strata to which certain ego qualities are connected shares little to do with those lived-body connections. Likewise, ego-qualities can be affected by different feelings of the lived-body. I can feel sorrow about someone’s sickness if I acquire it or a similar condition. Moreover, Scheler reminds us that the lawfulness of psychic feelings are “subjected to their own laws of oscillation as are different types of feelings in general” (Scheler, Formalism, 1973, p. 342). In other words, though there may be some connections between the vital and the psychic, we should not forget that the psychic realm of

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<sup>4</sup> I find it interesting that Scheler puts anxiety in the vital sphere whereas Heidegger has no delineated typology other than fundamental and ordinary moods to which some are more primordial than others, e.g. fear is an abstraction of anxiety as the primordial mood of human existence. Scheler does mention what the translators have called “despair” in spiritual feelings, and this is closer, if not identical, to Heideggerian anxiety.

<sup>5</sup> Scheler (1973) describes spiritual feelings as being independent in their givenness. It is a confusing feature of psychic and spiritual feelings that the body is less relevant to valuing. “In the kind of their *givenness*, spiritual values have a peculiar detachment from the independence of the spheres of the lived body and the environment”. (p. 107)

feeling [like its spiritual counterpart to be discussed shortly] shares in its own irreducibly complex givenness independent from the other strata.

Finally, Scheler describes *spiritual feelings*. These feelings can never be states. In his words, spiritual feelings

...seem to stream forth, as it were, from the very source of spiritual acts. The light or darkness of these feelings appears to bathe everything given in the inner and outer world in these acts. They “permeate” all special contents of experience. (Scheler, 1973, p. 343)

In other words, spiritual feelings are candidate experiences that color everything in one’s field of experience on the level of being a person (Frings, 2001, p. 26). Scheler has in mind experiences like bliss, despair, serenity and peace of mind. These feelings are given to us without mediation in much the same way that Heidegger describes the fundamental mood [*Befindlichkeit*] of anxiety [*Angst*]<sup>6</sup>. These feelings take possession of our whole being, and other nexus of feelings or values can steer us away from experiencing our whole being. This is why we must have no other motivating nexuses of sense to feel them, and in a direct way we cannot feel bliss or despair. One can only *be* blissful for instance. These feelings can only be given to us when we are in absolute possession of ourselves as ourselves. They can only be given when “we ourselves as selves” can be given to ourselves with no mediation between how the self manifests back upon the self. This is the core experience of a phenomenological conception of human life, a conception very much purged of the natural attitude. For Scheler, this core of the person; only as a person can I fully be revealed to myself as myself. In this way, bliss and despair are feelings revealing personal being. These feelings have no other source than the person herself that is the foundation of these feelings.

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<sup>6</sup> I draw this structure out in my new book. See J. Edward Hackett, *Persons and Values in Pragmatic Phenomenology* (2018)

Thus, spiritual feelings and the values of the absolute singularity of a person and the values of Holiness are not produced by or emanate from God, but have their origin in a person's affective intentionality.

Scheler's brief treatment of both psychic and spiritual feelings leaves much to be desired. Both types of feeling receive only one paragraph each, and Scheler's presentation of that content leaves much to be desired in terms of content. Concealed within, Scheler seems committed to the fact that persons are spontaneous and creative. They can shift their attitude phenomenologically in the higher forms of psychic and spiritual feelings, but cannot control the fact that their being and world are thoroughly saturated in feeling. In fact, this is a consequence that we might want to explain or draw out. We can only participate in this world so saturated in feeling, and a developed ontology of value must take to heart this penultimate truth. We cannot step outside of the thoroughly saturated condition of feeling. For these reasons, personal existence is value-laden because of the affective intentionality at the heart of life.

One may understand now that only persons can be the "bearer of moral values." Values have their origination in affective intentionality, and it's because of this preceding order of intentionality that makes possible that we understand how goods and deeds appear as valuable. For Scheler, goods like knowledge or art are never identified with value. Instead, they appear as valuable. Paintings are given as beautiful and are valued because the field of personal subjectivity is conditioned by affective intentionality to feel and apprehend the reality of values everywhere. A pressing deed or the inexhaustible nonobjectifiability of the person are seen as moral, or infinitely valuable.

When all the layers of affective intentionality are put on the table, the complexity of the value rankings are seen. For Scheler, these value-contents within these modes of affective

intentionality possess a pull to higher values; this is the pre-rational order of preferencing inherent in the values and their felt reality. When two values of various layers are manifest in an experience, one value will be placed higher than the lower one. We feel the attraction of higher values and the repulsion of lower ones. Persons are called in our own circumstance to prefer and realize the higher. Living a valuable life involves sacrificing one value for the sake of the higher, but this sacrifice is built into the very fabric of moral life. Put in a more Schelerian way, the moral life comes at the expense of non-moral values. In this way, love is ascension upward in affective mode of intentionality and the correlative value-contents. Scheler describes this as ascension and movement. Hence, the call to realize higher values is individuated and particular to the life situation of the one who is feeling these values. One value is higher in the sense that it is not divisible as the lower values. Instead, the higher values endure and are less transient than their lower counterparts. The values of immediate use or pleasure pale in comparison to the everlasting joys of the values of the mind in psychic feeling.

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