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Wojtyła’s Normative Ethic vs. Scheler’s Emotionalization of the *A Priori*

Max Scheler’s study is not coincidental. He is regarded as a great thinker, one of the most influential in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the words of Sánchez-Migallón, he is

most outstanding of the Europe of the first third of the twentieth century. At his death Heidegger said of him that he was “the strongest philosophical power in today’s Germany, in today’s Europe and even in today’s philosophy in general . . .” It is very difficult to think of much of the Ethics, Psychology or Anthropology of the twentieth century without Scheler’s influence; also in Sociology, in Philosophy of religion, and even in Moral Theology, the contributions of this author were decisive.¹

For most of his life, Scheler was concerned with the importance of reflection on the person by paying special attention to his moral life, specifically to understanding in a unified way the living of a rational and affective being in time.

One of the originalities of Scheler lies in his seeing in Husserl’s concept of *intuition* the solution of being able to receive lived data,

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¹ Sergio Sánchez-Migallón, “Max Scheler,” in *Philosophica: Enciclopedia filosófica on line*, ed. F. Fernández Labastida, J. A. Mercado. Available online—see the section *References* for details.



inconceivable in the approach of Hume and subsequently Kant. There are two fundamental features of the phenomenological idea of intuition. Firstly, it is an eidetic intuition, that is to say, it has essential essences and laws as its object, and not simply a set of contingent and specific facts. In this way, it becomes a mode of essential knowledge, whose validity is independent of circumstantial and existential variations. For this reason, such an intuition is called *a priori* intuition. Secondly, this phenomenological *a priori* intuition should not be confused with the Kantian which refers to thinking, to the *categories of judging*; the phenomenological refers to *what has been given*, to the essential known contents. Thus, with this instrument, Scheler begins to describe what he calls *phenomenological experience*. An experience that is not limited (this is the second feature of phenomenological intuition) to the cognitive experience, but also extends to all *volitional and sentimental experience*.²

Scheler, in spite of being a phenomenologist, separates himself from Husserl and applies with great freedom the phenomenological method to his own thought. Its aim is none other than to *return to things themselves on the basis of facts*. In this way, he maintains that every a priori fact can *be lived* and that the description of that experience constitutes the best access to what is given in it. This description makes it possible to discover the necessary laws between acts and their objects, between the elements of acts and those of objects. In this sense, Scheler goes so far as to state that one must only base oneself on facts, in the sense that every judgment must have a fact as a criterion, and nothing can be said of anything that is not supported by some lived (experienced) fact:

He who wishes to call this “empiricism” may do so. The philosophy which has phenomenology as its foundation is “empiricism”

² Cf. *ibid.*

in that sense. It is based on facts, and facts alone, not on constructions of an arbitrary “understanding” [*Verstandes*]. All judgments must conform to *facts*, and “methods” are purposeful only insofar as they lead to propositions conforming to facts.³

Unlike Kant, the new Schelerian intuition mode allows the scholar to delve into two as yet scarcely explored regions and discover completely new content: while values come to light on the side of objects, value-oriented feelings (*Fühlen*, i.e., intentional feeling) manifest themselves on the side of acts.⁴

Axiology or Theory of Values

In order to understand what Scheler's theory of values means, it is enough to look at the world around us and see that not only are there multiple qualities, such as sizes, colors, shapes, etc., but there are also objects that possess some other important qualities: *values*.

Values are qualities that are not natural. This does not imply that they are ideal, such as the intelligibility of mathematical laws or logical axioms. The most outstanding thing about values is that they make objects attractive to us (causing us to accept them) or unattractive (causing us to reject them). Sergio Sánchez-Migallón expresses it by saying that:

The distinctive thing about them is to dye objects as pleasant or unpleasant, good or bad, kind or hateful; for them, things provoke and demand an affective response on the part of the subject. Neither, however, the answer is merely theoretical (like a judgment), nor practical or volitional (like a demand of realization);

³ See Max Scheler, *Ética* [*Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik*], trans. H. Rodríguez Sanz (Madrid: Caparrós, 2001), 71 (English translation cited from: Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-formal Ethics of Values: A New Attempt toward the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism*, trans. Manfred S. Frings and Roger L. Funk [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973], 51–52; hereafter cited as: *Ethics*).

⁴ Cf. Sánchez-Migallón, “Max Scheler.”

in front of that which possesses these qualities we live a sentimental, emotional, affective response, an intimate pronouncement in favor or against. In addition, by what has been said, we experience it as coming from things; they are the ones that establish preferability. In other words, values are intrinsic properties of things.⁵

Although in the history of thought the term “value” is not something new, Scheler is responsible for its development on the basis of ethics in all its fields: ends, virtues, goods, duties, feelings, and character or moral personality.

Values are qualities. Scheler uses color as an example to explain values-qualities more clearly. His argument is as follows:

No more than the names of colors refer to mere properties of corporeal things—notwithstanding the fact that appearances of colors in the natural standpoint come to our attention only insofar as they function as a means for distinguishing various corporeal, thinglike unities—do the names of values refer to mere properties of the thinglike given unities that we call *goods*. Just as I can bring to givenness a red color as a mere extensive quale, e.g., as a pure color of the spectrum, without regarding it as covering a corporeal surface or as something spatial, so also are *values* as agreeable, charming, lovely, friendly, distinguished, and noble in principle accessible to me without my having to represent them as properties belonging to things or men.⁶

We think, with Sánchez-Migallón, that this comparison serves to realize that both values and colors are simple and original qualities: they represent individual points on the axis of qualities that can only be described and pointed out; moreover, Scheler affirms that the first thing we are given of an object is its value, which supposes the primacy of knowing by feeling over theoretical knowledge. The fundamental rela-

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Scheler, *Ética*, 35 (*Ethics*, 12).

tionships between values and their bearers make possible the development of an axiology. In other words, although values are simple and original, it is permissible to speak of certain conditions that an object must meet in order to incarnate a value.

In the same way it can be affirmed that certain values are correlative to certain beings, such as beauty to art or moral goodness to man. Scheler focuses on showing the objectivity of values, and just as Husserl asserted that what is thought is not the product of the act of thinking about it, whether individually or specifically, so too Scheler asserts that neither is value the fruit of an affective valuation. Values also reveal properties such as *polarity*, *matter* and *hierarchy*. Polarity makes every value positive or negative; matter provides the ultimate valuable nuance within the plethora of possibilities according to which something may be attractive or repulsive; and hierarchy reveals the greater or lesser range of one value relative to another, or generally in the axiological landscape.⁷

In the light of these properties, four great classes of values can be distinguished according to their matter: *hedonic*, *vital*, *spiritual* (which include *aesthetic*) and the values of *the holy*. And according to the hierarchy, it will have to be recognized, for example, that the spiritual values are superior or higher than the vital ones. According to Scheler, the whole hierarchy is based on God.

Having done this analysis, Scheler maintains that it is in such a hierarchy of values that all moral life is based. The realization of all that fosters higher values is, in this way, a morally good action, or rather a valuable action—since, for Scheler, moral goodness in itself cannot be the *direct object of human action*. This is what will lead him to affirm that, since it is impossible to carry out directly moral goodness by

⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

one's action, such an action masks the pharisaic will to appear to be good.

In my opinion, here we find an incoherence with the ethics of follow-up that he himself proposes, since an individual can carry out good actions because he sees the model, the specimen, and learns from it, realizing that those values he imitates are also in themselves. Would this also be pharisaism? I do not think so. The person can want the good not to please anyone, but because, as Karol Wojtyła says, *that good is related to the very truth of the human being*, a truth that belongs to the realm of natural law and, therefore, is discovered through intellect.

Continuing with the development of his thought, for Scheler, every theory of goods and every ethical doctrine with the pretension of authenticity and objective truth must be based on a theory of values, since they alone give meaning to goods and ethics. We understand, therefore, that a good part of his fundamental work, *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik*, is dedicated to criticize the main moral doctrines for having ignored the values, omission that has led them to failure (the ethics of goods and ends, the utilitarian ethics, the eudemonist ethics and, above all, the ethics of Kantian duty). At the same time, Scheler says that what is correct in such theories (not much) is because, although not explicitly, they contain some value data.⁸

The strong opposition to Kantian ethics is found in the first part of his *Der Formalismus*. In it we see how, on the one hand, it coincides with Kant in the insufficiency of the previous solutions in the history of moral philosophy, since only an *a priori* ethics can keep moral objectivity intact. On the other hand, however, he strongly disagrees that this *apriorism* is formal and legalistic as proposed by Kant. Scheler affirms that phenomenology with its own method has opened the way to discover material apriorism: apriori laws on values with quality or matter:

⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

Since its introduction by the Greeks, the term *reason*, or *ratio*—especially when placed in opposition to so-called sensibility—has always designated only the logical side of spirit, not the *non-logical a priori* side. . . . Only with the final dismissal of the ancient prejudice that the human spirit is *exhausted* in the contraposition of “reason” and sensibility” . . . is the structuration of an *a priori non-formal ethics* made possible. This groundless dualism, whose erroneous implications compel one to neglect and misinterpret the *peculiar properties* of whole classes of acts, must in every respect vanish from the door of philosophy. The *phenomenology of values* and the *phenomenology of emotive life* are completely independent of logic, having an autonomous area of objects and research.⁹

Sentimental Perception of Values

Scheler, like Brentano and Husserl, thinks that what is valuable does not appear as such in acts or cognitive experiences of a theoretical nature, but that it appears in emotional experiences. But in order not to fall into emotivism, you will enter into intentional feelings (emotional experiences: *Fühlen*). Therefore, intentional feelings cannot be defined as states (*Gefühle*) but as penetrated acts of intentionality. That is to say, it is a sentimental activity, according to which, when in it, we perceive a different hierarchy between two values; it is called “preferred,” as opposed to the “choice” of the tendential or practical scope.

Inquiring further into the question, let us say that the acts of preference are not originally acts of judging, of affirming or denying that one thing is better than another. In the same way they are not originally acts of choosing, of wanting one thing instead of another. The acts of preferring and dismissing are interpreted by Scheler as *specifically emotional phenomena* and, together with the functions of intentional

⁹ *Ibid.*, 83 (*Ethics*, 63–64).

feelings and acts of love and hatred, as movements that reveal values in people.¹⁰

For Scheler, what is given to the subject in the intentional feelings of preferring and dismissing is the peculiar property that every value has of having a certain rank in relation to others. It is a property of each value relative to or chosen-preferred over the other value by a subject who has a special predilection for them. In this respect, Palacios's opinion of Scheler seems to be correct:

This "preferring or dismissing," which does not need to be founded either on a previous intentional feeling of the same values to which the range of them was added, but which is absolutely original, is the one that can gradually discover to man the complex set of essential relations of height that exist between the values and that constitute a true objective hierarchy existing between them.¹¹

On the other hand, with regard to "choice," it may be said that, while the preference refers to goods or securities, the choice takes place between one action and another. In other words, while the preference is an emotional experience, the choice is a tendential phenomenon.

In this sense, choosing an action means deciding to do one thing instead of another. Thus, it is a free decision to want a certain content instead of another. For Scheler,

to choose between disjunctive actions which, thanks to a volitional subject, could become real goods or real evils, according to the proper value of the objectives of the trend involved in them considered as possible ends . . . The choice will be morally correct when the one who makes it folds to the order of values,

¹⁰ Cf. Juan Miguel Palacios, "Preferir y elegir en la ética de Scheler," *Revista de Occidente*, no. 250 (2002): 40.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 42. Translation is mine.

choosing the superior to the detriment of the inferior, or sacrificing the inferior for the sake of the superior.¹²

The Normativity vs. Scheler's Emotionalization of the Apriori¹³

Wojtyła's Review of Scheler

Kantian morality starts from the primary recognition of duty as *factum* of practical reason, which cannot be called into question by any experience. Moreover, the fact that experience has nothing to do with its validity is what makes it possible to recognize the priority of duty. That is why morality should be immediately translated into a universalizable norm, which is not reached through any phenomenal experience. The difficulty lies in how to access the judgments of experience from the aprioris of reason. In fact, prudence, as a moral virtue,¹⁴ is ethically devalued by Kant, by passing it off as simple skill (*Geschicklichkeit*).

The way to avoid any unilateral standpoint—that of an empiricist or that of an apriorist of pure duty—would have to come by *an experience that was itself a priori* or, we can also say, by *a pure fact of experience*, in such a way that the normative was originally seen in it. Scheler, from a radically new position, as we have seen in the previous section, tries to propose phenomenologically *an a priori experience of values*, presided over by formal and material axiomatic laws. The question that is asked by Wojtyła in this respect, and which goes directly to the essentials, is whether Scheler really solves the problem posed or not.

¹² *Ibid.*, 45. Translation is mine.

¹³ A reference work to understand this point is that of Leonardo Rodríguez Duplá, *Deber y valor* (Madrid–Salamanca: Tecnos, 1992).

¹⁴ Prudence as a moral virtue plays a key role in Aristotelian-Thomistic ethics in determining the right moral judgment.

The conclusion Wojtyła reaches is that only in part does Scheler achieve a proper integration between experience and a priori. Wojtyła, on the one hand, acknowledges that Scheler has effectively accessed the sphere of the essentially valid with the experience of values, without having to carry out a transcendental reconstruction in the Kantian way, which would take him away from the immediacy of experience. But, on the other hand, although it is an experience in which the different hierarchical orders of values are emotionally manifested, from the pleasurable and vital to the spiritual (including the aesthetic, cognitive, the just and unjust and the religious), it is an experience that does not include the personal dynamism indissociable from the realization of moral values.¹⁵

For Wojtyła, the main work of Scheler, *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik*, opposes, already in its title, to the ethical concepts of Kant. This opposition arises from a different relationship with experience and takes shape in the contraposition between value, as an essential element of ethical experience, and duty, which is considered by Kant to be the fundamental element.

In relation to experience, phenomenology, despite the similarity of the name, is clearly distinguished from Kant's phenomenism:

Phenomenalism assumes that the essence of a thing is unknowable; phenomenology, on the other hand, accepts the essence of a thing just as it appears to us in immediate experience. Phenomenology is therefore intuitionistic. It does not make a clear distinc-

¹⁵ For Scheler, therefore, the experience of the objectivity of moral values does not differ at all from that which is relative to the other value domains: "Scheler supposes that ethical values are objective values, but only manages to objectify them in the content of the emotional-cognitive experience (that is, of the phenomenon). But, on this plane, its objectivity is not at all different from the objectivity of all other values" (Karol Wojtyła, *Max Scheler y la Ética Cristiana*, trans. G. Haya [Madrid: BAC, 1982], 105). It is necessary to qualify these appreciations, however, adding that, for Scheler, moral values are not objective correlates, but fall on the act of placing (or postponing) one before the other objective values.

tion between sensory and rational elements in human knowledge, and it attaches no weight to abstraction. It treats knowledge as a certain whole known from experience; experience, in turn, reveals the phenomenological essence of objects and the relations and connections occurring between them. As to the manifestation of this essence, not only does the so-called cognitive faculty have a role to play here, but emotional factors are also especially important in bringing to our consciousness certain spheres of objective reality.¹⁶

According to Wojtyła, for some phenomenologists, it is precisely the emotional factors that play the main role; in this sense, reality would manifest itself thanks to them and not according to the factors that are traditionally ascribed to knowledge (the senses, the moral judgment of reason). In the opinion of Wojtyła, this is precisely the position of Scheler, whom he considers “emotionalist” in his theory of knowledge and in his ethical concepts.¹⁷

When it is said that the essence of the thing is manifested in direct experience, the essence is not understood in a metaphysical sense. A phenomenologist is not interested in what the thing is in itself, but in how it is manifested to us in direct experience. It will indicate to Wojtyła that “[p]henomenologists do not have the kind of cognitive ambitions that Aristotelians and Thomists have—they do not give priority to the philosophy of being; but then, on the other hand, they also differ

¹⁶ Karol Wojtyła, “El problema de la separación de la experiencia y el acto en la ética de Kant y de Scheler” (1957), in *Mi visión del hombre: Hacia una nueva ética*, trans. P. Ferrer (Madrid: Palabra, 2005), 202 (English translation cited from: Karol Wojtyła, “The Problem of the Separation of Experience from the Act in Ethics in the Philosophy of Immanuel Kant and Max Scheler,” in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Th. Sandok [New York: Peter Lang, 1993], 32–33; hereafter cited as: “The Problem of the Separation”).

¹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

from Kantians, who sever experience from the noumenal essence of a thing.”¹⁸

In Wojtyła’s study on the problem of ethical act and ethical experience, we see how in the light of the theoretical-cognoscitive assumptions of phenomenology can be partially reconstructed the relationship with the empirical set of ethical experience that had been radically destroyed by Kant. Wojtyła knows that Scheler’s phenomenological method allows him to access the ethical experience as a given set and can thus give a certain interpretation of it. Scheler’s presuppositions examine the ethical experience of the human person precisely as a lived experience, “for he is a phenomenologist; he passed from a position of apriorism and subjectivism to a position of objectivism.”¹⁹

In Scheler’s opinion, the whole constituted by the ethical experience of man has the character of an act of the person. Wojtyła clarifies, however, that in Scheler this act must be distinguished from the Aristotelian one, since it does not mean the actualization of a power. It is just an act called “intentional.” The intentional element intrinsic to any ethical experience is “value.” In the name of values, Scheler undertakes the ethical struggle with Kant, who has separated the entire ethical life of man from values and goods, enclosing it in the noumenal sphere and subjecting it totally to duty. Scheler, Wojtyła continues to argue, goes on to derogate duty in ethics, as a negative and destructive element. “Only value as an objective content of experience has ethical significance.”²⁰ Scheler does not stop to think if the duty can constitute the objective content of experience. Moreover, his system does not even admit the idea that it can be born of the value itself. Value and duty are mutually opposed and mutually exclusive (except, of course, the axiomatic duties derived from values).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 203 (“The Problem of the Separation,” 33).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 205 (“The Problem of the Separation,” 34).

Wojtyła, in this sense, rightly criticizes Scheler for being too concerned with opposing Kant and thus losing the contact with the real and organic empirical set that is an ethical experience:

There can be no doubt that this experience includes the element of duty. I do not, of course, mean duty as merely a feeling of respect for the law, as a psychological factor detached from the lived structural whole of ethical experience. I mean the element of duty within the structural whole of the ethical experience of the human person. Scheler rejects this element and presents value as the sole content of this experience.²¹

In this way, in the structure of true ethical experience we can find only intentional acts directed toward value. These acts are, above all, acts of an emotional nature, since the experience of courage is based only on acts of this kind. According to Scheler, reason captures essential connections, but fails to capture good. Therefore, in the face of reason, only the “objective” structure of objects opens up, which is neither the most important nor the most fundamental. The basic element of objective reality is value and, for Scheler, this is captured by man in an appropriate way only in emotional experience. This is how the German author proclaims the primacy of practice over theory and that of affectivity over knowledge.

In my opinion, to speak of primacy here can lend itself to misunderstandings since both practice and theory, on the one hand, and affectivity and knowledge, on the other, form a unitary whole, which is why we consider it more opportune to speak of integration or interrelation rather than primacy.

It can be said, however, that Scheler's emotional experience of courage is a cognitive experience, even if it is not in the first place. Therefore, it can also be said that Scheler assumes the position of emotional intuitionism, which is at the basis of his whole system of ethical

²¹ *Ibid.* (“The Problem of the Separation,” 34–35.)

thought.²² This is why the emotional intuition of values not only gives man the possibility of feeling them, but it also allows him to rank them directly. This happens in the following way: particular values are manifested in the feeling as superior or inferior, or even as supreme or infamous; consequently, it becomes unnecessary to apply reason to hierarchize them; this does not mean, of course, that there is no room for criteria with which to rank them.

According to Scheler, every man has a personal world of values (*ethos*) that grows on the basis of his emotional life and that constitutes the expression of the love or hate that he lives. This should not be understood, however, in the sense that values are something purely subjective, that they simply constitute a function of experience a posteriori; rather, the author makes it clear that values are objective and, therefore, intrinsic to objective reality. Emotional experience allows every man to enter into a personal relationship with values; outside of emotional experience, values do not reveal their true essence.²³

In the opinion of Wojtyła, Scheler realizes that in the ethical experience of the person, not only the feeling appears but also the realization of values. As a critic, however, he will say that Scheler never sufficiently explains in what this realization of values consists.²⁴ What it makes clear is that it is done in intentional acts (*Fühlen*) which have a different structure from feelings as states (*Gefühle*).

The acts of wanting are directed toward the values previously given affectively, and this is what causes the person to enter into a sensitive relationship with such values. The person who directs his will toward them is aware of which values he is moving toward; moreover, the respective values attract him, so Scheler will talk about the phenomenon of emotional motivation. Thus, when the values that the per-

²² *Ibid.*, 206.

²³ Cf. *ibid.*, 207.

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

son feels as higher attract him to the point of directing his will toward them, then it is in this realization of values that the person feels moral values. For Scheler, moral values are positive ethical values that, like any other, manifest themselves in emotional intuition. For this reason, the person who realizes the highest objective values feels in himself a “good” and, thanks to this feeling, he configures himself with this experience. “This experience culminates in ethical value and, strictly speaking, consists once again in feeling, and not in realization, not in willing. In relation to the feeling of ‘good’, the willing of value plays the role of something material.”²⁵

Scheler defines his system as an ethic of material values, asserting that it is these that have the primary role in ethical experience. These values, however, do not constitute the object of wanting, since the will of the person cannot be directed toward these values, because, if man wanted “good,” this would mean for Scheler that he would want to feel “good” in himself, which would be a sign of pharisaism. In this Schelerian thesis Wojtyła highlights that both good and evil are inseparably linked to emotional experience and “somehow enmeshed in emotion, such that the acting person cannot separate the good from emotion and realize it with a full sense of objectivity and disinterestedness.”²⁶

Scheler’s cognitive feeling of good and evil, however, is based on the integral structure of the emotional life of the human person, on the purely emotional experience of love or hatred, as it appears in the following fragment:

Love, as purely emotional act, tends to expand the human being’s whole *a priori* relation to values; it makes the person’s world of values richer. Scheler, therefore, speaks of a certain kind of emotional *a priori* in the life of the human being. Hate, again as a purely emotional act, reduces and narrows the human being’s *a*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 208 (“The Problem of the Separation,” 36).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

priori relation to values; it makes the person's world of values poorer.²⁷

On the other hand, Wojtyła highlights Scheler's distinction between the absolute and relative dimensions of ethical living. Experience assumes an absolute dimension when the value, that the acting person feels as supreme value, is an object of volition. In this case, "the good" is lived in an absolute way. If we admit that a person's love experiences the influence of the highest value and his hatred suffers from the impact of the lowest value, we can imagine all the depth of misery that follows from the latter and all the height of happiness that results from the former.

Although Wojtyła admits that Scheler's ethical picture is very suggestive and, in many cases, coincides with inner experience, it does not leave him free from deep criticism:

Scheler based his interpretation of ethical experience on a concept of intentional act that he inherited from Brentano. The content of this experience is simply value, and if the element of duty should happen to get mixed in one should try to expunge it. Value is only experienced emotionally, and so ethical experience is an emotional experience from beginning to end. Emotion determines the inner unity, the cohesion and continuity, of ethical experience. Ethical experience arises from emotion and returns to it. Emotion is the authentic ground of personal life, since through it the person comes in contact with what is most important and most fundamental in objective reality—value. It is precisely this notion of Scheler's regarding the essence—and even the phenomenological essence—of ethical experience with which I take issue.²⁸

According to Wojtyła, the ethical experience does not have a mainly emotional structure, although he admits that the emotional coef-

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 209 ("The Problem of the Separation," 36–37).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 210–211 ("The Problem of the Separation," 37–38).

ficient plays an important role in it. The central structural moment of ethical experience is the moment of will:

Scheler is aware of this element, but he proceeds true to his emotionalistic views, probably with the aim of distancing himself as far as possible from Kant's ethics, whose main error Scheler took to be the supremacy of duty taken to the point of the total rejection of value and the feelings through which we come in living contact with value.²⁹

Then Wojtyła highlights Scheler's biggest mistake in not realizing the most elementary and fundamental truth "that the only value that can be called ethical value is a value that has the acting person as its efficient cause."³⁰ Wojtyła points out that it is secondary to say in which emotional atmosphere a value is born, that is to say, in which type of atmosphere it is made property of a certain person; instead the nuclear thing is the fact that the value has its cause in the person itself. "And this is also where the very core of ethical experience lies."³¹ For Wojtyła, Scheler does not succeed in objectifying this fundamental fact; in fact, all his interpretation aims only to elevate the secondary elements to main rank and this is sometimes carried out in an artificial way.³²

Going deeper into the Wojtylian critique, he affirms that Scheler in relation to the link between will and reason only conserves a kind of residue of little relevance, being representations that always accompany the volitions and not other experiences of the person's aspiration. But, and here is another weak point, these representations have no role in directing volition toward a given value, since the direction toward a given value depends exclusively on the active initiation of emotion.

²⁹ *Ibid.* ("The Problem of the Separation," 38.)

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Cf. *ibid.*

This is the reason why in Scheler's understanding of the person the will is diminished to the extent that the person's will is entirely dominated by the a priori emotional element (which is to be the deepest and decisive factor in the ethical life of the person), so that it does not reach the act in its causal character, the acts that have the person himself as their efficient cause. On the contrary, I subscribe to the thesis of Wojtyła, according to which "the experience of this efficacy of the person stands at the basis of our every ethical act. We experience 'good' or 'evil' because we experience ourselves as the efficient cause of our own acts."³³

To finish this section and focus on Wojtyła's normativity against Scheler's emotionalization, the Polish author expresses with determination and clarity his position before the analysis of Scheler's thought in the following terms:

I am convinced that a deeper awareness of the nature of the will can be achieved only by a thorough analysis of ethical experience. Such an analysis gives us all the more reason not to doubt that ethical experience implies a lived experience of the efficacy of the person, an experience in which the will manifests itself phenomenologically as a basic structural element of the whole empirical fact. Because Scheler did not emphasize this element to the same degree in which it appears in ethical experience, his whole phenomenological interpretation of the ethical fact significantly departs from experience.³⁴

Wojtyła's "Ethical Normativity"

For Wojtyła, the moral experience is not limited to register data or *quid*, but it includes inseparably the moment of comprehension. Understanding is intended to answer the question of *why* I should do something. To understand is not to explain from the outside, but to con-

³³ *Ibid.*, 213 ("The Problem of the Separation," 39).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 214 ("The Problem of the Separation," 39).

tribute intelligibility from the inside to the duty. "The understanding of duty is the *definition of its true meaning and this meaning* cannot be established outside the real bond that binds duty to the subject, to the person."³⁵ With this affirmation Wojtyła ratifies the fundamental intuition of Thomas Aquinas, according to which duty is always born in close relationship with the ontic reality of the person, with his deepest reality: to be good or bad. For this reason, duty always enters into this dynamic structure which is the spiritual structure of the same personal being on which the whole transcendence of the person in the act is founded in good measure and in a substantial way.³⁶

Wojtyła points out that this structure is reflected in consciousness by explicitly determining experience. Hence the resounding affirmation that "moral duty is dynamically linked to moral good and evil: it has with it a close and exclusive bond."³⁷ Therefore, the *moralitas* consists in the fact that man through his acts becomes good or bad. We are here, say Wojtyła, before a totally *anthropological, personalist* and at the same time *axiological* reality.

Further on Wojtyła will explain the interpretation of morality as a revelation of its aspects. From this perspective he points out that the experience of morality is identified with the experience of the fact that one becomes good or bad, and it is also where duty is understood: "the duty to be and to become good, the duty not to be and not to become bad. Since duty is the constitutive moment of this experience, it is possible for the *experience of morality to be identified with the experience of moral duty.*"³⁸

³⁵ Karol Wojtyła, "El hombre y la responsabilidad," in *El hombre y su destino*, trans. P. Ferrer (Madrid: Palabra, 2005), 231. Translation is mine.

³⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 232.

³⁷ *Ibid.* Translation is mine.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 236. Translation is mine.

Before going on to analyze the relationship between ethical norms and the responsibility of the person, Wojtyła warns that one cannot lose sight of the final aspect of morality (autoteleology), since if this aspect was obviated in the interpretation of morality, we would condemn ethics to staticity, which would mean depriving it of all the dynamism proper to man as a person.

In this regard, Wojtyła asks two essential questions, one linked to the concrete moral duty: What should I do?, and another that becomes the most generic version of the same question: What is morally good and what is morally bad, and why? These are the questions that properly designate the normative character of ethics, since they indicate above all how to discover the norm and its specific reality in the whole process of understanding morality, and therefore, they aim to make this norm the central element of ethics as a doctrine. For this reason, Wojtyła affirms that: “*which is in accordance with the norm of morality is morally good, while that which opposes it or is contrary to it is morally bad.*”³⁹

And this is where Wojtyła separates himself from the Schelerian position by stating that no definition of good or evil, of moral value, is possible *without reference to the normative order*, without entering into that order. In favor of this conception the experience of morality proves the fact that the nuclear moment of this experience is precisely duty, and duty is always that which generalizes a norm: “The moral value of the act and of the author of the act is ‘revealed’ in this dynamic whole as the fruit of concordance or discordance with respect to the norm generalized through duty.”⁴⁰ So the standard is the essential content of duty, deciding also its structure and originality.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 244. Translation is mine.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* Translation is mine.

Mentioning Kant, Wojtyła underlines that the categorical character of the ethical norm indicates only the absoluteness and peculiarity of moral value, such that it is a value to be realized, which *must therefore be aspired to* as an unmitigated end. In this sense, the norm of morality presents the character of the absence of interest. The norm of morality reflects the absolute particular of a moral value and its disinterestedness. This underlining of the moral value and the norm of morality leads us to look in a particular way at the honesty and dignity of the person:

It can then be said that the norm of morality shows its absence of interest in relation to the dignity of the person as the end of action (self-determination). On the other hand, it cannot be admitted that the norm of morality indicates indifference to moral value in itself as the object of the will. On the contrary . . . everything that is included in the reality of the imperative, and precisely of the categorical imperative, influences the will in the sense that *it firmly wants good* and equally firmly *does not want evil*. The responsibility of being good or bad as a man, a fundamental responsibility, is a moral responsibility. The character of this responsibility, its subjective and objective dimension, establishes the norm of morality and intervenes in its determination.⁴¹

One thing that Wojtyła emphasizes and makes clear is that the norm is *the truth about the good*, so that the ethical norm already assumed is nothing but the objectification and concretization of the truth about the good, the good linked to a particular action of the person, wanted and carried out in it. That good should be wanted and evil avoided (*bonum faciendum est, et malum vitandum*) is not simply an ordinary intentionality, it is the very reason of the person in the axiological order.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 254. Translation is mine.

Duty as a dynamism provoked by the truth about the good verifies the profound structure of self-possession and self-mastery and confirms the most essential reality of the person in man. Duty and, by its means, the truth about the good stop and put in place all the natural dynamism of the subject, while at the same time giving it a completely new dynamicity.⁴²

This is why Wojtyła defines the ethical standard as the *principle of being a good man as a man and of doing good*. This principle marks the plane of everyone's effort to transform norms into their instantiations in one's own morality.

To conclude, Urbano Ferrer correctly interprets that the moment of duty is a specific part of moral experience:

The experience of duty is inherent in the experience of the "I act" and of the "I act with others," inasmuch as they both are linked to the truth of one's own will (*simplex volitio*), which is prolonged in action, and to the truth of the good that, by means of this will, I put into practice. Therefore, the duty does not derive from an abstract precept, detached from lived experience, but from the first act of wanting, the truth of which is deciphered in its motivation for the good of the person rooted in the choice of one or another particular good. Under this aspect, Wojtylian ethics is conducted as a metaethics, attentive to culling the ultimate elements of moral experience. It is first of all a question of laying the foundations of that experience in which man becomes good or bad as a man, and not so much of prescribing the proper way of acting, no matter how much one is able to fulfill the first task on the occasion of the second. Conceptually, the expression "my duty" has its full right, since there is no duty if it is not for me: I appropriate the particular duties in each case because I have al-

⁴² *Ibid.*, 263. Translation is mine.

ready appropriated duty as constitutionally ineliminable, as a specific constituent of moral experience.⁴³

This vision of experience makes us understand that personal reality is essentially transmitted by its own dynamism. "Experience in the anthropological order is so in its most proper sense, etymologically derived from the verb *πείρω*: to cross, as something that is acquired through it (something similar happens in German with the noun *Er-fahrung*, related to the verb *fahren*)."⁴⁴

Following Wojtyła, duty should be understood as anthropologically rooted in experience, so that duty cannot be separated from being, but duty is the very being of man.



Wojtyła's Normative Ethic vs. Scheler's Emotionalization of the *A Priori*

SUMMARY

The article discusses Wojtyła's position regarding the Schelerian *a priori*. Both Wojtyła and Scheler recognize the notion of *a priori*. But Wojtyła seeks an equilibrium between the *a priori* of duty (i.e., regardless of experience), on the one hand, and the exclusivity of the *a priori* values (aside from all normativity), on the other hand. The author concludes that Wojtyła points to the truth of man, which includes a concrete duty to realize the good by the acts of voluntary choice.

KEYWORDS

Wojtyła, Scheler, personalism, person, value, experience, duty, ethics, morality, moral norm, emotion.

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⁴³ Urbano Ferrer, *Acción, deber y donación. Dos dimensiones éticas inseparable de la acción* (Madrid: Dykinson, 2015), 124. Translation is mine.

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