



VITAL VALUES AS PERCEIVED BY MAX SCHELER AND JOSÉ ORTEGA Y GASSET

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary mass culture is such that it now demands that one takes care of their body. The cult of the body has dominated our actions to such an extent that, oftentimes, the value of a person is perceived in terms of his or her physical perfection. However, the modern cult of the body cannot be seen as a revival of the ancient Greek concept of *kalos kagathos*. Today's culture, while coaxing people into tending to their body's needs, mystifies that very care. The question therefore arises whether the cult of the body upholds the value of body or whether it, in fact, denies it.

Facing such a paradox, one may first question what significance the body itself has. Here, Max Scheler's concept of nobleness seems to be an alternative to the extremes represented in the philosophy of the body by both the traditional schools, more in line with Plato, and between those with more contemporary, somatocentric tendencies. As such, this antagonism between the noble and the ordinary constitutes one of the core issues in the demonstration of a human's vital values, values connected with maintaining life and health, in both the physical and mental aspects.

This paper aims at presenting the range and specificity of such vital values and their influence on human activities. Scheler draws a clear demarcation line between those values which are vital and those which are hedonistic and utilitarian. His concept of vital values assumes that they encompass the widely understood ideas of physical culture, health promotion and ecology. He does not reduce the vital values when compared to those hedonistic, but underlines their autonomy and grants them a high standing in the hierarchy of values. While considering Scheler's philosophy of vital values, this paper will also set them in the context of Ortega y Gasset's speculation on values.

Key words: axiology, physical activity, body, nobleness, vitalit

Introduction

Modern man has been beset by an omnipresent demand to take care of his body. Those residing in the world of mass culture, apart from what we may call a small group of "heroic" outsiders, may not ignore its demands for fear of being accused of disrespecting themselves. Mass media, various opinion-forming circles, food-producers, the manufacturers of cosmetics and food supplements, as well as fashion designers and those in business aimed at promoting a so-called healthy life-style, all compete in inventing new arguments and reasons for our bodies to receive ever more attention. However, this idea is nothing new, where in order to maintain the integrity of being a human, requires one to equally mind both the body and the soul. Yet the modern cult of the body cannot be seen as a revival of the ancient Greek concept of *kalos kagathos*. Today's culture, while coaxing people into taking care of their bodies, mystifies that very care.

Therefore, the question arises whether the cult of the body upholds the value of body or whether it, in fact, denies it. A person convinced about the importance of so-called "body care", which in fact involves the interference with, and a modification of, the body, paradoxically denies his or her original intention. Hu-

man corporeality becomes commodified in the process, acquiring a value only after having met specific requirements. Thus, the value of the body becomes itself a paradoxical notion: is a body itself a value, does it have a value or, perhaps, is it valuable? When does a body have any value? Is the value of a body determined by anything specific? If so, what requirements need to be met to give value to a body?

Max Scheler's concept of nobleness, when taken into consideration, provides an intellectual option which prevents us from plunging into any of the extreme views on human bodiness, either stemming from the more traditional, Platonic schools of thought or those stemming from more contemporary, somatocentric ideologies. Unlike other axiological theories, Max Scheler's typology of values is not burdened with too many ontological or ideological resolutions. Although Scheler assumes that values have an objective and normative status (that is, values are binding), he abstains from determining their ontological status. He does not determine the definitions of values or any specific classification of their kinds or modalities. Rather, he indicates the centres of where the values appear, which opens his approach to an empiric characterization of human preferences and choices. Max Scheler belongs to a group of axiological objectivists, hence to him values

are objective characteristics discovered by humans in objects. However, values, although discovered in objects, are not things unto themselves, nor are they features of things, nor do they come from the mental states of human beings. Values are simple and primary qualities and, as such, they remain indefinable. Jan Galarowicz, a researcher on Scheler's ethics, finds that "values are specific qualities that cannot be narrowly identified in the properties of things. As ideal beings they determine the importance and value of humans, of their acts, things, the states of things, etc." [1, p. 79]. Admittedly, Scheler ascribes values to a status of ideal beings, but at the same time, he precludes their association with those ideas coming from the Platonic mind-set [2].

Typology of values according to Max Scheler

Max Scheler distinguishes five kinds of values which are also described as value modalities (*Wertmodalitäten*). The first modality refers to hedonistic values (also known as hedonic or pleasurable). Sensual, hedonic values concentrate on the opposites of pleasant and unpleasant. They are connected with sensual sensations, such as the feelings of pleasure, pain and suffering. The second modality refers to utilitarian values which deal with the useful and the harmful. It must be mentioned here that the latter one is sometimes omitted by Scheler. The third modality refers to vital values which concentrate on the opposites of what is noble and ordinary. Vital values manifest themselves in feelings of bravery and paltriness, health and illness, power and weakness, ascents and drops in stamina, and they are all connected with maintaining life and health, in both the physical and mental aspects. Scheler characterizes this modality in the following way: "All values of this modality, if they are values in themselves, are the qualities which deal with the opposites of 'what is noble' and 'what is ordinary' [or maybe 'what is good' in the very specific meaning of the expression where it equals to 'what is suitable' (*das Tüchtige*) and is not opposite to 'what is evil' (*das Böse*), but rather similar to 'what is unsuitable' (*das Schlechte*)]" [3, p. 1539]. The fourth modality refers to spiritual values that are sometimes referred to as cultural ones. According to Scheler, spiritual values also include aesthetic values that focus on opposites such as beauty and unsightliness, values of "pure knowledge cognition" as well as values of legal order that focus on the opposites of right and wrong, honourable and dishonourable, just and unjust. The fifth and last group refers to holy (religious) values.

As was said before, vital values, also known as values of life, are determined by the opposites of what is noble and what is ordinary. Scheler's intention was to stress that the vectors of "noble" and "ordinary" are

values present in living organisms. "Therefore", Scheler writes, "on one hand they are typical not only of people, but also of animals, plants and even of all living creatures, whilst on the other hand, things (*Dingen*) are never entitled to them, as values of what is pleasurable and what is useful" [3, p. 1517].

Yet a discourse on the characteristics of vital values would not be complete without presenting Ortega y Gasset's standpoint. Being Scheler's friend and admirer at the same time, Ortega y Gasset developed his own interest in vitality. At the turn of the 20th century, philosophy became increasingly polarized into, as it then appeared at the time, two extreme aspects of reality: one of "sense" and the other "life", representing two opposites at a philosophic crossroad [4]. The philosophers of that time were faced with a necessity in declaring themselves either for the rational side, which saw reality as a scheme, or for the irrational side, escaping any sort of conceptualization. A researcher on Ortega's works, Stanisław Cichowicz, characterized Ortega's point of view in the following way: "Neither vitality, nor rationality, that was the answer for those who wanted to follow the paths of Ortega [...]. Therefore, his way led in the middle... The philosopher himself pronounced the moderate "azimuth" as ratio-vitality, thus showing he was preserving the most valuable aspects of the extremes" [4, p. 86]. Ortega y Gasset often stressed the "self-sufficiency of vital phenomenon" [5, p. 79], where life is a value of its own and does not have to serve any other purpose in order for it to be considered valuable. According to Ortega, "life does not have to resort to extra-vital deliberations, either theological or cultural ones, in order to choose and hierarchize values" [5, p. 79]. As Ortega explains, an example that can prove the above theory can be a herd of horses, where we always perceive individuals that are more perfect and those less perfect. Perfection or the lack of perfection is internally hidden in each form of life. Only the skilful eye of an expert can easily distinguish the hierarchy found inside a herd. Yet the hierarchy is not established by an outside observer, it is an immanent part of the structure. There is something about horses that lets us, irrespective of their utilitarian intended use, observe the measure of their perfectness. As Ortega y Gasset writes, that between these two opposite poles, "we can easily find a point, where a vital form unequivocally inclines to perfection and a second one, which inclines to degeneration. Below that point all individuals of the species seem "evil" to us, their biological potential deteriorates. And reciprocally, anything above that point is of "pure blood", an animal and species become "noble". The above described situation is an example of two absolutely vital values, a positive one and a negative one, one of honour and the other dishonour" [5, p. 79].

Rank of values versus *ordo amoris*

Max Scheler's typology of values is itself a part of a hierarchy of values. According to Scheler, a certain value gains its position within a hierarchy thanks to the acts of feelings and preferences, emotionally-cognitive acts, which result in particular commitments. Scheler claims that the emotional sphere of a life of a human is not, as had been believed, a kingdom of chaos and coincidence, but rather characterized by an order which is called by philosophers "*ordo amoris*". The cognitive recognition of this world of values is not due to the sanity of will, as was perceived by Kant, but thanks to emotional cognitive mastery. Therefore, values are accessible through emotional acts which allow us to capture their characteristics as well as the relationships between them. According to Max Scheler, neither senses nor the mind are capable of perceiving the hierarchic character of the world of values. The hierarchic character of the world of values reveals itself within "*ordo amoris*". Within a so-called feeling, Max Scheler differentiates a state of active experience i.e. "feeling something" (Fühlen von Etwas) from "a state of feeling" (Gefühlzustand), it being a passive experience. The difference between the two states is not limited to their degree of activity. What sets them apart is the sense of purpose that can be ascribed to active experience only. An emotional state is noticeable and explainable (it is almost always possible to give a reason for a certain emotional state), but it is never of a cognitive character, as only through feeling something can we transmit a meaning. Max Scheler explains that these "emotional states, as such, refer to sensual experience, whilst both vital and pure psychic and spiritual feelings can be of intentional character. Feelings that are purely spiritual have to be of such a character that is out of nature" [2, pp. 267–270]. The ranking of the vital sphere is emphasized in the above quote. All that is vital, as being potentially intentional, along with what is a psychic and spiritual, stand opposed to sensual feelings. Having made all the distinctions, we may venture to claim that vitality is closer to the spiritual sphere than to sensual one. The four levels of an emotional life of a human, as distinguished by Max Scheler, are the sensual, vital, psychic and purely spiritual and they all fully correspond to the typology of values.

Max Scheler presented five criteria in recognizing the rank of a value. The first is permanence. The longer the value lasts, the higher its value is. At the same time the permanence of a value is not tantamount to the permanence of its bearer (the value of a sculpture does not depend on the durability of the material it has been made of). Max Scheler stresses that the lowest values are the most "ephemeral" while the highest values have their share in eternity. The second criterion that gives a value its rank is its scope. The higher

the value, the less divisible it is, hence spiritual values have an advantage over material ones. The third criterion refers to the "founding of values". Values require foundation for their existence, for example, where the ontic foundation for sustenance is bread. The more a value can serve as a foundation for another value, the higher it is ranked. Therefore a vital value that serves as a foundation for a utilitarian value is superior to it. It stays in line with the natural ethical intuition of a human, as everyone agrees that possessing assets (a utilitarian value) remains of no importance if we are faced with a fatal disease (a vital value). "Who, being also truly unhappy, could possibly envy a paralytic's 'exhilaration'?" [3, p. 1527]. The fourth criterion of Scheler is a "depth of satisfaction". The deeper the satisfaction resulting from a value's implementation, the higher the value is ranked. Scheler stresses that the depth of satisfaction has nothing in common with pleasure, although pleasure can be the result of the satisfaction one experiences. "The pleasure we experience is because we feel the value is called 'a deeper one' than others only when its existence (*Dasein*) appears to be independent on feeling other value and the 'pleasure' connected with it" [3, p. 1528]. The insignificant and inconspicuous pleasures we feel when walking or having fun with friends can serve as an example of such a situation. Such pleasures may be a source of satisfaction, but only when we feel satisfied in "a more central", as Scheler says, realm of our life. The last and fifth criterion attributes the value's rank to its absoluteness. The more constant and accessible the value is, the higher it will appear to be. Scheler's values also appear to be ranked higher when deeper satisfaction is felt while implementing a value and less when it serves as foundation for other values.

Deformation of vital values

Unlike other typologies of values, Scheler acknowledges the existence of vital values but he clearly sets them apart from hedonic or utilitarian values. At the same time, his concept of vital values assumes the widely understood ideas of physical culture, the promotion of health and ecology. Yet Scheler does not reduce vital values merely to hedonic values, he recognizes their autonomy and grants them a prominent standing in the hierarchy of values, saying that, "Vital values are a completely independent modality of values and cannot be reduced to the values of what is pleasurable, what is useful or to spiritual values" [3, p. 1540]. Neglecting this autonomy, according to Scheler, is a "major flaw" of past ethical concepts. However, this is not the only threat he saw to vital values. In his book *Resentment vs. Morality*, Scheler analyses the phenomenon of perverting axiological hierarchy. This process mainly affects vital values, which begin to be subordinated to utilitarian values,

where, “if we use the term ‘noble’ to describe qualities responsible for the values of living organisms, we subordinate whatever is ‘noble’ to what is ‘useful’” [6, p. 190]. Although Scheler associates this unfortunate deformation with the expansion of industry and commerce that was happening during his times, and hence the domination of a middle-class mentality, yet it seems that the phenomenon in question was not symptomatic only at the turn of the 20th century. The perception of vital values as ancillary to utilitarian values is characteristic of modern times as well. The author of *Resentment vs. Morality* foresaw our thoughts and writes, “All of physical exercise is given only the value of ‘recreation’ after working hours or to regain power for newer, more useful work, they are not given any values, as all physical exercise is beneficial only when it serves the purpose of being a ‘respite’ from work or when it helps us prepare for new, useful tasks, and not as vital forces, which are valuable themselves” [6, p. 196]. Does this not sound familiar? Modern fitness clubs are overcrowded with those who come to get back into shape and at the same time want to be ready for the next day’s work, where they spend several hours of working in an office or in a bank. Corporate leaders leave the gym satisfied without realizing the nobility of physical exercise. Proud of being disciplined, sure of their rightness or even the necessity of their actions, they subordinate their vitality to practical, utilitarian reasons. There are numerous reasons for contemporary man to take care of his body and just as many different forms of physical activity. However, it must be stressed that few who take up sport and exercise appraise the more noble values found in it.

Inspired by Scheler’s philosophy, Ortega y Gasset in his essay *El origen deportivo del Estado*, differentiates thusly two kinds of activity: one that can be described as animalistic, characterized by primordiality, creativity, vitality but most important of spontaneity and disinterestedness. The second kind of activity is activity thoroughly human, of a utilitarian nature. The latter one is secondary, making mechanical use of the first activity. As Ortega y Gasset notices, utilitarian activity itself cannot be of a disinterested nature yet it is not creative. What is worse, it stabilizes and disables the potential and creativity of the first, primal activity [7]. Both forms of activity appear regularly in the lives of humans. The life of a human appears to us as a great effort, an effort which, similar to an activity, presents itself in two forms. The first one is that of necessary effort, an effort we cannot escape, an effort that is imposed on us by the fact that we exist, and is most commonly referred to as work. Ortega finds that, “work is opposed to another kind of effort, which does not originate from any imposed need, but it comes into being as the result of the free and noble impulse of vital powers, be it called sport” [5, p. 83].

Therefore sport, although sometimes perceived as an unnecessary effort (*superfluo*), appears to remain the noblest form of effort, of course only when it is performed when one wants to receive pleasure from it. Hence, if certain conditions are met, it can be assumed that physical activity is an equivalent of primal activity. Therefore, we can discuss the nobleness of effort only when the effort affirms itself, becoming a source and a goal at the same time. According to Ortega y Gasset, “with work a vital character of an act makes an effort meaningful; in sport, however, its result acquires nobleness thanks to its spontaneity. It is a luxurious effort, an excess of internal energy, which we take up making the most of it and never expect any reward. And that is why a sporting effort has been always perceived as a luxury” [5, p. 83]. As such, a vital value that is submitted to a practical goal ends with its degradation. When a physical effort is taken up for reasons different from those that simply involve accomplishing an effort, when we can consider it as “pleasurable vs. not pleasurable” or “useful vs. useless”, it consequently equates vitality with the values of hedonism or usefulness. If performed because of heterogenic reasons, sport cannot possibly become anything more but a mean of satisfying a need, a need to look good, to be thin, to be fit, to possess new skills (one can also imagine a need to learn how to play golf for purely snobbish reasons). But when a physical activity is taken up as a consequence of our affection of nobleness, only then an endless affirmation of the activity and disinterestedness appears.

A noble man versus an ordinary man

Let us remind ourselves that Max Scheler laid the values of what is noble and what is ordinary as the groundwork for vital values. Nobleness should be understood as a synonym of aptitude, while ordinaryity comes closer to being inapt, unfit. Therefore the question arises, what is a noble man capable of? What is he fit for? Ortega y Gasset, inspired by Scheler’s speculations, provided his own definition of nobleness, “for me, nobleness is synonymous to a life full of effort and sacrifices, being always ready in perfecting oneself, to moving from what there is to still bigger responsibilities and new goals” [8, p. 72]. A noble life, understood in this way, is definitely the polar opposite of an ordinary life. As we shall see shortly, both nobleness and ordinaryity influence a man’s attitude to his bodiliness. In *The Revolt of the Masse*, while discussing the concept of nobleness, Ortega finds that people are mostly unable to take up an effort by themselves. They do it only when forced by an external necessity. That is the case of an ordinary man, one who takes up an activity only when pressured by external coercion. We realize that we regularly admire the few people who “can summon up the spontaneity and the

luxury of an effort" [8, p. 72]. Ortega continues by writing that, "These are the chosen ones, the noble ones, the only ones who know how to be active, not only re-active, for whom a life is a constant strain, a never ending training (*áskesis*). They are the ascetics." [8, p. 72]. Who can nowadays remember that the Greek term *ἀσκησις* (aesthetics) originally meant "training"? Following the word's etymology, Ortega y Gasset equates asceticism with training. But does that mean they are the same? Assuming so, let us outline where the athlete meets the ascetic. Undoubtedly, both asceticism and training are associated with sacrifice and self-control. Both an ascetic and a trainee must find the inner strength to cope with the regime they impose on themselves. One might say that in the case of an athlete, their training regime and the numerous limitations resulting from it are purely external and imposed, and as such, we could not refer to it as to self-limitation. However, it seems that even if we initially may talk about external limitations, the process of internalization is inevitable and as a result whatever was external therefore becomes internalized. As a result, all coercive limitations become liberating self-limitations.

Let us come back to considering nobleness and ordinariness. A noble man can be said to be able to make sacrifices through the affirmation of his activities. A noble man is able to stick to his decisions, having enthusiasm on his side. A noble man is the one who imposes strict rigors on his activities, in both moral and vital realms, which brings us back to the tradition Greek tradition of *arete*. In order to become strong, a noble man limits himself and accepts these limitations voluntarily. A noble man is the one who understands the liberating power of self-limitation. Therefore, what might be an ordinary man? An ordinary man is unable to make sacrifices or do effort that would originate from him. If it happens that such a man does not waste his life on pleasures, it most certainly is not the result of a conscious decision but from a lack of opportunity. An ordinary man creates the pretence of activity while in reality he remains only re-active. His re-activity is only a response to external factors, in the same way that the movement of a billiard ball is only a re-action to the hit of a cue. One may wonder whether the causality that is so typical of the physical world is not a characteristic of ordinary man. An ordinary man lacks enthusiasm and persistence and is therefore unable to feel admiration or exhilaration. Sublimity is unfamiliar to him. An ordinary man lacks the noble passion that can be easily turned into a fiery one. An ordinary man misses his life's mark with every step. Anyone can declare vital values, but only the noble man will extol them in a perfect manner, and hence has the chance to become a "hero". An ordinary man will confine himself to his illusions which will never reveal the essence of

vitality. An ordinary man is impossible to admire, his stillness and stagnation inspires no one. He lacks the luminous glow that beams in a noble man. Everything remains matte and motionless within the fumes of the ordinary.

A hero: a noble epitome of vitality

In his ethical treatise, Max Scheler not only hierarchized values but he also assigned a specific role model to each modality. A role model differs, according to Scheler, not only from the bellwether we encounter in the world of animals but also in the case of a leader. A leader differs from the role model in such a way that he is aware of his role and aims at performing it. A person who is a role model is neither aware of their role nor do they desire it. Role models, unlike leaders, do not even have to be real people, "as the relation between role models and people, for whom they perform, is perfect" [1, p. 94]. The idea of a "model" is entirely axiological. Someone who is a role model does not affect people in the same way that a leader does. A role model influences the perception of values not by means of verbal declarations, but by actions. A role model is someone who we wish to follow, someone we want to emulate. Max Scheler quotes five models which refer to the five modalities of his hierarchy of values. So the "master of pleasure" links his life with hedonic values, the "leading spirit of civilisation" realises utilitarian values, the "hero" realises his potential in vital values, and the "genius" mainly focuses on spiritual values. "The saint" is connected with the highest level of values, those which are religious in nature.

Let us observe the hero who made vital values essential in his life. A hero is a man who proclaims himself in favour of nobleness, where "he is the man of power and volition. The essential virtues of a hero include the presence of mind, composure, bravery, decisiveness, battle spirit. He is also characterised by a beautiful body, dignified manners, agility in games, self-discipline [...]" [1, p. 96]. It is worth observing how a man passionate about life becomes a hero. A man who prefers vital values would then at the same time prefer nobleness, and by means of nobleness he becomes a hero. A noble man cannot, by nature, ignore values that exceed the value of life. A noble man is a man of honour and, as such, is capable of sacrificing his own life in defending that honour. It is someone who declares himself on the side of vital values and never stops being their glorifier, even when he sacrifices his life in defending his homeland. The same can be said about athletes; where among such a group we may encounter both the noble and ordinary ones. One might ask how to tell a noble and an ordinary athlete apart. The answer is simple, where only a noble sportsman is capable of strictly following the rules

of the game. Nobleness always means playing fair. A noble athlete will never break the rules of a game as he will always act in the name of justice, which as we already know, belongs to legal values. It may easily happen that a noble sportsman becomes a hero worth following.

Nobleness as a vital value – nobleness as a moral value

Positioning vital values in, as it can be said, the middle of a hierarchy not only forces them to prominence but also emphasizes the fact that a body is not “only” a body. Their central position suggests that the importance of vital values comes from their relativity. One might say that vital values give certain properties to utilitarian and hedonic values, and that they themselves are derivative from the spiritual realm. If we removed vital values from the hierarchy, it would again become an antithesis of the sensual and spiritual. Vital values are what provide the hierarchy with a kind of organic unity. Although, according to Scheler, a body is neither an ontic nor an axiological bearer of vital values (a body plays such role only with reference to hedonic values), that within the context of vital values a body seems to be more than just a means or a tool for their realisation. Following Scheler’s intentions, we can observe that vital values, for the first time, combine the spiritual order with a bodily order in a clear manner. This clarity is called nobleness. Declaring oneself for the cause of nobleness may be the first opportunity, within Scheler’s values, that would enable a man to become a moral subject. This aspect is noticed by Roman Ingarden, who points out that nobleness is “a decisive moment” which determines the other elements of moral values, “a quality determinant of values” [9, p. 225]. According to Ingarden, if we want to discuss the moral value of an act, we need to find a general “quality determinant”, common in all moral acts. Ingarden stresses that such a factor does not exist in Kant’s formal ethics or in Max Scheler’s conclusions. Let us remember that in the ethics of Kant, a formula exists where the categorical imperative is what decides whether a given act is of moral value, and hence whether the act is considered to be moral, but only if the rule we follow is in force. Max Scheler believes that an act is moral only when, through preference, we are able to recognize a hierarchy of values. Therefore, our acts prove that we can give priority to higher values over the lower ones. As was mentioned before, Ingarden considers both attitudes inadequate. Although he does not question the necessity in meeting the above-mentioned requirements, he still assumes the existence of something “morally specific” in every moral act. Ingarden perceives nobleness as *specificum*, but at the same time he makes it clear that he is aware of the triviality that

can be ascribed to his suggestion, “With reference to the nobleness of an act one may say it is an empty cliché. It may only be true that each value we discuss as a moral value, can be referred to as ‘noble’, that a moral value means that an act is noble in itself” [10, p. 326]. Roman Ingarden emphasizes that noble acts, in the case of man, have a “transforming function”, which means that every morally valuable, noble act of man influences him as a person and gives him dignity. It seems that with such a view, Ingarden comes close to the intentions of Max Scheler, who could easily state that in giving priority to higher values over lower ones we turn out to be noble or possibly even become noble. Nobleness has two appearances. The term may be used when we deal with vital values as well as moral ones, which are not separated categorically but nevertheless, do not cease to be the key issue within the science of morality. If nobleness appears to me to have a higher value than pleasure, then through the choices I make I opt for variants which are different than if the two values were reversed. Scheler writes, “If you ‘prefer’ what is noble to what is pleasurable, then you can *reach* to experience a completely new *worlds of goodness*, otherwise unattainable” [3, p. 1519]. We choose to prefer some values over others but this does not mean that such a hierarchy depends on our preferences. The hierarchy of values does not set them apart, if any conflict appears it refers to what is good and remains secondary to aprioric preferences. The very act of having a preference is previous to the choice we make. Therefore, the clearer our preferences are to us, the less we are exposed to feelings of weakness and perplexity when we make a choice. It commonly happens that we do not have enough time for thought prior to acting. Hence, decisions are made prior to choosing, prior to acting. It would not be an abuse to either Max Scheler or to Roman Ingarden if we were to state that a noble man is the least prone to conflict, and as Ingarden points out, “nobleness results in a certain internal unity of a man” [10, p. 326].

Józef Tischner suggests that only with vital values can deserting one’s own act of preference be called infidelity to oneself [11]. Let us one more time use the example of giving priority to nobleness over pleasure. If nevertheless, despite our prior preferences, it happens that we choose pleasure over nobleness, then, according to Tischner, “a sense of infidelity, some inappropriateness” will remain [11, p. 357]. In the case of a noble man, the exclusiveness of experiencing “the world of goodness” is exactly that, that only at the level of vital values can something be seen as meaningful and which can be confirmed. The subject is himself responsible in the inadequacy of his choices.

It can therefore be justifiably said that vital values are the turning point in Scheler’s hierarchy. If a man opts for nobleness he consequently opens himself up to all other levels of values. If someone is noble he

cannot be blind to other higher values without discrediting nobleness itself, but he also understands that a certain “world of goodness” correlates to specific values. Access to this world is granted or taken away depending on his accordance, or the lack thereof, with the act of preference and the act of will. Nobleness, therefore, is the key towards opening the gates that conceal the greatest treasures a human being can possess.

Conclusion

If Max Scheler differentiates between the values that are based on acts and those that are based on functions, it implies that vital values cannot be brought down to the values of living functions. Scheler wrote that life is not a set of living functions of the body or an “empirical idea”; it is instead a “real essence”. On the one hand, it signifies the independence between the two values, but on the other, it signifies the two values being founded in what is higher to them. It appears, however, that vital values are founded in spiritual values differently than, for instance, the way hedonistic values are related to utilitarian ones. The very act of having some values founded in others, within such a hierarchy, is not only a formal and abstract act, but is dependent every time on the nature of what is being founded, as well as in what it was founded. We may risk saying that the higher the value the more it anticipates the value in which it is founded.

Therefore, if taking care of our body does obscure the successive levels of values’ modalities, and is only used in trying to fulfil them, then taking care of one’s body can certainly be considered an extension of what is noble.

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