

MAX SCHELER ON THE MEANING OF EMOTIONS

This article deals with the emotional constitution of meaning. The emotional bestowing of sense is a subject elaborated primarily by contemporary phenomenology. It was Franz Brentano who first pointed out the intentional nature of emotions and who defined feelings as intentional acts of consciousness. Later, Husserl analysed the primordial character of emotions and their constitutive function for the ethical meanings. However, only Max Scheler has disclosed a rich variety of emotional senses and the creative function of love in the world of value.

Scheler in his phenomenology of feelings makes a distinction of three different kinds of emotional acts: a) "feeling of something" (Fühlen von Etwas) which is a function of consciousness. Feeling is intentionally directed to the quality of value. In this kind of act goodness, beauty, pleasure are given. b) Acts of preferring. Due to them the hierarchical structure of the value-realm is revealed. A value is always apprehended as a "higher than..." or "lower than..." The hierarchical position of a value belongs to value itself, it is an objective fact of the value-realm, however, it can be disclosed only in the feeling of preferring, which constitutes the sense of hierarchy in our experience. c) Acts of love and hate form the highest level of emotional life. They are the crucial emotions. Love is intentionally directed to a positive value, and hate to a negative one. But love is also directed to the whole world of values and to the value of holiness in particular. It is also a source of moral consciousness as well as a motion to a possibly highest value. Scheler emphasized the spontaneous and creative character of love, when he writes: "In love and hate our spirit does much more than respond to already felt and perhaps preferred values. Love and hate are acts in which the value-realm accessible to the feeling of a being is either extended or narrowed."¹ Love is an act which opens to us the world of values; without it this world is hidden, unknown. The sense of value can be revealed only by love.

According to Scheler, as well as to a general phenomenological view, emotions are intentional acts directed to values as their objects. They have a cognitive meaningful sense because they provide an intuitive apprehension of values. The sense of values is understood in emotional intuition. This emotional intuition is composed of various kinds of feelings, as mentioned above: feeling of something, preferring and love. It has also an internal unity. This unity is determined by love, which constitutes the whole moral consciousness or the *ordo amoris* of a person.

The emotional intuition has, on the one hand, clearly cognitive character but, on the other hand, it has also a creative power for revealing the value-realm and stimulating to the highest value. So, it is of a reproductive and creative nature as well. However, those two aspects of emotional intuition are not separated. On the contrary, the creative aspect of it makes a ground for a cognitive one. According to Scheler, among the three of emotional acts only love has a spontaneous, creative function, two others are of purely perceptive nature. In feelings of something we recognize the quality of value: we perceive the sense of pleasure, of nobility, we grasp moral good or evil in a similar way as in sensual perception we apprehend colors, shapes, sounds. But axiological qualities, because of the hierarchical structure of the value-realm, never are grasped as simple features: pleasure is perceived as lower than nobility and nobility as higher than pleasure but lower than cognitive and spiritual values. So, grasping of a value is accompanied by a simultaneous perceiving of its hierarchical position. The last is directly given in an act of preferring. Consequently, feeling and preferring are two separate acts bestowing together a sense of value and its belonging to an axiological structure. However, the nature and function of love is totally different. Love does not have such a clear objective and cognitive character. It is rather a spiritual energy, a *spiritus movens*, than an intentional act directed directly to its object.

Scheler in his concept of love follows the tradition of St. Augustine and Pascal. Love is, according to him, the highest form of spiritual life. Moreover, it is grounding the whole of spiritual life, which means, that it defines and influences all other acts, remaining

itself independent of them. Love is prior to emotional perception of values and is prior to all intellectual acts as well. This idea of primacy of loving over knowing corresponds with Scheler's notion that love is the only source of spiritual energy and that a human being is *ens amans* primarily. This idea is expressed when Scheler writes: "Whoever has the *ordo amoris* of a man has the man itself."²

Here, I will limit my remarks to the relationship between love and other emotional acts and to analysis how the bestowing of emotional sense is deeply rooted in acts of love. The crucial point is that love is prior to other acts; it is a condition for them but itself remains independent of them. It is love which creates the primordial axiological sense. This particular function of love consists in the fact that it is directed to the whole value-realm; it moves us to values, it creates our interest in values. In other words, love reveals to us the fact of value existence and only this prior disclosing of the value-realm makes possible the emotional presentation of particular values and their hierarchy. Love makes hidden values apparent to our consciousness. It creates the sense of value. In this sense Scheler claims that love is the primordial source of values. The lack of love produces a "blindness for values".

So, love creates our sensitivity to values. The act opposite to love: hate, not only hides values from our emotional perception but it also directs our interest to negative values, to that what is vulgar, ugly and morally wrong.

Another feature of love is that it stimulates us to higher values. Love, disclosing the value-realm, reveals also its hierarchical structure and, consequently, directs us to that which is the highest. Love is always a motion from the lower value to a higher one, but it does not presume that any particular values are given, on the contrary, only this intentional direction "to the higher" and "the highest" reveals concrete higher values. No value is given in the act of love but this act is primarily an intentional striving *up*. Here we have another sense of creativity. Love reveals us the highest value and motivates us to it; it motivates us always *up*, never *down*. In this way love discloses also the highest value, which according to Scheler is the value of holiness. So, in its intentional approach

"up" love is also directed to holiness. Moreover, due to this motion to the highest value love extends the axiological field. In the above quoted passage Scheler writes: "Love and hate are acts in which the value-realm accessible to the feeling is either extended or narrowed." Hate, contrary to love, reduces feeling of values and the axiological sense.

Moreover, acts of love may intend either generally to values or to values through concrete individual objects. The latter case is when, for instance, the love of beauty focuses on the particular works of art. Love focused on objects carrying values stimulates to accomplish the highest possible value ideally destined for such objects and this motion up may transcend all known values and disclose new higher value. As Scheler writes in *Ordo Amoris*: "love is the tendency or the act that seeks to lead everything in the direction of the perfection of value proper to it,"³

In consequence of the fact that love is an intentional striving to the highest value the act of love is also a vehicle of moral value. Love as a motion toward the higher value is *ex definitione* morally good. So, love constitutes the sense of moral value.

Since the emotional intuition of values is partly a cognitive experience, the question of illusion becomes of primary significance. It was Scheler who introduced and elaborated the idea of axiological illusion. According to it, the emotional perception of values happens to be delusive. Feeling of values and preferring may grasp values not adequately: some values remain unknown, the sense other is deformed and, the most frequently, the hierarchical structure is distorted. Also the understanding of the relationship between feelings and values occurs delusive: the states of feelings are identified with values and subsequently values are relocated from outside of our consciousness to the inside of it.

The notion of axiological delusion raises the question how this delusion may be avoided or corrected? Or in other words, how is an adequate value intuition possible? Emotional axiological intuition is of a nature of direct experience, so it cannot be verified by another kind of perception; there seems to be nothing more primordial than seeing itself. Emotional intuition is self-justifying and there

are no external criteria for it. So, that what is given in a feeling of value, or in preferring, is self-given and self-evident. If it is delusive it might be corrected only by the same kind of emotional seeing of values but by a new act of seeing, which goes further or sees better. But what can produce a new perception of values?

According to Scheler, the only part of our emotional intuition which is not delusive is love. Love provides a unique and certain guidance through the world of values. And it is the only power which can improve or correct our seeing of values. Love can reveal the mistake of emotional perception of an axiological sense. As mentioned above, the total lack of love produces a blindness for values. In such a case the whole value-realm disappears, no axiological sense is known at all. But more frequently, if blindness is only partial, there are some axiological meanings which remain hidden. The emotion opposite to love: hate, is more radical than just lack of love; it strives to negative value, it creates the sense of negative value and is always a motion down: from higher to lower values.

Thus, the blindness for value and the emotional illusion find their solutions in the concept of love. In love, which constitutes the basic sense of value.

This primordial and constitutive axiological function is delineated by Scheler also in his concept of *ordo amoris*. He alludes on this point to Pascal's *ordre du coeur* and *logique du coeur* expressed by him in *Les Pensées*, where he writes that "Le coeur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connaît pas". For Scheler, *ordo amoris* is a system of values which is recognized by an individual human being. It is an individual understanding of the sense of value. *Ordo amoris* is an individual limitation of the axiological universe; it defines the sense of value.

Ordo amoris constitutes the moral essence of a person. A person, who is just the totality of one's acts, is ruled by its *ordo amoris*, by his individual *logique du coeur*. As quoted above: "Whoever has the *ordo amoris* of a man has the man himself." Moreover, every individual not only acts according to his *ordo amoris* but also sees the world through it: the world as an environment is organized by

his particular logic of emotions. *Ordo amoris* defines also human destiny. The individual destiny is a timeless and essential value essence in form of personality. *Ordo amoris* does not influence an external fate, but determines the essence of one's actions and subsequently his place in the world. All this results from the fact that *ordo amoris* is identical with one's value structure: it defines the sense of value-realm, it opens and limits the boundaries of accessible axiological sense.

So, according to Scheler the axiological and the moral sense is deeply rooted in the phenomenon of love. Love is an act of consciousness in which the sense of value is constituted. Love is also a mysterious source of the *logique du coeur*, it is a power which motivates essentially all our actions: material and spiritual. Love is a fundament of human personality; it is the most crucial act a person. However, love as a primordial act of a person is also a highest possible act. Love is not a simple natural instinct. On the contrary, it is the most refined feeling, it is the highest spiritual energy of consciousness. Only as the highest kind of mental acts love is able to form the ground for emotional and intellectual activity. Its highest position and its grounding function are identified by Scheler.

But what is love? Love itself remains undefined. And as a primordial act it cannot be defined. Thus, after all that Scheler told us about love it still is a mysterious residuum, which remains hidden and unknown, beyond all explanations of the structure of human acts. Scheler did not destroy the mystery of a spontaneous constitution of the sense of value. Love seems to be like Heidegger's Being - presencing itself here or there from time to time but never surrendering to full intellectual explanation.

NOTES

- 1 Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics*. Evanston, Ill. 1973. p.261
- 2 Max Scheler, *Ordo Amoris*. In: *Selected Philosophical Essays*. Evanston, Ill. 1973. p.100
- 3 ditto, p. 109

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