

On the relationship between emotions and values in Scheler's phenomenology of ethics

The significance of Scheler's theory of emotions

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Scheler's theory of emotions is of a great significance, theoretically and practically. On one hand, it plays a part in breaking the long-term dominance of rationalism prevailing in epistemology and ethics; on the other hand, it contributes to the reconsideration to epistemological and ethical values of emotions. Maybe it bears an important inspiration for the reflection and critique to crisis of cultural values and spiritual crisis in western society.

Scheler's main points

Scheler highlights the intentionality of emotions, and explains the basic structure and the inner mechanism of emotional behaviors towards values. Scheler gives an important distinction regarding human emotions, namely, the intentional acts of feelings and unintentional state of feelings. Intentional acts of feelings are aroused from one's own, and direct to the object, actively and spontaneously, while unintentional state of feelings cannot be "given" to the object directly. Intentional acts of feelings are fundamental and lay basis for unintentional acts of feelings. Four strata of intentional feelings are distinguished by Scheler: sensual feelings, feelings of life, psychological feelings and spiritual feelings. Correspondingly, values given by intentional feelings are classified as follows: sensual values (comfortable and uncomfortable), values of life (noble and humble), spiritual values (beautiful and ugly; justice and injustice) and religious values (virtuous and evil; religious and unreligious). Four kinds of values have a connection with the existence of the person's essence. Values given by intentional feelings bear order and hierarchies. The order of values can be revealed by emotional preferences, fundamental, intentional emotional acts, which can direct a priori and objective values spontaneously. Love is the most primitive emotional activity and possesses primitivity and essentiality. Humans get involved with the world through love. Love is a primitive unity of humans and existence, humans and the world, as well as humans and matters. Love directs to matters; and also inclines to, discovers and creates values.

Considerations & Conclusion

Scheler's theory highlights certain functions of emotions, but it is not the foundation. It is only a step where he can construct his theory of values. Scheler and Hume have conflicting opinions as to the relationship between emotions and values. Hume, an emotionalist and subjectivist, emphasizes that values are emotions and stems from emotions substantially. While Scheler underlines that values are a priori and objective essence and that the order of values has essential factual relationship. Scheler, who appears an trend to Platonism, is an absolute idealism advocator. Furthermore, Scheler's research still lacks clarity and credibility on emotional values' "being given" problems. How the values can be given to and whether a variety of values are given to in the same way are still needed to be further discussed. It seems that Scheler's phenomenology studies on those questions have not broken through the framework of the philosophy of consciousness completely. Scheler fails to deal with relationships between values and living word (Habermas), values and cultural traditions (Gadamer), as well as values and social history (Marx). Basically, a perfect solving of the problem on the relationships between emotions and values requires facing historic of values.