

*The Genius of War, the Genius of Peace*  
*Max Scheler's Demons*

**A Sacred War**

On August 25, 1914, three weeks after the invasion of Belgium (August 4) and two months after the fateful assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo (June 28), German troops entered the city of Leuven and destroyed its celebrated university library. Some 300,000 books and more than a thousand irreplaceable Medieval manuscripts were burnt along with the torching of 2,000 buildings and the killing of 248 civilians.<sup>1</sup> The devastation was so intense that Dietrich Mahnke, a student of Edmund Husserl's serving in the 75th Reserve Infantry Regiment, could still observe the city burning on August 27 as his company marched through the village of Korbeek-Lo a few kilometers northwest of Leuven. Outrage among intellectuals, politicians, and the public in Allied nations was swift. Romain Rolland penned an open letter to Gerhart Hauptmann on August 29 condemning this "assault on culture and humanity." In the words of British Prime Minister H. H. Asquith: "The burning of Louvain is the worst thing [the Germans] have yet done. It reminds one of the Thirty Years' War." As Sir Arthur Evans, the famed archaeologist who excavated the ruins of Knossos, declared in *The Times*: "Sir, may I be allowed to voice horror and profound indignation at the Prussian holocaust of Louvain."<sup>2</sup>

Two weeks after the sacking of Leuven, Reims Cathedral in France was severely damaged by German shelling. After an initial occupation, German troops were forced to withdraw to fortified positions on the outskirts of the city after the battle of the Marne, which effectively halted the sweeping German advance toward Paris and set the stage for the grim

<sup>1</sup> See J. Lipkes, *Rehearsals: The German Army in Belgium, August 1914* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in A. Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 14.

deadlock of trench warfare that would indelibly define the Western Front. Over the course of three days, German artillery set fire to the cathedral's roof and damaged its facades. Along with the destruction of Leuven University Library, the shelling of Reims Cathedral ruptured cultural relations between France (as well as England) and Germany. As Rolland indignantly wrote: "Whoever destroys this work murders more than a person, he murders the purest soul of a race." The London *Times* equated the shelling of the cathedral to the deeds of Attila the Hun. Decrying it as a "barbaric shame and horror," demands that "the beast must be killed" became widespread in newspapers and Allied propaganda. "German mentality," it was proclaimed, had "regressed to a state of barbarity."<sup>3</sup>

Reims Cathedral possessed a special significance as a place of remembrance and incarnation of the sacred union between France and Catholicism. As the historical location for the coronation of French kings and the site of an imposing statue of Joan of Arc, erected in 1896 in commemoration of her victory over the English and Charles VII's coronation (1429), the cathedral symbolized the divine authority of French kings and France's self-appointed defense of Christianity. The desecration of Reims Cathedral was not just a crime against French civilization by the might of Prussian *Kultur*. It was an attack on France's Catholic identity, thereby imbuing the war with religious overtones.<sup>4</sup> As Georges Bataille, 17 years old and serving in the 154th Infantry Regiment at the time, meditated on the cathedral's defacement in his first publication *Notre-Dame de Reims*: "I thought that corpses themselves did not mirror death more than did a shattered church as vastly in its magnificence as Notre-Dame de Reims."<sup>5</sup> According to the Dutch war correspondent Lodewijk Hermen Grondijs, who chronicled firsthand the German invasion of Belgium, the defilement of Catholic churches, and the killing of priests, the German army was undertaking nothing less than a "religious war."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> T. Gaechtens, *Reims on Fire: War and Reconciliation between France and Germany* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2018), pp. 51, 53.

<sup>4</sup> As Léon Bloy bitterly wrote: "La où l'anglais offrait une Croix de bois à Jeanne d'Arc au bucher, l'hérétique Allemagne offre une Croix de fer aux assassins et incendiaires pour les récompenser de leurs crimes." [Where the English offered a Wooden Cross to Joan of Arc at the stake, heretical Germany offers an Iron Cross to assassins and arsonists to reward them for their crimes.] *Jeanne d'Arc et l'Allemagne* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1915), p. 263.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in D. Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of George Bataille* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), pp. 15–19.

<sup>6</sup> L. Grondijs, *Les Allemands en Belgique: Louvain et Aerschot* (Paris: Librairie Militaire – Berger-Levrault, 1915), p. 19. For documentation of anti-Catholic sentiments among the German soldiers of the mainly Protestant First, Second, and Third Armies, see J. Horne and A. Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 104–108.

From the pronouncements of intellectuals to mass propaganda, from the speeches of politicians and sermons of the clergy to private letters of soldiers, the rhetoric and ritualization of a sacred war suffused the mobilization of Europe.<sup>7</sup> This symbiosis of the political, the cultural, and the religious was arguably nowhere more virulently on display than with Kaiser Wilhelm II's address to the German nation on August 4. The Kaiser's speech had been authored by the liberal Protestant theologian Adolf Harnack, who served as his privy counselor and president of the Kaiser Wilhelm Foundation.<sup>8</sup> The nationalistic ambitions of science and religion, essential for the advancement of German culture, were exemplified in Harnack, whose influential version of Liberal Protestantism legitimated the synthesis of theology and politics, church and state in the newly forged Wilhelmine Empire.<sup>9</sup> In the rousing words of army pastor Otto Meyer to volunteers on the way to the front on September 9: "Your work is work for the Lord; your war service (*Kriegsdienst*) is a church service (*Gottesdienst*) [...]. A bad and godless human being is never a good soldier and a genuine soldier is always a good Christian."<sup>10</sup>

### "A Demoniacal Genius Who Stormed from the Heights"

Among numerous manifestations of *Kriegsphilosophie*, Max Scheler's *Der Genius des Krieges und der Deutsche Krieg* stands apart.<sup>11</sup> Occupying the "first place among German war philosophers" as "the highpoint of a philosophical veneration of war," Scheler was one of the most prolific wartime thinkers, and one of the "most colorful."<sup>12</sup> While Alois Riehl declared that Germany had embarked on a "war of culture" – a designation adopted by many prominent thinkers – Scheler's dithyramb to war proclaimed its metaphysical and religious significance.<sup>13</sup> Offering a vision of the world *sub specie belli*, *Der Genius* progresses from an exposition of

<sup>7</sup> P. Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014), pp. 7–8.

<sup>8</sup> K. Hammer, *Deutsche Kriegstheologie* (Munich: Kösel-Verlag, 1971), p. 374.

<sup>9</sup> Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War*, p. 11. As Jenkins observes, "activists in most countries spoke the language of Christian warfare, but the German approach to the war still stands out for its widespread willingness to identify the nation's cause with God's will, and for the spiritual exaltation that swept the country in 1914." Indeed, "In two crucial cases, though – Germany and Russia – religious motivations were so inextricably bound up with state ideology and policy making that it is impossible to separate them from secular factors."

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Hammer, *Deutsche Kriegstheologie*, p. 219.

<sup>11</sup> For a survey of German *Kriegsphilosophie*, Hoeres, *Krieg der Philosophen*.

<sup>12</sup> Flasch, *Die geistige Mobilmachung*, p. 117.

<sup>13</sup> A. Riehl, "1813 – Fichte – 1914 (Rede am 10 Oktober 1914)," in *Deutsche Reden in schwerer Zeit* (Berlin: Verlags-Archiv, 1914), p. 192.

the war's revelation of the "highest ethical values" through an elaboration of the specific German character of the war to the emancipatory promise of Germany's envisioned triumph for "the spiritual unity of Europe" and "humanity." Unlike the spiritual mobilization of preachers and theologians, *Der Genius des Krieges und der Deutsche Krieg* styles itself as an exposition of the "essence" of war by weaponizing Scheler's own philosophical thought. The war represented for Scheler an original awakening of the German nation, as well as, importantly, an exemplification of his own developing ethical thinking.<sup>14</sup>

On the eve of the war, Scheler's intellectual energies were guided by two overlapping concerns: the formation of an ethical theory of values embedded in a spiritual conception of life and objective values, on the one hand, and forging a philosophical critique of modern culture, on the other. Whereas Scheler's approach to ethics leveraged a phenomenological method of intuitionism, a material a priori of ethical values, and a synthesis of personalism and objectivity of values, his cultural critique took its bearings from sociological thinkers (Werner Sombart, Georg Simmel, Max Weber) on the origins of capitalism, modern bureaucracy, and bourgeois individualism. In his 1914 essay "The Future of Capitalism," Scheler railed against "the death of the system of life," "the deep perversion of all basic intellectual energies," and the "delusionary subversion of all meaningful orders of value." In a collection of essays, *Umsturz der Werte* (1915), Scheler ascribed the alienation of modern culture to unbridled capitalism, the mediocrity of the middle class, and rampant mechanization – common themes in the cultural pessimism of German cultural discourse. The "weariness of Empire" (*Reichsverdrossenheit*) plaguing wide swaths of the *Bildungsbürgertum* found a sophisticated expression in Scheler's writings. These cross-fertilizing directions of thought would further develop during the 1920s into an amalgam of philosophical anthropology, sociology of knowledge, and metaphysics of life. Despite envisioning systematic works and comprehensive studies, the restlessness of Scheler's temperament along with the volatility of historical circumstances propelled his thinking along different eccentric orbits around a central desire to understand the place of human existence in the cosmos and humankind's aspiration for the highest, eternal values. As Scheler writes in *The Human Place in the Cosmos* – published a year before his death – "ever since the awakening

<sup>14</sup> Flasch, *Die geistige Mobilmachung*, p. 91. As Staude remarks: "The war was undoubtedly one of the most important experiences of Scheler's life. His military service took place more in the realm of ideas than on the battlefield." J. R. Staude, *Max Scheler 1874–1928: An Intellectual Portrait* (New York: Free Press, 1967), p. 66.

of my philosophical thinking, the question ‘what is the human being and what is his place in being?’ has occupied me more fundamentally than any other question I have dealt with.”<sup>15</sup>

Scheler cut an unusual figure among German philosophers. Born of a Jewish mother who converted to Protestantism and a Protestant father, Scheler converted to Catholicism in his youth due to his infatuation with a maid. By every account, he possessed – or, better, he was *possessed by* – a charismatic and tempestuous character. His friend Theodor Lessing described him as “a demoniacal genius who stormed from the heights to the depths of life seeking salvation through debauchery.”<sup>16</sup> After an ignominious departure from the University of Munich in 1910 (accused of adultery) and banishment from academic employment, Scheler lectured in coffeeshouses, *Weinstuben*, and hotel rooms (paid for by his friend Dietrich von Hildebrand), wandering between Göttingen and Berlin, before settling in Berlin in 1912. Perpetually lacking income, but philosophically undeterred, Scheler embarked on a career as a freelance writer and thinker, thus allowing him to engage a broader audience with his writings on the ethical plight of the modern world.

At the outbreak of war, Scheler was thus an established if itinerant intellectual figure who moved between academic institutions and artistic milieus. Refused for military service due to astigmatism in 1914, but drafted only to be discharged in 1915, Scheler was then enlisted by the department of psychological warfare in the Foreign Ministry to deliver lectures in Belgium, Austria, Switzerland, and Holland.<sup>17</sup> Writing during the first months of the war – his manuscript was finished in November – Scheler published “Der Genius des Krieges” in *Die Neue Rundschau*, followed by an expanded book version in 1915 with an additional section, “Der Deutsche Krieg.” *Der Genius des Krieges und der Deutsche Krieg* was a bestseller going through three successive editions (1915, 1916, 1917) that further elevated his public status, especially in Catholic circles. Hermann Bahr praised Scheler’s *Kriegsbuch* as a work that would remain significant long after the war: “Scheler’s art of persuasion is unrivalled. He is a born educator; I know of no one who can lead us so easily but firmly to the truth.” Yet, Scheler’s *Kriegsbuch* also provoked dismay. Upon reading Scheler’s work, an indignant Max Brod composed a rebuttal of Scheler’s *Gesinnungsmilitarismus* (“spiritual militarism”) in a short text, “The Genius

<sup>15</sup> M. Scheler, *The Human Place in the Cosmos*, trans. E. Kelly (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009), p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Staude, *Max Scheler*, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Staude, *Max Scheler*, p. 68.

of Peace,” which on account of its defiant stance against the war was never published.<sup>18</sup> In his indictment of German intellectuals for their wanton legitimization of Germany’s imperial ambitions, Hugo Ball sarcastically alluded to Scheler’s *Kriegsbuch* in his *Critique of the German Intelligentsia*:

The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation and the heraldry of Gothic Kaisers stamped the people with a consciousness that believed service to God and its mission consisted in clanging weapons, judgships, hangings, smashing things to pieces, and in brute force [...] Even today [1918] Germany still feels that it is both the “Genius of War” and the “moral heart” of the world.<sup>19</sup>

### “Endlich ein Gott”

August 1914 was for many, especially for the middle class and those belonging to what the cultural historian Fritz Ringer dubbed the German Mandarin caste, welcomed for its “spiritual” significance.<sup>20</sup> Even if more apprehensive views prevailed privately, the war enthusiasm, or *Augusterlebnis*, that swept across Germany during the opening weeks of the war tapped into an apocalyptic narrative of German nationalism extending back to the nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup> In Georg H. Heym’s iconic poem *Der Krieg* (1911), the longing for a war that would release a restless youth from the blandness of life took the form of imagining war as a chthonic god awaking from subterranean depths:<sup>22</sup>

Aufgestanden ist er, welche lange schlieff,  
Aufgestanden unten aus Gewölbe tief.

Heym did not live to witness the war he dramatically envisioned (he accidentally drowned in 1912 at the age of 24) and the influence his poem would exert on the explosion of *Kriegslyrik* in 1914. Heym’s image of a “war-god” was appropriated by Rainer Maria Rilke in his *Fünf Gesänge*,

<sup>18</sup> Staude, *Max Scheler*, p. 89.

<sup>19</sup> H. Ball, *Critique of the German Intelligentsia*, trans. B. Harris (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 76. As Ball continues, “Prussian militarism in its fundamentals is an institution of ‘practical Christianity,’ that is abundantly evident [...] It is religious militarism [...] This much is evident: the Prussian army gives cause to philosophize, and I am not joking when I say that Prussian militarism rests on ‘philosophy of religion’” (p. 77).

<sup>20</sup> F. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890–1933* (London: Wesleyan University Press, 1969). See also J. Habermas, “Die deutschen Mandariner,” in *Philosophische-Politische Profile* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1987): 458–468.

<sup>21</sup> See K. Vondung, *The Apocalypse in Germany* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000).

<sup>22</sup> See P. Bridgewater, *The German Poets of the First World War* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), p. 23ff.

*August 1914*, hurriedly written on August 2 and 3 in the margins of his edition of Hölderlin's poems. In the first poem, the arrival of war is venerated as the emergence of a deity:

ZUM erstenmal seh ich dich aufstehn, hörengesagter, fernster,  
unglaublicher Kriegs-Gott.

As Rilke ends this song of war:

Endlich ein Gott. Da wir den friedlichen oft  
nicht mehr ergriffen, ergreift uns plötzlich der Schlacht-Gott,  
schleudert den Brand: und über dem Herzen voll Heimat  
schreit, den er donnernd bewohnt, sein rötlicher Himmel.<sup>23</sup>

In the flush of comparable enthusiasm, Scheler launches *Der Genius* with an evocation of the war's sublime advent: "At the beginning of the month of August, our German destiny took its stand before us like a single immense dark question and shook each individual to the core."<sup>24</sup> As "an incredible event in the moral world," the German nation faces itself, its values, and its future in an existential time of decision. The war was not just another episode in a chronological sequence of history, but a transformative event of revelation, or *kairos*, placing each individual under the existential "dictate of the hour." On a social and cultural level, Scheler envisions the war as an opportune moment for the transfiguration of capitalism and bourgeois individualism. As with other intellectuals, Scheler yearns for a new order of values and social solidarity, which he emphatically models on a Catholic idealization of Medieval community and spiritual union. On the level of national consciousness, the war represents an awakening of Germany to its unique historical mission. The war is said to expose the truth, or the untruth, of different national worldviews and their respective philosophical ways of thinking, thus underlining – at the focal point of Scheler's view – an irreconcilable difference between English utilitarianism and German *Geist*, the ethical supremacy of which the war validates. On a metaphysical level, the war reveals the highest ethical values for life, as realized through the vital and creative movement of "bellicose spirit" (*kriegerisches Geistes*). Scheler speaks decisively against both

<sup>23</sup> Rilke's exhilaration began to wane already within the course of his five cantos, and by the end of the war he had changed his view of the war entirely and came to regret his initial rush of poetic war fervor. As he writes on November 6, 1914 to Karl von der Heydt: "In den ersten Augusttagen ergriff mich die Erscheinung des Krieges, des Kriegs-Gottes [...], jetzt ist mir längst der Krieg unsichtbar geworden, ein Geist der Heimsuchung, nicht mehr ein Gott, sondern eines Gottes Entfesselung über den Völkern."

<sup>24</sup> M. Scheler, *Politisch-Pädagogische Schriften* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1982), vol. IV, p. 11.



evolutionary theories of pacificism and the instrumental militarism of *Realpolitik* in advocating his own *Gesinnungsmilitarismus*, which he sees as based on a “spiritual drive,” not bent on the acquisition of power but on the amplification of cultural values and spiritual realization of the highest values. This drive is “more original and stronger than the drive to maintain one’s existence.” Hence, for Scheler, there is “joy in deed and struggle” but also “in risk and sacrifice” over and above the “joy at the spoils of war or security and well-being.”<sup>25</sup> The war is deemed to be “a miracle,” as if answering the secret prayer of a culture in crisis, that “best remains unspoken and in the heart alone,” and yet reveals “a wide and great path of the world” by promising an ecclesiastical unification of individuals into a community of love.<sup>26</sup>

Scheler throughout speaks of the “essence of war” as founded on “phenomenological evidence” and his idiosyncratic method of “intuition of essences,” and thus considers the war as a historically fortuitous opportunity for the application of his foundational ethics. Scheler’s thinking in this manner becomes deliberately weaponized, thus sharpening his rejection of alternative philosophical approaches and, most significantly, English utilitarianism. Rhetorically, *Der Genius* is composed in different styles of writing and modes of address: emphatic affirmation of Germany’s “special mission,” spiritual supremacy, and passionate nationalism; philosophical argumentation and technical vocabulary; popular simplifications and exhortation; clichés and commonplaces. Scheler’s text can be read as a variegated performative speech act, appealing more to its illocutionary force and perlocutionary effects than the cogency of its locutionary pronouncements.<sup>27</sup> The war is not a theme of detached contemplation nor a topic of partisan geopolitical considerations; nor is the war reduced to merely subjective enthusiasm and chauvinism. Scheler ascertains the “essence of the war” from the war’s own revelation, channeling its creativity and decoding its “sublime language,” such that the war speaks “to us,”

<sup>25</sup> Scheler, *Politisch-Pädagogische Schriften*, p. 13.

<sup>26</sup> Scheler, *Politisch-Pädagogische Schriften*, p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> For a consideration of Scheler’s work as a speech act, see D. Weidner, “Das Absolut des Krieges: Max Schelers Kriegsdenken und die Rhetorik des Äußersten,” *Texturen des Krieges. Körper, Schriften und der erste Weltkrieg* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2015): 85–114. As Weidner writes, “the decoupling of war from its political aims has the epistemological consequence: a grammar becomes absolutely displaced and becomes a language without a logic, becomes a new form of thinking, which is immediately warlike [...] when the grammar of war replaces or displaces the logic of philosophy, war becomes a category not in need of explanation but that itself explains” (pp. 99, 101). In Weidner’s words, “we find in Scheler a post-metaphysical politics which does not admit any place or source for legitimation.”



individually as well as collectively. As a creative and spiritual force that gives us meaning, the war suspends questions of legitimation and justice; its significance resides beyond politics and economics. As a speech act, the dominant chord of Scheler's war dithyramb thus consists in the instilling of faith. As Scheler exclaims: "We can only believe! Only as faith, but as firm and well-founded, is therefore meant all future-political [considerations] of the second part of this book."

This advocacy of the war's metaphysical revelation occurred during a fertile period in Scheler's thinking that witnessed the continued elaboration of his seminal work of phenomenological ethics as well as influential essays and unpublished studies, along with additional writings on the war.<sup>28</sup> In the 1916 preface to *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, Scheler remarks that, although "all parts of the work were written prior to the outbreak of the war," owing to "personal circumstances and the turmoil of war" it is only now that both parts (first published separately, in 1913 and 1916, in Husserl's *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*) could be printed together. After referencing his "emotive-phenomenological" and "moral-critical" studies, Scheler refers to *Der Genius* and *Krieg und Aufbau* as "moral-critical applications" of his ethical thinking. The inclusion of these two wartime texts within his ethical endeavor is stated again in the 1921 preface to the second edition of *Formalism in Ethics*. And yet, as Scheler writes in the 1916 preface to *Der Genius*, the "new realities" and "tremendous events" that transpired since 1914 have impacted his thinking about the war, transforming his attitude to a more sanguine reflection on the prospects of social and spiritual reconstruction in *Krieg und Aufbau*. From the standpoint of 1916, *Der Genius* appears as a "document of the temperament (*Gesinnung*) and thoughts which animated [us] at the beginning of the war." It is a war book that already, over the course of the war, no longer entirely represents Scheler's evolving attitudes. This shift in Scheler's thinking is confirmed in the preface to the third edition of *Formalism in Ethics* (1926) – two years before his death – where Scheler makes known a change of thinking on "essential questions of metaphysics." Despite this change, "the ideas in this work [*Formalism*] not only remain unaffected by the change in my fundamental metaphysical position but represent some of the reasons and intellectual motives which led to this change." Conspicuously missing from this 1926 preface is mention of his wartime texts. Instead, Scheler

<sup>28</sup> *Krieg und Aufbau* (1916), *Die Ursachen des Deutschenbasses* (1917), a review of Johann Plenge's 1789 and 1914, and a review of Pierre's Duhem's *La science allemande*.

refers to two lectures, “Moral und Politik” and “Die Idee des Friedens und der Pazifismus” (1927), which he hopes soon to publish and will “reveal the direction in which I would like to see the non-formal ethics of values develop” – a direction he did not live to see through.

### Material Value Ethics

In his *magnum opus*, Scheler seeks to establish a “strictly scientific and positive foundation for philosophical ethics with respect to all its fundamental problems – but to deal only with the most elementary points of the problems involved.”<sup>29</sup> Such a foundation would upend the dominance of rationalism and utilitarianism in ethics, as well as underpin an alternative to the rampant individualism, instrumentalism, and social fragmentation that Scheler considered endemic to modernity. Scheler envisions a transformation of modern life in the aspiration for solidarity, community, and cultivation of higher values (individually and collectively) based on an ethical socialism of love with strong Catholic overtones. Against Kant’s formalist ethics, Scheler contends that ethical conduct is not defined by formal lawfulness of the will with respect to ethical imperatives, but grounded in the apprehension of values as the content of experience. Ethical obligations – what we ought to do – only gain traction through an affective uptake of values in our lives. Values are contingent upon experiencing diverse forms of affects, or feelings, neither arbitrary in their manner of givenness nor reducible to the capriciousness of subjective experience, since, as Scheler argues, values are structured according to a priori configurations, or essences. Based on the objective *and* subjective experience of values, as “feeling phenomena,” Scheler displaces the rational ethical subject and Kantian goodwill as well as the biological-psychological subject (“human nature”) with a conception of the person who, attuned to the ontological primacy of values and intimately responsible for oneself, bears an original coresponsibility with all other persons for the realization of goodness in and salvation of the world. Even with this broad vision, *Formalism* is an incomplete work: The ontological status of value essences (partly treated in Scheler’s unfinished essay “Ordo Amoris”), the function of exemplary ethical individuals (partly treated in the essay “Vorbilder und Führer”), and the elaboration of God’s significance for ethical life remained in need of clarification.

<sup>29</sup> M. Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, trans. M. Frings (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. xvii.

Scheler utilizes a phenomenological approach that draws on as well as distances itself from Edmund Husserl's phenomenology. In contrast to the latter's analysis of the constitutive operations of transcendental subjectivity, "phenomenology," as Scheler writes, "is neither the name of a new science or a substitute for the word philosophy; it is the name of an attitude of spiritual seeing in which one can see or experience something which otherwise remains hidden, namely, a realm of facts of a particular kind."<sup>30</sup> Those particular facts are "value-essences" – the objective, non-arbitrary configurations of values – that are ordinarily taken for granted yet saliently implicit throughout our experience. By means of a shift in attitude, reflexive recuperation, and eidetic intuition, the a priori essential structure of values can be rendered into a thematic field of investigation; thereby revealed is an objective hierarchy of values. Scheler's inventory of values ranges, lower to higher, from "agreeable values," "vital values," and "spiritual-intellectual values" to "holy values."<sup>31</sup> On this account, values inhere in things or persons without themselves *being* a distinct thing or person: It is the table that we find agreeable; it is being a chess prodigy that we admire; it is the noble deeds of humanitarians that we find uplifting. Things (or persons) are experienced as valuable not in isolation, but within a nexus of values: the sense of wellbeing when drawing a warm bath, the pleasurable warmth of the water, the relaxation of our bodies, and the ultimate physical and psychological invigoration that seems to breathe new life into us. We are attuned to and oriented in the world through values, and indeed, for Scheler, things and persons in and of the world "announce" themselves, or "show up," as more valuable or less valuable. Experience is value laden across different ways of world disclosure. It is values, in their ontological purchase, that define what we care for and why what we care for remains important to us.

Values are distinct from their bearers (things or persons) as well as distinct from each other, yet they are indissociable from acts of experiencing. Importantly, values are not constituted by consciousness; they are disclosed to consciousness in two forms of intentionality: "intentional feelings" (as distinct from "feeling states," for example the feeling of pain) and "strivings." In both instances, a value is the intentional object of consciousness. Strivings are (mostly) prereflective and preconscious. The stirring of desire

<sup>30</sup> M. Scheler, "Phenomenology and the Theory of Cognition," in *Selected Philosophical Papers*, trans. D. Lachterman (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973): 136–201, p. 137.

<sup>31</sup> On occasion, Scheler considers "utility" as another type of value; his classification of values thus varies accordingly (*Formalism*, pp. 104–105, 255–261, 332–344).

for an attractive person or the impulse to reach for a delicious-looking apple are examples of how the value quality of a person or thing affects us before any deliberate decision or volitional act is set into motion. As Scheler writes: “For values are neither dependent upon purposes nor abstracted from them, but are the foundation of *goals of striving*, and are hence the foundation of purposes, which are themselves founded in goals.”<sup>32</sup> In strivings and intentional feelings, values are revealed through preferences (*Vorziehen*) or “placing after” (*Nachsetzen*) between relatively “higher” and “lower” values. We are pulled toward or pushed away from, or attracted to or repulsed by, things or persons, not by qualitative experiences of isolated values as such, but by values in hierarchical relation to each other.

Preferring underlies our inclinations, decisions, and intentions, yet is open to reflective appropriation, correction, and calibration.<sup>33</sup> From this insight, Scheler mounts the argument that ethical obligations have their foundation in the experienced – “preferred” – disclosure of values. As Scheler writes: “Whenever we speak of an ought, the comprehension of a *value* must have occurred.”<sup>34</sup> Not every value apprehension, however, has uptake as an ought. Judging what I ought to do, as determining my conduct, rests on the foundation of a value alive to, as it were, its possible being-real; something ought to be done in such and such a manner only because it expresses a value that itself should be. Scheler distinguishes in this regard between the “ideal ought” of a value as such and the “ought of duty,” where in the latter case the ought refers to a possible decision, or a willing, the value content of which should be realized. A normative ought prescribes a certain possible conduct: I ought to act in such and such a manner. An ideal ought is independent from possible action; an ideal ought states “this ought to be.” To value the lives of others is to recognize that lives should matter in the world. An ideal ought is not constrained by the ability to act, since from an ideal ought no direct obligation to act ensues.

Scheler identifies love and hate as the “highest level of our intentional emotive life.”<sup>35</sup> Love and hate are not values per se, but “acts in which the value-realm accessible to the feeling of a being (the value-realm with which preferring is also connected) is either *extended* or *narrowed*.”<sup>36</sup> Whereas

<sup>32</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 41.

<sup>33</sup> Scheler proposes that there are two orders: rank ordering of values with respect to their essential bearers (things, acts, and persons) and rank ordering of values with respect to value modalities (the agreeable, the vital, etc.).

<sup>34</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 184.

<sup>35</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 260.

<sup>36</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 261.

preferring discloses a bounded range of values within which we operate and navigate, shaping our dispositions for choosing and directions for acting, “[love] is, as it were, a movement in whose execution ever *new* and *higher* values flash out, i.e., values that were wholly unknown to the being concerned.”<sup>37</sup> Love discloses new dimensions of values, moving upward along the hierarchy of values toward the holy (and ultimately toward God), opening new possibilities of valuing and trajectories of being a person. By contrast, hate narrows down the possibilities of valuing and being. Love is a movement of going beyond oneself, enriching oneself in the revelation of values that impel us to the ideal of what ought to be and who we ought to become. The movement of love passes through other persons, not things. When regarding another person in love, we behold more than who the person is, their moral character and value; we behold who the person *can be* (and *should be*) beyond their social standing and cultural encodings, and thus see the other person in the light of their own Idea; namely, their individual valuableness in terms of their goodness (or evilness). We speak of individuals as either “good” or “evil” in view of the values realized through their actions and lives. To be good or evil is not a matter of formal lawful conduct with respect to the moral law. It is a question of the realization, or instantiation, of higher values in one’s life.

### Individual and Collective Persons

This conception of the person resides at the center of Scheler’s phenomenological ethics; it is a person who is deemed good (or evil), who exemplifies the highest (or the lowest) values, and who strives (or who does not strive) to realize goodness in the world. But rather than define the person with reference to a soul, an ego, goodwill, or inborn psychological traits, Scheler raises the fundamental question: *Who* – not what – is a person? Being a person is “given as one who executes intentional acts that are bound by a unity of sense” and experience of oneself in self-responsibility, responsiveness to values, and understanding of oneself as the author of one’s own actions.<sup>38</sup> At the core of personhood, there is awareness of standing before one’s own irrecusable responsibility “to be” a person. Freedom is couched in self-responsibility; volition is situated in responsiveness (or lack thereof) to values. As Scheler writes:

<sup>37</sup> M. Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, trans. W. Stark (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 153.

<sup>38</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, pp. 476, 487.

All true autonomy is first and foremost a predicate of the *person*, not a predicate of reason (Kant) or of the person only as an X that participates in the lawfulness of reason. But here we must distinguish two sorts of autonomy: the autonomy of personal *insight* into good and evil and the autonomy of personal *willing* of what is given as good and evil.<sup>39</sup>

An individual is constituted as both a public (or social) person and a private (Scheler speaks of the “intimate”) person. While the social person embodies the cultural, social, and historical determinations of an individual, the private person, as “one’s particular self-being,” is the nonobjectifiable “mineness” of one’s individuality. As Scheler writes:

No matter how rich and diverse the memberships through which *each* person is enmeshed in the whole of the moral cosmos, and no matter how diverse the directions of the various kinds of co-responsibility by which the person is tied to this *whole* and its direction and sense, the person is never exhausted by these kinds of membership, nor is his self-responsibility reduced to various co-responsibilities, nor to his duties and rights to those duties and rights which derive from such membership (duties of family, office, vocation, citizenship, class, etc.).<sup>40</sup>

To be a person is characterized by an intimacy only known to oneself and a secret only discoverable by oneself. Other persons are known to us through their social determinations, and yet remain unknown to us as to their intimate personhood. Scheler’s radical humanism affirms the uniqueness of personhood beyond objectifications of social forms, the universal principle of equality, and mutual recognition. Persons are unequal in relation to each other given each person’s irreducible and nonobjectifiable uniqueness.<sup>41</sup> And yet, the individuality of a person is not only determined by intimate self-responsibility. A person’s individuality, as a temporal becoming, is guided by “an individual personal value-essence,” or personal destiny, not predetermined but self-prescribed, that must be claimed and consciously pursued.<sup>42</sup> An individual’s value essence entails their “moral tenor” (*Gesinnung*), or disposition, along with their value inclinations, or what Scheler calls “personal salvation.” Personal salvation is neither theologically ordained nor identical with the fulfillment of ethical obligation; instead, it is the “material a priori field for the formation of our possible

<sup>39</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, pp. 494–495.

<sup>40</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 561.

<sup>41</sup> For the term “radical humanism,” S. Schneck, *Persons and Polis: Max Scheler’s Personalism as Political Theory* (Albany: State University of New York, 1987), p. 61ff.

<sup>42</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 489.

intentions” and “value-qualities which [we] alone can grasp.”<sup>43</sup> It scopes out accordingly a range of possibility for what is good for me, individually, to accomplish, a sense of my own life as an unfolding and abiding whole, only accomplishable by me, that “places me in a *unique* position in the moral cosmos and obliges me with respect to action, deeds, and works, etc., which, when I represent them, all call ‘I am for you and you are for me.’”<sup>44</sup> Goodness, as manifest through (higher) values, “whispers to me *for you*,” of who I am to become. What I ought to do speaks to me individually, for it is only if I recognize *myself* as called upon to do what is good that moral imperatives can have traction and purchase *for me*, and not as a universal subject or noumenal self. This openness presupposes openness to oneself in “self-love” (in contrast to love of self); namely, that I value myself as a valuing being, and hence value from myself to effect goodness. The path to “personal salvation” – effecting goodness in the world that singularly becomes my calling – requires relations with other persons; that is, not just self-love but also love for others. When in love with another person, we behold more than who the person is in social terms: We behold their moral tenor and worth (good or evil) as well as who our beloved *can be and should be* in light of their individual value essence, or calling, beyond their social standing and cultural encodings. Rather than determine one’s ethical conduct according to an impersonal categorical imperative, it is to others, as exemplifications of values and goodness, that individuals must turn, not in imitation, but through creative inspiration and critical self-development. As Scheler writes: “One can therefore say that the highest *effectiveness* of the good person in the moral cosmos lies in the pure *value of exemplariness* that he possesses exclusively by virtue of his *being* and *haecceity*, which are accessible to intuition and love, and not in his will or in any acts that he may execute, still less in his deeds and actions.”<sup>45</sup>

In the final section of *Formalism*, Scheler observes: “An ethics which, like the one developed here, located the highest and ultimate meaning of the world in the possible being of (individual and collective) persons of the highest positive value must finally come to a question of great significance,” namely, “are there *specific types* of persons that can be differentiated in an *a priori* fashion” (much as Scheler differentiated different types of values in

<sup>43</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 115.

<sup>44</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 490.

<sup>45</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 575. For a further, albeit incomplete, development of this cardinal idea of ethical exemplarity, see M. Scheler, “Vorbilder und Führer,” *Schriften aus dem Nachlaß: Zur Ethik und Erkenntnislehre* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1957): 255–344.



an a priori fashion)?<sup>46</sup> Ethical obligations have their foundation in the revelation of highest values, and if such values – that is, the highest – are exhibited in persons, not things, it follows that an ought of duty, as the basis for willing what ought to be done, cannot itself serve as the motivating norm. As Scheler proposes, “there can be *no norm of duty without a person who posits it* and no non-formal rightness of a norm of duty without the essential goodness of the person who posits it.”<sup>47</sup> From this claim, Scheler identifies different types of exemplary ethical persons (“the *bon vivant*,” “the leading spirit,” “the hero,” “the genius,” and “the saint”) and further argues that typified “value-persons,” or functional ethical models of goodness, stand in a relation to the Goodness of the Divine; that is, God. The Goodness of God – the highest person – is not an aggregate or synthesis of persons. Rather, “one can call the pure types of the value-person perspectival sides (structured by ranks) of the simple and undivided Godhead, sides which are constitutive for the possible *modes of givenness* of the Godhead (as value-being) in a finite being, but not constitutive for the being of God.”<sup>48</sup> There exists, in this regard, an “essential tragedy of all finite personal being,” given their “essential moral imperfection.” It is impossible for an individual person to embody in one life “the saint, the hero, and the genius.” As Scheler wonders: “Only the hero fully values the hero; only the genius fully values the genius. Who should value both wills when it is impossible to be both perfect hero *and* perfect genius?”<sup>49</sup> How can one pursue being, and hence valuing either the hero *or* the genius, given that one cannot become both? The tragedy of the ethical is here not based on a conflict between incommensurable duties, nor between duty and inclinations. Within Scheler’s personalism, the tragic arises in that “*equally justified provinces* of duty clash, each ‘province’ receiving its objective field from the value-being and the value-kind of the persons *themselves* who participate in the conflict.”<sup>50</sup>

It belongs to the individuality of the person to be a social being. As Scheler underlines: “All persons are, with *equal* originality, both individual persons and (essentially) members of a collective person.”<sup>51</sup> In *Formalism*, Scheler outlines a social ontology of groups, an implicit account of

<sup>46</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 572.

<sup>47</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 573.

<sup>48</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 590.

<sup>49</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 591.

<sup>50</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 593. What remains wanting from this statement of the tragic condition in *Formalism* is an account of God as a person and how God becomes himself manifest, or experienced, in his goodness, along with a sociology of ethical vocations, a theory of the exemplary person in its relation to historical worldviews. See also Scheler’s essay on the phenomenon of the tragic.

<sup>51</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 524.

“we-intentionality” and social acts. A collective person is constituted neither through a synthesis of individuals nor as a supra-individual person. As Scheler writes: “It is therefore *in* the person that the mutually related *individual person* and *collective person* become differentiated. The idea of one is not the ‘foundation’ of the other.”<sup>52</sup> In this sense, a collective person attains consciousness in the social acts of individual persons. All individuals, for example, who experience themselves as Germans (i.e., a collective person), given their finitude, cannot encompass the entire “collective content which is experienced by the collective person and to which the person’s peculiar awareness *also* belongs as a member-person.”<sup>53</sup> The relation between collective person and individual person is thus a “special kind of relation between the universal and the individual [...] the collective person is as much a spiritual *individual* as the individual person, e.g., the Prussian state.”<sup>54</sup>

As with values, Scheler identifies a hierarchy of collective forms of existence. In its rudimentary form, a group is constituted through mimetic behavior (the mass or herd). In a higher form, individuals possess an understanding of themselves as group members. Whereas in a herd no solidarity obtains among members, in this second kind of group a representable solidarity binds individuals to each other into a life-community, where individual responsibility is founded on coresponsibility for the conduct, volition, and intentions of the group. A life-community, however, is not yet a collective *person*; it is a collective form of life predicated on “thing-values” (*Sachwerte*), for example a farm sharing group. A third form of collective existence is society (*Gesellschaft*), in which relations among individuals are neither biologically determined nor mediated by “thing-values.” What characterizes a society is that an individual decides to belong (or, alternatively, not to belong). Whereas life-communities are based on coresponsibility, in a society “all responsibility for others is based on unilateral *self-responsibility*, and all possible responsibility for others must be regarded as having come from a free and singular act of taking over certain obligations.”<sup>55</sup> A society – Scheler’s gloss on modern liberal society – is not a fully constituted collective person; the social is woven from relations of conventions and contracts, but not, on this account, mutual solidarity. In a life-community, the basic attitude is one of trust. In a society, by contrast, the basic attitude is one of distrust; solidarity is a product of coercion or calculated self-interest. Against these forms of collective existence (herd,

<sup>52</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 522.

<sup>53</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 523.

<sup>54</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 525.

<sup>55</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 529.

life-community, society), Scheler envisions the highest form of community as “the unity of independent, spiritual, and individual single persons ‘in’ an independent, spiritual, and individual collective person.” The self-valuing of an individual person (“self-love”) binds itself to self-valuing of the collective person by means “of the idea of the salvational solidarity of all in the *corpus christianum*, which is founded on the Christian idea of love (and which is contrary to the mere ethos of ‘society,’ which denies moral solidarity).”<sup>56</sup> In the collective person, every individual is self-responsible as well as co-responsible for others in the community. Both the collective person (the community) and individual persons are, moreover, responsible “to the person of persons,” God, in terms of self-responsibility and co-responsibility. This spiritual solidarity is “unrepresentable,” since an individual person is co-responsible not only in their social position, office, and rank, but as an individual person above the social, as the bearer of a unique conscience: An individual does not ask themselves: “What positive moral value would have occurred in the world and what of negative moral value would have been avoided if I, as a representative of a place in a social structure, had comported myself differently?” Rather, an individual asks: “What would have occurred if I, as a spiritual individual, had grasped, willed, and realized the ‘good-in-itself-for-me’ in a superior manner?”<sup>57</sup>

In this highest form of communal life, there obtains an original co-responsibility of each individual for the ethical salvation of the world and “the whole of all realms of persons.” Care for the community – for its culture and collective wellbeing – resides at the living center of the individual person, taking on an ultimate religious significance, for what is of ethical value (the highest value of self-love and love for others) is directed toward the world in love – for love of the world – standing before God “feeling united with the whole of the spiritual world and humanity.”<sup>58</sup> The holy (*das Heilige*) is the highest value for individual persons; salvation (*das Heil*) is the highest value for a genuine collective person. Although Scheler thus binds individual salvation with collective salvation, he notes that personal salvation is “totally independent of its relation to the state.” This envisioned ideal of “spiritual community” cannot have the form of the nation-state or national identity. In fact, individual members of a state exist in an “unequal realm of free spiritual persons” that places them “above the state and above law.” There is no subordination of the individual person to the

<sup>56</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 533.

<sup>57</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 534.

<sup>58</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 534.

collective person; each has a common ethical subordination to the idea of the infinite person “in whom the division between individual persons and collective persons, necessary for finite persons, *ceases to be*.”<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, Scheler grants that “in extreme cases” the state can demand the sacrifice of an individual’s life, in time of war for example; he rejects, however, that the state can demand the sacrifice of the person “in general,” that is, “its salvation and its conscience,” nor demand unlimited devotion, reserved only to God. In this light, Scheler takes issue with “thinkers of note” who oppose liberal and mechanical individualism in favor of the organic community of the supra-individual state, “for which a person must be prepared to make any sacrifice.” This illicit “glorification of the German conception of the state,” Scheler contends, has been abolished “*once and for all* by Jesus.”<sup>60</sup> Expressed in Christian terms, an “eternal state” or “eternal nation” is contradictory and more than just empirically impossible: “The false assumption of such an eternal nation or state would also lead to a deadly conservatism that would obstruct a total explication of the inner possibilities of the spirit which forms the cultures and states. Every ethics of state or culture is therefore *eo ipso* ‘reactionary.’ Rather, there is a *moral* right to both cultural revolution and revolution against the state.”<sup>61</sup>

### The God of War

As Scheler states in the preface to *Der Genius des Krieges und der Deutsche Krieg*, “while the first part [‘The Genius of War’] proceeds in such a way that what appears is only the shadow of the war that surrounds us, the shadow the war projects by virtue of the light from the eternal world of ideas, onto the wall of Being; the second part [‘The German War’] shows the very same ideas completely immersed into concrete life, into action and dictates of the hour.”<sup>62</sup> With this tacit wartime refashioning of Plato’s allegory of the cave, Scheler expresses his ambition as penetrating beyond the shadows cast upon reality by the war to contemplate the essence of the war as “revealing of absolute realities.” Through this optic, war is seen to disclose values that otherwise remained veiled amid the dogmatic slumber of peace, thus catalyzing the surpassing of modernity’s ailments: capitalism, individualism, and utilitarianism. “Der Genius des Krieges” presents

<sup>59</sup> Moreover, a collective person cannot be based on blood, soil, or tradition (Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 543).

<sup>60</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 512.

<sup>61</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 560.

<sup>62</sup> Scheler, *Politisch-Pädagogische Schriften*, p. 9.

a wartime ascent of the soul along the contours of Scheler's prescribed hierarchy of values, toward the eternal and God. War is a vital and creative upsurge of life in pursuit of the highest ethical values, as configured in three stratifications of world-ordering (*Welteinrichtung*): vital, cultural-spiritual, and holy.<sup>63</sup> In "Der Deutsche Krieg," Scheler descends from this essential vision of the world in war to speak more directly to his compatriots, who are encouraged to "see with their own German eyes" the justness (*Gerechtigkeit*) of their struggle, and urged to embrace "concrete life, into action, and the demand of the hour."<sup>64</sup>

The values of the vital, the cultural-spiritual, and the holy structure Scheler's assessment of the war's force of transformation. Thus framed, the war is claimed to release a dynamism of life, allow for the constitution of a new world order according to the highest values, and lead to the realization of collective personhood in the revelation of God. The gap in *Formalism* between Scheler's conception of collective person and God – indeed, the function of God for his philosophical ethics – would seem to be illuminated in the glow and glory of war. This emphasis on war's vitality for life establishes a point of intersection between Scheler's concern with spiritual (and holy) values and personhood from *Formalism* (which only offers a muted assertion of vital values) with the subversion of vital values that Scheler vigorously identified with the *ressentiment* of bourgeois society, with its evisceration of trust and solidarity in the abstract name of equality.<sup>65</sup>

In a manner not untypical of late nineteenth-century thinkers, Scheler identifies the creative source of war with life. "The true root of all war," he writes, "consists in that from life itself, independent from its particular and changing environment and its stimulus, there is a tendency for amplification [*Steigerung*], towards growth and the unfolding of its manifold types inherent to life."<sup>66</sup> The paradox of war consists in creation, in myriad ways, through destruction.<sup>67</sup> This Schelerian affirmation of war's vitality

<sup>63</sup> Scheler, *Politisch-Pädagogische Schriften*, pp. 36, 53.

<sup>64</sup> Scheler, *Politisch-Pädagogische Schriften*, p. 9.

<sup>65</sup> See M. Scheler, *Ressentiment*, trans. W. Holdheim (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1994). In a collection of essays written between 1912 and 1914, *Vom Umsturz der Werte*, Scheler faulted utilitarianism – the dominant ideology of liberal capitalist society – for its subordination of vital values to values of utility, conformity, and efficiency.

<sup>66</sup> Scheler, *Politisch-Pädagogische Schriften*, p. 31.

<sup>67</sup> As Ruskin observes in his lecture on war in *The Crown of Wild Olives*, "national military conflict is not anathema to art, but its very basis." The paradox of war, for Ruskin, is that "it is impossible for me to write consistently of war, for the group of facts I have gathered about it leads me to two opposite conclusions: suffering and death," and yet "the most beautiful characteristics yet developed among men have been formed in war." Quoted in D. Pick, *War Machine: The Rationalisation of Slaughter in the Modern Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 69–70.

does not espouse a notion of “will to power” (prevalent among wartime appropriations of Nietzschean thought) that emphasizes the enhancement of life through conflict.<sup>68</sup> The force of life is not, for Scheler, without the aspiration of spirit to more than life. As he writes, “we must therefore distinguish two roots of all human struggle; the one that is responsible for economics and technology, springing from the struggle for existence and the other, its individualizing presupposition, as the drive towards amplification of power and achievement of the universality of life, culture, and the formation of the state.”<sup>69</sup> Scheler distinguishes between violence (*Gewalt*) and power (*Macht*), whereby “power” is wedded to “spirit” in an inverse relation to the bond between life and violence. In placing the power of spirit, as opposed to the violence of life, at the heart of war, Scheler argues that material destruction and killing do not express the “essence” of war. On this view, war is not primarily the employment of physical force or a utilitarian instrument for the pursuit of political or economic ends. Rather than a “struggle for existence” (*Kampf ums Dasein*), a dominant slogan of *Kriegsphilosophie* and enshrined in the writings of Friedrich von Bernhardi and Heinrich von Treitschke, Scheler argues that war is a “struggle for higher existence” (*Kampf um ein Höheres als Dasein*), where power stands at the service of culture and freedom in the formation of an ethos, or form of life, incarnating higher values and a community of love, higher than the nation (Germany) and yet impossible without it.

With this spiritualized conception of life, Scheler objects to social evolutionary arguments for the progress of humankind toward peace, either of the kind in Herbert Spencer or Kant’s perpetual peace. The rejection of Social Darwinism and biological accounts of human existence cuts both ways, against liberal pacificism as well as “instrumental militarism.” Scheler’s metaphysical conception of war – his *Gesinnungsmilitarismus* – subverts Clausewitz’s influential definition of war as the pursuit of the political by other – violent – means. Rather, Scheler cites von Treitschke’s statement that war is “politics κατά ἐξοχήν” – *par excellence*.<sup>70</sup> The bellicose realization of life in the collective form of the nation *is* the essence of politics – and not just an instrument of policy or national interest. The political is based on the existential decision of war for the sake of life’s highest values. Despite this allegiance to Treitschke’s idea of war as the essence of politics,

<sup>68</sup> See S. Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany, 1890–1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), chapter 5.

<sup>69</sup> Scheler, *Politisch-Pädagogische Schriften*, p. 35.

<sup>70</sup> Scheler, *Politisch-Pädagogische Schriften*, p. 41.

Scheler does not accept that war stems from an evolutionary clash of civilizations, or *Weltanschauungen*, nor the crude Social Darwinism that underlays Treitschke's *Realpolitik*. Unlike Treitschke and von Bernhardi, Scheler does not conceive of war as racial or biological survival of the fittest, or as a struggle for economic and geopolitical power.<sup>71</sup> Scheler speaks against the aim of war, as with the bastardized reading of Clausewitz's *On War* among nineteenth-century German military theorists, as "absolute" in the sense of tending toward the annihilation of the enemy. As Scheler states: "In cases where the goal of war is the physical annihilation of a group [...] there we have a misused application of the noble name of 'war.'"<sup>72</sup> Scheler, in other words, rejects the idea of *Vernichtungskrieg*, as is implied, for example, in Treitschke and stated in eugenic and racist terms by Eduard von Hartmann.<sup>73</sup> The essence of war is for Scheler not to be "total," but to be totally ethical, or better: all-embracing in a metaphysical-ethical sense.

Under the heading of *ordo amoris*, Scheler understands being-in-the-world (Scheler speaks of *Umwelt*, or environing world) in terms of both the objective structure of values in their historical-cultural determination and the subjective configuration of individuals as to their moral tenor and disposition.<sup>74</sup> The world is ontologically value laden; worlds show up already saturated and structured by values. According to Scheler, nations historically actualize different value-laden apprehensions of the world and thus inevitably enter into conflict with each other in terms of these differences of values and forms of life. Different cultures, based on the range of values available to them, stand in a hierarchical relationship to each other. Important in this respect is Scheler's fundamental claim that the world, historically and culturally, is experienced in terms of values. From this claim, it follows that, above and beyond economic and political interests, war is the pursuit of "the maximal spiritual dominance the planet" through the expansion of genuine communities of love, namely, of the highest values, and hence not as communities bound together contractually or in terms of rights or common interests.<sup>75</sup> Scheler's hierarchy of values leverages his argument for the justness and, indeed, cultural superiority of the German

<sup>71</sup> F. von Bernhardi, *Deutschland und der Nächste Krieg* (Berlin: J. G. Cotta, 1911).

<sup>72</sup> Scheler, *Politisch-Pädagogische Schriften*, p. 16.

<sup>73</sup> E. von Hartmann, *Die Phänomenologie des sittlichen Bewusstseins*, (Berlin: Duncker, 1879), p. 670: "die Kriege sind das Hauptmittel des Racenkampfs, d.h. der natürliche Zuchtwahl innerhalb der Menschheit." For his part, Treitschke explicitly argued for colonial expansion and racial wars of conquest.

<sup>74</sup> M. Scheler, "Ordo Amori," in *Selected Philosophical Papers*, pp. 98–135.

<sup>75</sup> Scheler, *Politisch-Pädagogische Schriften*, p. 15.



war effort. The world of the English, most notably, is structured by “lower values” of utility, whereas the world of Germany to come, as revealed in the war, will be structured by “the highest values” of the holy. Although cultures disclose worlds differently, Scheler nonetheless envisions a possible harmony among conflicting ways of world-disclosing, and hence valuing. Attaining what Scheler calls the “structure of a common-world culture” in its “display of the whole greatness and expanse of the human spirit” – the extension of the heart to embrace the highest values of *ordo amoris* – ultimately leads to embracing the love of God. Germany’s war therefore proves critical for defending its ecumenical spiritual values – that is, its higher values – against the shallowness and degeneracy of English utilitarianism, mechanism, and materialism, among other idols. War is necessary in the ways of world-making (*Welteinrichtung*) toward realizing the unified and religious-moral task of humanity.<sup>76</sup> In this respect, Scheler insists that the destruction of the University of Leuven Library and shelling of the Cathedral of Reims are justified – spiritual collateral damage, as it were – given that Germany’s struggle for “higher values” does not occur in the same value dimension, and hence world, as her enemies. The German war (in contrast to England’s war) carries “an eminently positive meaning for cultural creation” and “the creative sources of national and personal spirit.” As Scheler remarks: “Who would deny that the Athenian flowering in tragedy, sculpture, philosophy before and after the Persian wars would not be possible without the spiritual new birth of the Athenian state by virtue of victorious defense against the barbarians?”<sup>77</sup>

Against Allied images of “barbarian Germans” and calls that “the Hun must be killed!” Scheler affirms the supremacy of German spirit against the “barbarous Russians” and the “English cant” of utilitarianism. Scheler’s argument for the justness of Germany’s war elides, on the one hand, political and military reality while, on the other hand, advocating that Germany is essentially struggling against her enemies in a defensive war for the highest of values – “the holy.” As Scheler declares: “This war – unlike any other – is a just war and hence a war sanctioned by divine right.”<sup>78</sup> Whereas the English are motivated by secular interests of economic influence and power and the French are animated by revenge and *ressentiment*, the German war is spiritual in the name of love. Strange as it may be, Scheler contends that the desire for Germany’s annihilation by

<sup>76</sup> Scheler, *Politisch-Pädagogische Schriften*, p. 44.

<sup>77</sup> Scheler, *Politisch-Pädagogische Schriften*, p. 45.

<sup>78</sup> Scheler, *Politisch-Pädagogische Schriften*, p. 107.

her enemies confirms a hatred that animates *their* war, not Germany's. As Scheler examines in *Die Ursachen des Deutschenhasses* (1917; first delivered as lectures in 1916), hatred against Germany represents an enmity of the periphery against the spiritual-moral center of Germany. In this political theology of war, Germany struggles in the service of higher values from love of those values and love of humankind as such. Germany's special mission, or *Sonderweg*, consists in its arrogated spiritual responsibility for the secular world – Europe – in attaining the highest values unto the love of God, while defending those values from degenerate values and idols of infatuation as exemplified by the British and modern culture more broadly.

Scheler's notion of the "genius" of the German war anachronistically represents a reversal to a modified Medieval-theological theory of war and can thus be said to be antimodern as well as antiseccular. Whereas Clausewitz seminally defined a modern conception of war around the decisiveness of battles predicated on chance and friction ("the fog of war"), where war is the pursuit of (rational) political objectives by organized violent means, Scheler upholds in his idiosyncratic manner a premodern conception of war as a theological judgment of God. As Scheler writes: "Only here the idea of war as judgment of God becomes completely clear. If God is a God of love, then he will also give victory to the people, in which love is the richest, the deepest, the most high! [...] In this way therefore the divine judgment of war becomes an experience."<sup>79</sup> In sacrificial death, soldiers experience – indeed, "everyone" experiences ("Everybody becomes a metaphysician, because everyone can become a war hero") – eternal life in affording God's actuality in history to become effective in this testing judgment and benediction of the nation: "ein Gottesgericht über die Kultur der Völker."<sup>80</sup> War is God's *examen rigorosum*: the decision itself of victory, or, in other words, the pursuit of decisive victory *at all costs*, attests to God's preferential judgment. As Scheler writes: "And particularly here the genius of war becomes our leader (*Führer*) to God."<sup>81</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Scheler, *Politisch-Pädagogische Schriften*, pp. 98–99.

<sup>80</sup> 'A divine judgment on the culture of the peoples.' Scheler, *Politisch-Pädagogische Schriften*, p. 95.

<sup>81</sup> Scheler, *Politisch-Pädagogische Schriften*, p. 99. Against this theological backdrop, what distinguishes Scheler's "metaphysical conception of war" is its combination of elements from Protestant war theology with an appropriately revised Catholic theory of just war. In an echo of the Kaiser's declaration for German spiritual unification, Scheler offers a conceptualization of the war that would inhibit any internal division among German Christians, while identifying the privileged enemy of Germany as England rather than Catholic France. For the relation between Scheler's *Der Genius* and Protestant *Kriegstheologie*, N. de Warren, "Skepticism on Violence and Vigilance on Peace," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (2020): 279–317.

*On the Eternal in Man*

As Scheler remarks in the preface to the first edition, although parts of *Formalism* were written prior to the war (Part One was published in 1913; Part Two was published in 1916), “personal circumstances and the turmoil of war” delayed its publication in book form. As significantly, the war prevented Scheler from completing his foundational ethical project as well as “a major work planned for the near future” (announced in the Introduction to *Formalism*) on “non-formal ethics on the broadest possible basis of phenomenological experience.”<sup>82</sup> What remained missing from the published form of *Formalism* was an elaboration of the ontological status of values as well as an examination of the relation between ethics and religion, and although Scheler intended to write a philosophy of religion, “On the Essence of Godliness and the Forms of His Experience,” which would have completed the conceptual foundation of his philosophical ethics, this work never came to fruition. This unfinished condition of Scheler’s ethics was compounded by a philosophical transformation – a conversion he himself likened to a “religious awakening” – that occurred during the winter of 1915–16 while residing at the Benedictine Abbey of Beuron.<sup>83</sup> Against the backdrop of Germany’s waning fortunes and the *Ideenwende* among German intellectuals, Scheler’s crisis was political, metaphysical, and personal. He emerged from this winter of discontent with a changed attitude toward the war and returned to embrace the Catholic Church.<sup>84</sup> As Martin Heidegger observed at the news of Scheler’s death in 1928, “it is no accident that Scheler, who was raised a Catholic, in an age of collapse took his philosophical path again in the direction of what is called ‘catholic’ as a universal world-historical power, not in the sense of the Church.”<sup>85</sup> “The brokenness of contemporary human existence,” in Heidegger’s characterization, that obsessively drove Scheler’s thinking became more enlivened and despairing after Germany’s defeat. As with Hugo Ball and Carl Schmitt, Scheler’s newfound attraction to Catholicism, as a “world-historical power” and font of spiritual meaning, resided in the promise of the renewal of social order and establishment of ethical values. This change of heart further cemented the centrality of the question of human existence in relation to

<sup>82</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 5.

<sup>83</sup> Z. Davis, “The Values of War and Peace: Max Scheler’s Political Transformations,” *Symposium*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2012): 128–149; p. 129.

<sup>84</sup> For the *Ideenwende* of 1915–16 and Scheler’s wartime reconversion to Catholicism, see Flasch, *Die geistige Mobilmachung*.

<sup>85</sup> M. Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. M. Heim (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 51.

“higher” – that is, eternal – values and God, with which he would wrestle until the end of his life.<sup>86</sup>

Scheler's philosophical conversion did not occur without a final salvo. In *Krieg und Aufbau* (1915), Scheler continues to express confidence in the prospects of German victory by taking aim at “the French idea” of democracy and its conception of a collective volition of individuals. Leaning on his own conception of the collective person from *Formalism*, Scheler argues against the ideals of liberalism that the nation is a “spiritual person in its own right.” Despite this spirited defense of Germany's cause, Scheler nonetheless concedes that Germany's “world-historical mission” precariously hangs in the balance. By early 1916, beneath the somber horizon of the battle of Verdun and increased fragmentation of political discussions of the war's aims at home, Scheler decisively reversed his position on the war. Rather than consider the war, as in *Der Genius des Krieges*, as a historical opportunity for Germany's liberation from decadence, he came to see the war as a revelation of Europe's “moral and religious emptiness [and] the inner mendacity of this lying sham of European cultural community, long corroded with the poisons of nationalism, subjectivism, relativism, capitalism.”<sup>87</sup> This dramatic shift in perspective pushed Scheler toward accepting the value of democracy and, as significantly, the importance of education and the humanities for the promotion and cultivation of values, for which his sociology of knowledge and worldviews was intended to play a vital role.<sup>88</sup> In his 1917 essay “Christian Democracy,” Scheler idealizes Medieval communal solidarity in arguing that a desire for the highest spiritual freedom should supplant the centrality of individual political liberty. Catholicism, he proposes, represents an alternative for Germany against the skewed narrowness of Kantian-Prussian formalism.<sup>89</sup> In his 1917 essay “The Reconstruction of European Culture,” Scheler extends his reflections on “the origins of hatred” against Germany, first broached in his essay “The Causes of Hatred against Germans” (1917). Setting aside his previous diagnosis that it was Germany's distinctive cultural values that provoked “hatred” among the Allies due to their due cultural *resentiment*, Scheler seeks instead to understand “how can we build anew the moral and spiritual culture of Europe, which has been shaken in its deepest

<sup>86</sup> P. Spader, *Scheler's Personalism: Its Logic, Development, and Promise* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), p. 147ff. As Flasch remarks, “das Thema Krieg ließ ihn von 1914 bis zu seinem Tode nicht mehr los” (*Die geistige Mobilmachung*, p. 110).

<sup>87</sup> M. Scheler, *Krieg und Aufbau* (Leipzig: Verlag der Weissen Bücher, 1916), p. 347. See Staude, *Max Scheler*, p. 87.

<sup>88</sup> As Scheler develops in his *Die Wissensformen und die Gesellschaft* (1926).

<sup>89</sup> Scheler's late wartime writings on Catholicism brought him to the attention of Konrad Adenauer, who called him to the newly founded university of Cologne in 1919.

foundations and now – to change the image – flutters in the wind like a flag in tatters over the fields of dead? What spirit, what inner purpose must animate men to that end?”<sup>90</sup> Hatred against Germany, Scheler avers, carried a positive benefit: It united Europe in a common struggle. With Germany’s defeat on the horizon, only “one great reconciliation with us Germans” could finally bring unity to Europe; but, as Scheler forewarns, any future peace treaty among European nations must avoid producing “a lacerated body of jealous nationalities.” Needed is “a mighty spiritual unity which still has something important to give to the world,” namely, a perpetual peace that addresses “life and spirit,” not to be reduced to the formalism of legal treaties and maintaining the balance of power.

By the end of the war, it was clear for Scheler that a Christian pacifism of conviction among European nations in spiritual kinship with the highest values was urgently needed. Peace for a renewed Europe necessitated cultural reconstruction, the mitigation of *ressentiment* and desire for revenge, the decentralization of the state, the dismantling of European colonialism, and increased federalism along with cultural autonomy.<sup>91</sup> Most importantly, a spiritual-cultural reconstruction of Europe could only be achieved through collective guilt and moral solidarity in common expiation and repentance. As a corollary to Scheler’s call for European repentance, Germany should not be singled out as responsible for the war. At fault is European modernity and, especially, secularization.<sup>92</sup> The renewal of German spirit that Scheler believed to have witnessed with the God of War in 1914 became transfigured into an ecumenical renewal of European spirit through a rekindled desire for a God of Peace. A future European Union must be based on respect for and solidarity with all European peoples, including, Scheler makes a point of noting, cultural minorities, in shared coresponsibility for what is distinctive and valuable in every nation. Speaking directly to his German audience, “we must break with the old German vice of traditionalism, that false sense of historical determination in its thousand and one habitual forms, not to mention the ten thousand and one academic theories it has fostered.”<sup>93</sup> A first step in atonement for humanity’s self-inflicted suffering among the peoples of Europe is called for, rather than “accusation and thirst for revenge.” As Scheler writes: “There is nothing so clear as this: only the

<sup>90</sup> M. Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, trans. B. Noble (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2010), p. 405.

<sup>91</sup> Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, p. 410.

<sup>92</sup> For Scheler’s understanding of repentance, M. Scheler, “Repentance and Rebirth,” in *On the Eternal in Man*, pp. 33–66.

<sup>93</sup> Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, p. 417.

gradual raising of the whole of the European heart, mind and judgment to that sunlit plateau, only the clear vision of Europe's – and indeed the world's – inseparably interwoven *common guilt* for the late war, can even *begin* any edifice of religious renewal."<sup>94</sup>

In the aftermath of war, the advent of peace requires the renewal of religion as an antidote to the catastrophe of secularism: "this is by far the most significant new *ferment* in man's outlook on the world to have been born of the Great War." Scheler's demand that "no mere restoration, then, but *conversion* of culture; a radical change of heart and the serious will to build anew" represents the central theme of *On the Eternal in Man* (1921). It is a work that stands as a personal affidavit of repentance for his heady enthusiasm for the "genius" of Germany's war in 1914 and a preliminary installment of the philosophy of religion promised at the end of *Formalism*, as developed, however, from the changed vantage point of his wartime conversion. As Scheler writes, the war, "so unimaginably saturated with tears, suffering, [and] lifeblood," has awoken a "cry of longing" and "deepest yearning" for "the divine beyond finite things [such that] one may expect the call to a renewal of religion to resound through the world with such power and strength as has not been felt for centuries."<sup>95</sup> As with his earlier writings, *On the Eternal in Man* situates the question of human existence at the center of his thinking, here emphatically aligned to the aftermath condition of historical desolation – the wasteland – in search for "the eternal," or the highest values, in relation to God. Europe's renewal must take the form of a renewal of religion; postwar Europe will have to become a postsecular Europe. Scheler was not alone in this effort to think anew the indispensability of religion for the devastated modern world. Karl Barth, Rudolf Otto, and Friedrich Gogarten, among Protestant crisis theologians, and Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber, among Jewish thinkers, were equally concerned, in their respective and divergent ways, with thinking beyond the failed project of secularization. As Scheler remarks:

Today this call [for the renewal of religion] takes on a singularly historic character in that what is stricken to the heart is nothing less than the *whole of humanity*, nothing less than this mysterious planetary species in its undivided state—that is, like one man, a man cast into the boundlessness of time and space, cast into a mute uncomprehending nature: he bends every member in a solidarity effort to win the fight for existence, but it is also a fight for the meaning of his life and for his worth and dignity.

<sup>94</sup> Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, p. 125.

<sup>95</sup> Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, p. 107.

In contrast to Protestant crisis theology, Scheler maintains the place of human existence at the center of his call for the return of religion in looking to a new humanism for a postsecular age. Although the history of humankind has been plagued by “countless sufferings” and “interne-cine conflict,” throughout this “dark history” the vicissitudes inflicted by humans against each other “had at least one thing *above* it [...] something above man to which he imputed as it were a moral office of judge over himself, but something in which he could at the same time place a deep trust and hope and in whose bosom he could at least believe himself to lie in some way sheltered. This one thing was – *humanity*.” In the aftermath of the war, faith in humanity is now “gone,” Scheler writes, “because this war, rightly called the World War, was the first experience to be undergone by humanity as *its collective* experience.” The original catastrophe of the twentieth century condemned the “quasi-religious pathos over humanity” that “the great being of humanity was inflated to something distant and holy.” The war demystified the deification of the human in the apocalypse of a humanity at war with itself, thus propelling the problem of world peace to an elevated status by affecting “every member of the race – to a greater or lesser degree – in life, in body, in soul.”<sup>96</sup> Adrift in the ruins of its own edification and deification, humanity must find again its place in the cosmos. “For the first time,” Scheler writes, “humanity feels *alone* in the wide universe. It has seen that the god it made of itself was an idol – the basest of idols since time began – baser than graven images of wood, marble and gold.” In this condition of anthropological desolation, the human can only regain a place in the cosmos by returning to God.

This argument that Enlightenment secular humanism has “collapsed into ruins” is tacitly directed against France and England. In turning to his assessment of the war’s spiritual desolation with Germany in view, Scheler undertakes a critique of pantheism, which he identifies as the predominant worldview of German thinking in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Heinrich Heine once observed, “pantheism is the clandestine religion of Germany, as was predicted fifty years ago by those German writers who campaigned so intensively against Spinoza.”<sup>97</sup> Given that neither “the positivism of humanism” nor “the religious pathos of humanity” played a considerable role in German culture, Germany witnessed instead

<sup>96</sup> Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, p. 108.

<sup>97</sup> H. Heine, *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, ed. T. Pinkard (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 59.



“manifold forms of pantheism,” which “[have] been struck the hardest blow by the deep revelation of the *nature of things* which the experience of the Great War has brought in their wake.”<sup>98</sup> On Scheler’s construal, pantheism identifies God with the immanence of the world. The world, as rationally ordered, is created by God, yet this notion of God as the creator is arrived at from an understanding of the world as created. In this manner, “the god of pantheism is always a reflection of theistic belief,” according to Scheler. There are, moreover, two forms of pantheism: “the noble form” of acosmic pantheism, where the world exists in God, and “the base form” of atheistic pantheism, where God exists in the world. Until the outbreak of “the Great War, *pantheism was tending more and more away from its noble to its base form, from acosmism to atheism,*” and this degeneration culminated with atheistic monism. Arguably with Ernst Haeckel in mind, whose writings on the war and his Monist League aggressively supported German nationalism (and who coined the expression “the First World War”), Scheler observes that “Pantheism was able – with certain allowances – to express as it were the religious formulation of the German temperament so long as the nation’s intellectual life was lost in dreams of an ideal world of the spirit, representing the true homeland of man (for ‘man’ read ‘German’) – so long as the nation thought and felt itself to be first and foremost a *Kulturnation*.”<sup>99</sup> Germany’s identification with God walking in world history – the God of War in 1914 – is thus symptomatic of the devolution of theism into pantheism, including (for Scheler) Hegel’s.

This twofold tendency toward, on the one hand, the cultural religion of pantheism, with its German nationalist affinities, and, on the other hand, the positivistic faith in humanity of European modernity (France and England) was definitively arrested by the catastrophe of war. Scheler implies that the competing ideological justifications for the war among the Germans, the French, and the British leveraged their own respective worldviews. These worldviews can no longer respond to the call for religious renewal. Contra Scheler’s earlier view of the war’s positive “genius” in 1914, the war’s revelation is now assessed negatively. Its “genius” consists in disclosing the emptiness of European culture, the loss of faith in humanity and God, without thereby offering a positive revelation of how to regenerate human existence in relation to the eternal and to God. As Scheler writes,

<sup>98</sup> However, for the resurgence of pantheism during the interwar years in Germany, see B. Lazier, *God Interrupted* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), chapter 6.

<sup>99</sup> Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, p. 113. See D. Gasman, “Ernst Haeckel and the German Monist League,” in *The Scientific Origins of National Socialism* (London: Routledge, 2017): 1–30.

“it is false to think that the Great War must of itself bring to birth a *new religion* [...] as it were a miraculous pin-bright new Word in answer to the Question of suffering humanity.” Most significantly, the war has pushed the “question of suffering humanity” – and hence the problem of evil – to the forefront for an understanding of the place of humankind in the world in relation to God. A new religion and hence a new Europe must be forged in response to the problem of evil in its paradigmatic manifestation of war.

### The Genius of Peace

In 1924, Scheler received an invitation to participate at a gathering of European writers and intellectuals, organized by Paul Desjardins, at the Abbey de Pontigny in France.<sup>100</sup> This event, known as the “Décades de Pontigny,” the first meeting of which began in 1910, sought to foster intercultural exchange in a spirit of cosmopolitanism imbued with Christian overtones, yet without a common confessional doctrine among participants.<sup>101</sup> Scheler’s lectures (on Augustine and Meister Eckhart) contributed to his introduction of phenomenological thinking to France during the 1920s.<sup>102</sup> By 1924, however, his philosophical thinking had changed again since the war. As Heidegger retrospectively observed, the “new possibility of thinking” that Scheler discovered during the war, and which came to expression in *On the Eternal in Man*, “broke down again,” but once more the question “What is Man?” moved to the center of his work.” In this new optic, “he saw the idea of the weak God, one who cannot be God without man.”<sup>103</sup>

A first indication of Scheler’s second transformation in less than a decade (coinciding with yet another falling-out with the Catholic Church, this time formally abandoned) is found in the 1924 essay “Problems of a Sociology of Knowledge.” This second conversion pushed Scheler further

<sup>100</sup> 1924 marked the beginning of political and cultural rapprochement between Germany and France under the stewardship of Gustav Stresemann, German Foreign Minister from 1924 to 1929. In 1924, the Weimar government agreed to the Dawes Plan, regulating indemnity payments for the war, followed in 1925 by the Treaty of Locarno, which recognized Germany’s Western territorial borders. See M. Nolan, *The Invented Mirror: Mythologizing the Enemy in France and Germany, 1898–1914* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), p. 110–111.

<sup>101</sup> See F. Chaubet, *Paul Desjardins et les Décades de Pontigny*, (Villeneuve d’Ascq: Septentrion, 2009). Scheler received a second invitation in 1926.

<sup>102</sup> See C. Dupont, *Phenomenology in French Philosophy: Early Encounters* (Dordrecht: Springer Verlag, 2014), chapter 2. *The Essence of Sympathy* was the first work of German phenomenology translated into French, in 1928.

<sup>103</sup> As Heidegger further comments: “All of this was far removed from a smug theism or a vague pantheism”; *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, p. 51.

in the direction of searching for a renewal of religion, while decisively breaking with the theism that had defined his thinking from *Formalism* to *On the Eternal in Man*. The catalyst for this transformation in his conception of God was the unresolved question of how to make sense of the suffering of humanity at war with itself and the senseless manifestation of evil on a historically unprecedented scale. Scheler's theistic God proved to be inadequate for responding to the problem of evil. How could a theistic God – as the perfect embodiment of Goodness – stand reconciled with such vastness of (self-inflicted) human suffering? Scheler's own account of hatred, as emerging from *ressentiment* and the narrowing of the hierarchy of values, fell short, he realized, of taking full measure of the depth and virility of war's appetite for destruction. Although in "Problems of a Sociology of Knowledge" Scheler continued to reject pantheism, he would shortly thereafter adopt and formulate his own kind of pantheism, and yet not the "noble" or "base" kinds criticized in *On the Eternal in Man*, but a newfound pantheism that espoused the conception of a "weak God."<sup>104</sup>

In *The Human Place in the Cosmos* (1928), Scheler's theistic conception of God as the being from which all beings are created, who, as the highest person, embodies the perfection of Goodness, is displaced by an original agonistic difference between "Drive" (*Drang*) and "Spirit" (*Geist*). Neither can be reduced or derived from the other. The ontological ground of the cosmos is thus an original nonidentity of incessant discord between life and spirit. God is not the being who creates the cosmos nor a person – "the highest person" – who embodies perfected goodness. God becomes caught in the cosmic struggle between life and spirit, helpless and hapless before the spectacle of world suffering, which, in this speculative framework, stems from the unbridled drive of life. God is without being, not so much as the absence of being, but as the need for his own becoming "insofar as the historical process of the realization of the ideal *Deitas* (the realization of higher values) takes place."<sup>105</sup> From this original diremption of being, the place of the human in the cosmos is situated at the conflictual point of intersection between "drive" and "spirit." God is not an infinite person to which finite human persons aspire; on the contrary, God stands powerless to actualize his own being. God's becoming depends on the efforts of human striving to establish concord among themselves in the world. As played out within

<sup>104</sup> Spader, *Scheler's Personalism*, pp. 176ff. As Scheler notes, however, in the Preface to the third edition of *Formalism* in 1926, "the grounds and intellectual motives" for this transformation in his philosophy of religion remain anchored in his foundational ethics.

<sup>105</sup> Scheler, *The Human Place in the Cosmos*, pp. 70–71.

human existence, life cannot become sublimated into spirit, nor can spirit become vanquished by life. Spirit is itself “without power” yet graced with vision (“ideals”), whereas life is blind in its striving yet armed with power. Scheler disavows any final reconciliation or dialectical unity between life and spirit, stridently avoiding any form of monism, yet maintains that in the conflictual opposition between life and spirit, spirit can direct the forces of life toward higher values. There is, however, neither a cunning of reason nor a progressive teleology of history leading humanity toward a final reconciliation between life and spirit. The human condition is at war with itself, torn between life and spirit, and yet the spiritual aspiration of the human spirit toward the realization of higher values issues an “eternal protest” against unbridled life in the hope of peace and reconciliation between life and spirit, which must occur among humankind in order for God to become reconciled with himself and the world.

In 1926, a few years before *The Human Place in the Cosmos*, Scheler received an invitation to deliver two lectures, “Politics and Moral” and “The Idea of Perpetual Peace and Pacifism,” to military officers at the behest of the liberal Minister of Defense Otto Gessler. The purpose of this invitation was to mediate between conflicting political factions in the German *Reichswehr*. Both lectures were delivered in Berlin in 1927. Scheler repeated his lecture on politics and morality at the University of Cologne and was due to deliver both lectures once more at the University of Frankfurt in 1928; a few days after the first lecture, he died. In his first lecture, Scheler’s reflections are organized around a critical assessment of possible relationships between politics and morality in the Western tradition. The aim of this schematic survey is to arrive at a resolution of the endemic conflict between political power and moral values. On Scheler’s view, there are four basic relations between politics and morality: the subsumption of morality to politics; the subsumption of politics to morality; the dualism between politics and morality; and the division between private morality and state morality. After examining these relational forms, Scheler faults each one for a common inability to properly balance the relation between political power and moral values, and proposes instead a mutual determination of power and morality – their egalization – under the ideal of the collective realization of human existence according to an objective order of higher values. The decisions of politicians must be framed by an “as much as possible diverse and profound commitment to the general world situation and the situation or position of their state therein.”<sup>106</sup> The interests of the state

<sup>106</sup> Scheler, *Schriften aus dem Nachlaß*, p. 43.

are here constrained by the principle that nothing should adversely affect the “total salvation of humanity”; that is, the attainment of perpetual peace. In this sense, politicians are responsible for the salvation of their own state as well as for the salvation of humanity. This twofold aspiration for national and cosmopolitan salvation must be guided by the “law for the progressive diminution of the employment of violence” in history. The “drive to power” that animates politics must therefore be curbed and directed by the historical goal of realizing peace among nations, to which in turn morality, encoded in a system of laws, becomes subsumed for the purpose of allowing individual citizens to live according to higher values.

This subsumption of politics and morals to the historical realization of humanity under the watchword of peace is taken up again in Scheler’s second lecture, “The Idea of Perpetual Peace and Pacifism,” which, *inter alia*, can be read as a point-by-point (though he remains silent with respect to his wartime reflections) repudiation of his metaphysical conception of war. The idea of war as the pursuit of creative vitality, as cultural critique and awakening, as forging solidarity and ordering of the world (*Welteinrichtung*), and as *Gottesgericht* – these facets to the “genius of war” in 1914 are summarily rejected. This reversal hinges on the argument that the drive for increased vitality and self-realization is positively drawn by the idea of perpetual peace. Against his own understanding of the relation between war and peace in *Der Genius*, in 1927 peace is accorded a metaphysical significance for life, rather than war. As Scheler states: “War is not rooted in ‘human nature.’”<sup>107</sup> If there was a genius of war in his wartime writings, there emerges in his thinking during the 1920s a genius of peace.<sup>108</sup>

Written in the aftermath of German defeat, Scheler extracts from the failure of the German war a lesson: “We must break with romantic war-philosophy and a romance that lacks any sense of reality (*wirklichkeitsermangelnder Romantik*).”<sup>109</sup> Unlike his view of peace as a negative idea and war as a positive value in *Der Genius*, Scheler turns to consider the idea of perpetual peace as the positive value in contrast to the negative value of war. In reversing his conception of war and peace in the aftermath of 1918, Scheler proposes that the problem of perpetual peace represents “for all time” and “for all human beings” a fundamental aspiration of human life for attaining autonomous rationality and consciousness. This primordial (*uralt*) drive toward peace for the self-realization of human freedom

<sup>107</sup> Scheler, *Schriften aus dem Nachlaß*, p. 88: “Auf der ‘menschlichen Natur’ beruht der Krieg nicht.”

<sup>108</sup> For this dual conception, see Davis, “The Values of War and Peace.”

<sup>109</sup> Scheler, *Schriften aus dem Nachlaß*, p. 121.

represents a drive toward freedom that critically entails rupture with pre-given meaning, received tradition, and an ordering of the world through violence.<sup>110</sup> The aspiration for perpetual peace, coupled with a drive toward autonomous freedom, underlies the world's "great cultures" (Scheler speaks of China, India, Ancient cultures, and Western Christianity) in a movement of "*stetiger Wiederkehr*." With each flourishing and hence promise of perpetual peace, eternity becomes temporalized in a historical "eternal recurrence," yet not in terms of the repetition of the same idea, for with each breakthrough in history, peace – the force of its idea – always emerges in the form of "new political and ethical theories."

And yet: "What is one to make of the real significance and historical efficacy of an idea of peace so ancient – and which in its own thousand years has come to virtually nothing, not even to certainly and clearly discernible beginnings of its realization?" Indeed, is perpetual peace – the *idea* of perpetual peace – even possible for human beings (*menschenmöglich*)? As Scheler writes: "Das Gute soll sein, auch wenn es niemals geschähe."<sup>111</sup> The Good must be, even if it has never occurred. The recurring idea of peace is the power of the powerless that, in its interruption of the conflict between "life" and "spirit," allows for the realization of the God – the God of Peace – in the world. This unfinished God is the unfinished history of humankind progressing toward the "World Age of Equilibrium" (*Weltalter des Ausgleichs*). As Scheler writes, "there is a kind of 'support' even for us. This is the support provided by the total process of realizing values in the world history in so far as this process has moved forward toward the making of a 'God.'"<sup>112</sup> It is this unshaken ideal, despite the "blood and revulsion" of world history, that awakens a world saturated with violence from its romanticism, complacency, or cynicism. In the aftermath of the "great furies" and "gruesomeness" of 1914–18, is there any exodus from the perpetual strife of the world toward peace? As Scheler remarks: "There is no escape from the harshness of this fact," that the apparent impossibility of peace in our world must nonetheless become the new God of the future, the possibility of which resides exclusively in what can only seem to be humankind's greatest possibility; namely, to overcome the seeming impossibility of a humanity no longer at war with itself.

<sup>110</sup> M. Scheler, *Schriften aus dem Nachlaß: Philosophie und Geschichte*, ed. M. Frings (Bonn: Bouvier, 1990), p. 79.

<sup>111</sup> Scheler, *Schriften aus dem Nachlaß: Philosophie und Geschichte*, p. 81.

<sup>112</sup> Scheler, *The Human Place in the Cosmos*, p. 95.