

# MAX SCHELER'S PHENOMENOLOGY OF SOLIDARISM

## “THE THIRD PATH” OF NORMATIVE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Wei ZHANG

Sun Yat-sen University, Department of Philosophy, No. 135  
Xingang Xi Road, Guangzhou 510275, China

*renzhizhang@hotmail.com*

---

### *Abstract*

On the level of normative political philosophy, Scheler not only criticizes “individualism” in a familiar sense, but also rejects “universalism”. But then he develops the “third way” of “solidarism” as different from both individualism and universalism. Solidarism is fundamentally a kind of value-personalism in its phenomenological essence. It is to be founded both upon Scheler’s distinction between the individual person (*Einzelperson*) and the collective person (*Gesamtperson*), and upon “a theory of all possible essential social units”. Fundamentally, the so-called “third way” is first of all the “principle” of a phenomenological “meta-sociology” and of a “meta-ethical-politics”, but not a concrete project for the development of social history.

*Keywords:* Scheler, individualism, universalism, solidarism, personalism

## **Fenomenologija solidarizma pri Maxu Schelerju. »Tretja pot« normativne politične filozofije**

### *Povzetek*

Na ravni normativne politične filozofije Scheler ne kritizira samo »individualizma« v običajnem smislu, temveč zavrača tudi »univerzalizem«. Nato razvije »tretjo pot« »solidarizma«, ki se razlikuje tako od individualizma kot od univerzalizma. Solidarizem je po svojem fenomenološkem bistvu v osnovi vrednostni personalizem. Utemeljiti ga je potrebno na podlagi Schelerjeve razločitve med individualno osebo (*Einzelperson*) in kolektivno osebo (*Gesamtperson*) ter na podlagi »teorije vsakovrstnih možnih bistvenih družbenih enot«. Tako imenovana »tretja pot« je v svojem temelju »načelo« fenomenološke »meta-sociologije« in »meta-etične politike«, ne konkretni projekt za razvoj družbene zgodovine.

**148**

*Ključne besede:* Scheler, individualizem, univerzalizem, solidarizem, personalizem.

---

Up to the end of the first century of phenomenology, there were still some people complaining, “One of the great regrets in phenomenological movement is the lack of political philosophy.” (Sokolowski 2000, 226)<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact, early in 1927, Scheler discussed the theme of “Politics and Morals”, under which title he presented a social-political conception, “solidarism [Solidarismus]”, which is different from both “individualism” and “universalism” in their usual senses. Such a “third path” was also called by Scheler “value personalism” which includes not only the fundamental issues dealt with by positive socio-political philosophy, but a series of phenomenological reflections intended to found “socio-political philosophy” itself. In what follows, I will probe into and reveal the most fundamental principles of solidarism or value personalism as such.

## I. Individualism and universalism

Scheler once analyzed the problem of “self-deception [Selbsttäuschung]” and made criticisms of leading modern theories of it, contending that at the level of social problems, one of the most fundamental manifestations of “self-deception” as such is “the immersion [Eingeschmolzenheit] in the spirit of the community” (Scheler 1973c, 242; English translation [E. t.]: Scheler 1954, 248). It is of two types: we encounter the experiences of other people as if they were our own, or take those of others for one’s own (Scheler 1973c, 241; E. t.: Scheler 1954, 246 ff.);<sup>2</sup> we also transfer to the psychic world facts, relations, and forms which belong to material existence (*Dasein*).<sup>3</sup> The two types have one point in common: one’s own experiences are entangled with one’s surroundings or, in other words, one’s own experiences are in essence immersed in the minds of others or in the community.<sup>4</sup> According to Scheler, this “immersion in the spirit

1 This article is funded by the Major project of the National Social Science Fund of China (NSSF) (Project No.: 17ZDA033) and the Project supported by the Foundation for the Author of National Excellent Doctoral Dissertation of PR China (FANEDD) 2013 (Grant No. 201403).

2 Cf. also: Scheler 1972, 265; E. t.: Scheler 1973b, 65.

3 Cf. Scheler 1972, 257; E. t.: Scheler 1973b, 54.

4 Cf. Scheler 1993, 382.

of the community” failed to be noticed by people notwithstanding, it in effect is the dominant “self-deception” in natural world view and, as a rule, the damage it brings about is all the more severe. This is because it essentially immerses each unique and unrepresentable individual into the so-called “social self” and hence obliterates in essence a person’s own individuality before resulting in a sort of “depersonalization [Entpersonalisierung]”.

What is yielded by this “self-deception” in the sphere of philosophical sociology or socio-political ethics is the so-called theory of “*universalism* [Universalismus]” into which various forms of socialism, collectivism, etc., are distinguished.<sup>5</sup> These theories share one property: the self-value of the being of the person is no longer regarded as the end of all community and historical process, though things should be so. Contrary to Scheler, in this doctrine, the being of the person is considered valuable only to the degree that he effects something particular of value for the community and the progress of history (e.g., to the degree that he furthers cultural development).<sup>6</sup> According to these doctrines, the individual is nothing but a member of the collective whole, and the individual person’s idiosyncratic particularity no longer has value; all individual human beings exist merely “for the sake of” the unity of the community and, in addition, the individual person no longer owns a “private sphere”, nor any self-value, but can only “be devoted to the public life” (Scheler 1993, 379). This reduction of the value of the person to his contribution to the community can be seen rather clearly in the so-called the “great man” theory, which, albeit different from socialistic doctrines in many ways, is most essentially coincident with them in this: “The value of the person is derived from and dependent on what he achieves in an impersonal community or an impersonal historical process.” (Scheler 1980a 494; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 503) A “great man” is great exactly due to the fact that he exercises great influence on the course of history. The “great man” does not set store on the value of a “man’s” “personhood”, but on his (even if as an impersonal X) “great” achievements in society and history. Therefore, his value is ultimately the one necessarily founded in the “group” and deduced in a causal fashion from his achievements,

5 Cf. Scheler 1993, 378 ff.

6 Cf. Scheler 1980a, 493; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 501.

---

and hence the “great man” theory” ultimately reduces to “a causal personalism” and “a value collectivism” (Scheler 1980a, 495; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 504).

According to Scheler, different from the various universalism theories, value-personalism possesses a requirement that any philosophical sociology or socio-political ethics must meet. Specifically, the individuality of the person must be maintained, for “all history has its goal in the being and activity of person” (Scheler 1980a, 496; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 505). The value of the being of person must be maintained, and the value of the person must be founded in his individuality itself, rather than relying upon the sum of the achievements yielded by his activity in some community or historical epoch.

Nonetheless, while maintaining the value of the person’s own individuality, as we must, we must also be alert to sliding wrongly into another direction, i.e., into “*individualism* [Individualismus]”. Although this term has various expressions, they all share some fundamental points: on the one hand, they fail to deal correctly with the relation between the “single [Einzel]” and the “individual [Individuum]” person and hence in effect stress “single” when intending to stress “individual” and, as a result, they completely deny the “collective person [Gesamtperson]”. As a matter of fact, the “collective person” is merely the opposite of the “single person [Einzelperson]” and there is one individual “collective person” just as there are individual “single persons”. On the other hand, individualism as such confuses all the merely individually valid things with merely “subjective” things. To Scheler, the a priori or eidetic is irrelevant to the universal or individual and there are exactly a priori or eidetic, viz., objectively valid things to an individual, so being individually valid is by no means identified with being purely subjective.<sup>7</sup>

In the eyes of Scheler, no matter how many differences there are between Kant’s and Nietzsche’s concepts of the person, there is one most fundamental common point between them: they both stand opposite universalism, namely, they do not assess the value of person according to its role or efficacy in community or history, but just the opposite, that is, they assess the value of community and history according to “which these are able to provide *the being of the person* with the most appropriate foundation for his existence

7 Cf. Scheler 1980a, 501; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 510.

and action (for Nietzsche, the being of the most valuable persons, i.e., ‘the great personalities’; for Kant, the being of the rational person *in every man*).” (Scheler 1980a, 494; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 503) In this sense, they both represent a sort of individualism and in them, “all the collective unities are ‘for the sake of’ the individuals” (Scheler 1993, 374).

Nevertheless, since Kant denies the merely individually valid things and treats them as mere subjects, he finally “*identifies* the rational person *with* the spiritual individual person” (Scheler 1980a, 502; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 512) and, in point of fact, regards the rational person itself as “trans-individual” and “universally valid”. In this, he essentially follows Averroism, viz., he presupposes a so-called “trans-individual and transcendental reason”. The theoretical consequence of this theory may be found in the modern realistic view of life as “drive-individualism”. “Drive-individualism” means that only the lived body individualizes the person. These philosophers completely ignore spiritual individualism. The target that this view of life ultimately directs us towards is in fact quite opposite to what it first claimed to uphold. The concept of a “subjective consciousness” of such “individualists” maintains that I am a special individual. Nonetheless, in their conception of individuals, these philosophers posit a large-scale objective uniformity. For although they disregard a spiritual element in individuals, they believe that only the lived body and its drives can individualize the person. Thus, one can almost predict the nature and actions of others from a single example of their behavior. Plainly, rather than what they subjectively expect—that they themselves are special individuals—the foundation of any genuine “objective individuality” is in effect completely absent from them.<sup>8</sup>

In this matter, Nietzsche runs exactly counter to Kant and his followers. In Nietzsche, it is not in every individual that a homogeneous rational person and its act-relations display a partitioning of ethic-moral value; rather, each person is itself originally different in essence from others. The identity of persons as they stand before universally valid ethical laws is merely an assumption and it is only because, in order to seek for the so-called universally valid good, that humans tend to ignore the original differences between values. Nietzsche’s

---

8 Cf. Scheler 1980a, 504; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 514.

stress on a person's individuality and essential difference from others can also be seen from his criticisms and analyses as regards to "the morphology of self-feeling [Selbstgefühl]". In his view, collective self-feeling is at the level of "a school cultivating individual self-feeling." In collective self-feeling, say, the pride that a member has compared to that of the members of another group may force the individuals to embody it. Therefore, to embody the community in a person, the individual must speak and behave with a sort of extreme reverence for himself. The process of this "cultivation" as such, nevertheless, is in effect a sort of "de-selfness [Entselbstung]" (Nietzsche 1999, 111 ff.). Differently put, in the self-cultivation of a school, individual self-feeling or personality is essentially destroyed and replaced by the "self-cultivation" of the members of some group or community. We may notice the similarity of Nietzsche's "de-selfness" to Scheler's "de-personalization [Entpersonalisierung]" in word formation. In fact, on this point, Scheler surely agrees with Nietzsche *in toto*, but draws a sharp line between Kant and him.<sup>9</sup>

153

In Scheler's view, nevertheless, Nietzsche's problem is that he has essentially gotten enmeshed in the "pragmatistic prejudice" according to which "it is exactly the realization of the highest ethical value that necessarily may and must be a task of our *desires* and *acts*." (Scheler 1980a, 508; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 518) That is to say, Nietzsche correctly regards a (great) person's being itself as the highest value of social or historical progress, but he also takes it, with the "pragmatistic prejudice", as the immediately intended goal of our acts. To Scheler, contrariwise, the realization and enhancement of the person's value is that "this experience is the timeless *consequence* of his activity, a consequence that is *not* immediately directed toward him and thus it is not an intended content." (Scheler 1980a, 498; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 507)

Nay, Scheler further points out the common fallacy in Kant and Nietzsche's forms of "individualism". On the one hand, it is manifested in the fact that they reasonably treat persons as the bearers of ethical values, but they also wrongly contend that the person is the "positor" of values, namely, that the person posits values as what they are. Thus, their individualisms became entangled with "value-nominalism" and "subjectivism" with the only

9 Cf. Scheler 1980a, 505 ff.; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 514 ff.

difference being transcendental subjectivism in Kant instead of empirical subjectivism in Nietzsche. On the other hand, although they point out, not without reason, that every person is “self-responsible”, they ignore the fact that every person is simultaneously and with equal *originality* “co-responsible” for the comportment, willing, and actions of any other person. In this connection, both of them are essentially trapped into “singularism [Singularismus]”, where the only difference is that Kant’s personalism is rational singularism, and Nietzsche’s empirical singularism.<sup>10</sup>

**154**

What is clear for Scheler is that the common fallacies of Kant and Nietzsche are fundamentally coincident with his revealing of the two wrong origins of “individualism” mentioned before. In the final analysis, Scheler’s difference from all the theories of “individualism” is situated at the following two fundamental points. 1) “Individual” is completely different from “single”. The emphasis on a person’s individuality by no means implies a rejection of a “collective person” which is the contrary of the “individual person”. There is, also primarily, an individual “collective person” or the individuality of the “collective person”. In this case, each person is both self-responsible and co-responsible and, hence, it is not a form of “singularism” (be it rational or empirical) but the “principle of solidarity [Solidaritätsprinzip]” that is the essential principle of value personalism. 2) That it is valid of individuals cannot also lead us to confuse solidarism with mere “subjectivity”. In this connection, value is a priori, which is irrelevant to whether it is individually or universally valid. The a priori value is itself “objective” rather than merely subjective, even if it is simply individually valid. Furthermore, an a priori objective value is itself an ideal being, so it is not “posited” by a subject or a person (be it transcendental or empirical). A person is in essence merely a “bearer” of values instead of a positor. Thus, another essential principle of value personalism is value apriorism or value objectivism.

So long as the target that they are aiming at is slightly modified, these two fundamental points may well be employed to refute “universalism” of any form whatsoever. 1) Person-being is its own value, the highest value, which is determined by value apriorism or value objectivism. According to the a

---

10 Cf. Scheler 1980a, 506; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 515 ff.



priori order of ranks of values (namely, merely considered from the aspect of the bearer of values), any value of things must be superior to the value of the state, whereas the value of a person is, *ipso facto*, all the more superior to the value of things.<sup>11</sup> In this line, the values of a community of persons or of social or historical progress are in essence all values of things and hence they are undoubtedly inferior to the value of the person. For value-personalism, the meaning or value of community and history lies precisely in “their providing conditions within which the most valuable persons can come to the fore and freely bring about their effects” (Scheler 1980a, 496; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 505). For short, “a person value is higher than all values of things, organizations and community”, which is the “most essential and important proposition” that *Formalism* strives to demonstrate and propagate.<sup>12</sup> 2) It is just because a person’s value is *ipso facto* the superior value that the individuality of its being needs to be highlighted, be it the individuality of the collective person or the individual person. So, different from the case of “universalism”, that which is essentially maintained or embodied by value-personalism is “solidarism”.

155

Scheler’s essential endeavor is aimed at finding a “third path” between “individualism” and “universalism”, viz., “solidarism” or value personalism. That which needs to be particularly explained is, the “solidarism” as such is no nearer to “universalism” than to “individualism” in the general sense. Although Scheler once called his stance “individualism” in quotation marks, as is stressed by us once and again, that which Scheler intends to highlight is nothing but person’s individuality, which is by no means the person’s individuality in general sense. In Scheler, a person’s individuality is that of both the individual person and the collective person, and value personalism is both value “individual”-personalism and value “collective”-personalism. Similar to other places, Scheler’s mode of thinking is all the time one and the same. Specifically, he always denies the opposite pair, for his ultimate aim is to question the premise of “duality” (on which this pair depends) itself, and his phenomenological path ultimately appears as an “in-between [Zwischen]”. Undoubtedly, such an “in-between” never means “mediation”.

11 Cf. Scheler 1980a, 117; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 100.

12 Cf. Scheler 1980a, 15; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, xxiv.

As a matter of fact, the disputes around truth in philosophy are far beyond mediation.

What on earth, then, does such a path of “in-between” “solidarism” mean?

## II. Individual person and collective person

Scheler’s third path is called “solidarism” which is in essence a sort of value personalism or one essentially founded upon Scheler’s phenomenology of value and of the person, particularly, in the latter case, upon his differentiation between the individual person and the collective person. How, then, are we to understand the notion of a “collective person”?

I will take as my point of departure Scheler’s renowned example of “a Robinson Crusoe endowed with cognitive-theoretical faculties”, but who has never in his life encountered, in any way, creatures of the same species as him or their marks or traces, and who has never had the existential experiences pertinent to this species of creatures. Is it possible that such a man would know of the existence of communities of spiritual-psychical beings like himself, and is it possible that he would also know that he essentially “belongs to” such a community? Scheler offers a rather positive answer to this thought-experiment. Such a “Robinson” would by no means hold that there is no community and he alone exists in the world, nay, he also would not be lacking in the eidetic intuition and the idea of community; on the contrary, he may think, “I know that there is a community, and that I belong to one (or several such); but I am unacquainted with the individuals comprising them, and with the empirical groups of such individuals which constitute the community as it actually exists.” (Scheler 1973c, 228 ff.; E. t.: Scheler 1954, 234)<sup>13</sup> Scheler stresses that we should clearly distinguish the general *eidetic* cognition of community and “Thou-existence [Du-Existenz]” on the one hand, and the cognition of the factual existence of some specific community or a member of a certain historical community on the other. “An imaginary Robinson Crusoe endowed with cognitive-theoretical faculties would also co-experience his *being a member of a social unit* in his experiencing the *lack* of fulfillment of acts of

---

13 Cf. Scheler 1980a, 511; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 521.

act-types constituting a person in general.” (Scheler 1973a, 511; E. t.: Scheler 1973a , 521)

In his *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie* (*The Nature of Sympathy*), Scheler marks the theoretical fruit of this experiment of thought as “evidence of your existence proper”, or the existent evidence of “the sphere of the Thou” and “the world of the Thou”. Here the “Thou” is certainly a rather wide concept, referring either to “you” or to “he/she/it” or “they” as the result of which the evidence of the existence of others is more suitable. The a priori evidence of the existence of others as such and of one’s belonging to some community has its phenomenological foundation in intuition which, as with Robinson here, is manifested in, for example, a sort of “consciousness of emptiness [*Leerbewusstsein*]” and “not-being-here consciousness [*Nichtdaseinsbewusstsein*]” of the emotional act of “the love of others”. Specifically, one would sense oneself as being capable of loving others and of knowing some other person, so the “love of others” is “not here”. Differently put, insofar as an act of pursuit is concerned, this intuition is manifested in a sort of “consciousness of ‘something lacking’ [*Mangelsbewusstsein*]” or “consciousness of ‘non-fulfillment’ [*Nichterfüllungsbewusstsein*]”, which appears when Robinson is engaged in some mental acts that can constitute a unity of sense only when there is also a possible “social response [*Gegenakt*]” (Scheler 1973c, 229 ff.; E. t.: Scheler 1954, 235). In a word, the existences of “the sphere of the Thou” or the sphere of the other and the community are phenomenologically evident, and these a priori intuitions of essence will not be changed whether or not people are capable of finding real people in community with one another .

In Scheler’s phenomenology of person, person is in essence the executor of acts, the “act-substance” or “the inner being within acts”, as he is essentially the “concrete subject” of acts. Since there are different act-essences or types of essences, there may also be different essences in type of “concrete subject”. Differently put, by virtue of the differentiation of type of essences as to different acts, people may distinguish different types of essences under the rubric of “person”. In the context of the person, Scheler has distinguished, as it were, “individualized acts of a person ” from “essential social acts” or “socially responsive acts”, the former involving, among others, consciousness of self, self-esteem, self-love, the scrutinizing of one’s conscience, the acts of commanding,

obeying, ordering, promising, vowing, etc.<sup>14</sup> Be they the acts of an individual or essentially social acts, they are *ipso facto* consistent act-performances and are merely differentiated phenomenologically. Compared with a person proper, these two kinds of act are merely a sort of “abstract essentia”; compared with each act-performance, yet, on the other hand, they are all of “concrete essentia” so long as people regard them as penetrating act-performances rather than objectifying them.<sup>15</sup> Thus, each “individual person [Einzelperson]” is the concrete subject of the individualized personal act which, exactly, “constitutes within a person and a world in general in the special essential class of singularizing acts” (Scheler 1980a, 511; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 521); the collective person, in contrast, is the concrete subject of essentially social acts. It constitutes itself as a specific essence in executing its social acts. More importantly, the differentiation between the individual person and the collective person is an “abstract” essential one and hence it is not that some person is individual whereas another is collective. Rather, “an individual person *and* a collective person ‘belong’ to every *finite* person. Both factors are essentially necessary sides of a concrete whole person and world.” (Scheler 1980a, 511; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 521 ff.)

**158**

In this connection, the individual and the collective person are always essentially distinguished “in abstract fashion” from each other in the person itself. They belong in essence to the same person and may be mutually connected within this concrete person. They are equally original without one being founded upon the other. In the light of this, we see that the collective person undoubtedly does not refer to the sum or the group of individual persons; rather, it is in essence an experienced real being, but by no means a constructed component. Like the individual person, the collective person is a spiritual act-center, but, more exactly, it is the center of the essential social acts of spirit, while the individual is the center of its own individualized acts of spirit, and they both belong to a person in general which is the concrete spiritual act-center.<sup>16</sup>

On account of this, it is not supposed that we merely understand the

---

14 Cf. Scheler 1973c, 225; E. t.: Scheler 1954, 229 ff. Cf. also Scheler 1980a, 511; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 521.

15 As to the difference between “abstract essence” and “concrete essence”, cf. my article: Zhang forthcoming.

16 Cf. Scheler 1980a, 531; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 543.

---

collective person as a social organization or a unit composed of single individuals or individual persons. The difference between the individual person and the collective person has nothing to do with the difference between the individual and the universal. Just as there is a single individual person, there is also a single collective person, such as state (nation),<sup>17</sup> church, etc., for instance, the former Prussian state is itself both a collective person and a spiritual individual.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the stress upon a person's individuality is by no means that upon some individual person. Not all kinds of social units are unities that may be called collective persons. What, then, is the relation between collective person and social unit? And, to which kind of social unit is the collective person intrinsically related?

### III. The theory of the essential unity of all possible societies

To answer the questions above, Scheler developed "a theory of all possible essential social units". I would like to offer the following table, according to his discussions, so as to explicate the most fundamental principles of this theory in a clearer fashion:<sup>19</sup>

**159**

17 Scheler distinguished "folk [Volk]", "Nation" and "State [Staat]". The folk is essentially a life-community, while the state is a spiritual total subject. It is not a perfectly or purely spiritual collective person, but rather a concept of politics or sociology, and only the nation is a cultural collective person (cf. Scheler 1980a, 533 ff.; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 545 ff.). For instance, we may say the "Bavarian people" (the people) or the Federal Republic of Germany (state), but we can also discuss a nation such as "Germany".

18 Cf. Scheler, 1980a, 514; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 525.

19 Cf. Scheler 1980a, 515–548; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 525–561.

| Social unit      | Act of understanding       | Fundamental principle                                  | Responsibility   | Member   |
|------------------|----------------------------|--|--|--|
| the mass         | without self-understanding | imitate others unconsciously                           | without individual responsibility                          | lack of self-consciousness                             |
| life-community   | quasi-understanding        | representable [vertretbar] principle of solidarity     | co-responsibility  | includes minors  |
| society          | mediate understanding      | principle of contract                                  | self-responsibility  | adult single person with self-consciousness            |
| person-community | genuine understanding      | irrepresentable [unvertretbar] principle of solidarity | equally original self-responsibility and co-responsibility | person proper embracing single person and total person |

160

What must be stressed in advance, is that some scholars relate these four sorts of social unities to Scheler's four modes of values, that is, from the low to the higher, the mass to sensible values, life community to the vital values, the society to spiritual values, and person-community to absolute values.<sup>20</sup> In my view, this is rather reluctant, even misleading. We may take the person-community as an example. According to Scheler, the person-community is one made up by persons proper, embracing both the individual person and the collective person, whereas the two pure forms of the collective person are the cultural and religious collective persons respectively, the former corresponding to spiritual value, the latter to absolute value which, as a result, makes it hard to say that a person community purely corresponds to absolute value. Various problems exist in other layers as well. In this vein, we can hardly consider that Scheler's eidetic analyses pertinent to these four social units correspond to his

20 Cf. Keller 2002, 126–157.

analyses of the scale of values. Of course, among these social units, there are the distinctions among elements of higher and lower value, which originate from *forms* rather than the *materials* of the a priori order of values, namely, from the distinctions among a social unit's bearers of value. Whereas the mass and life-community possess thing-values [Sachwerte], the society possesses the values of both matter and person, and the person-community possesses pure personal values, and the low-and-high relations of values between them are manifested in such a formal order.

Let us come back to this table. The first one can be explicated briefly; it is the social unit of "the mass [Masse]", which is on the lowest layer. It resembles a herd of animals, for it is founded in such experience as mere mutual infection *without understanding*, and its members are "assembled" by means of an unconscious imitation of others. As people act in a mass, they are essentially unconscious of themselves.

In contrast to "the mass", among the members of "life-community [Lebensgemeinschaft]" there is a sort of "understanding" upon which its modes of common living [Mitleben] and reliving [Nachleben] are founded. The "understanding" here is not yet on the level of Scheler's "inner perception of others", for in the life-community there is no definite distinction between "my experiences" and "your experiences" among the members; rather, they are a unity of a mutual "co-experiencing" (Scheler 1980a, 515 ff.; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 526). In this connection, the "understanding" here is merely presented as corresponding to the "lack of understanding" among the members of "the mass" and, to differentiate it from the true "understanding" founded in the person-community, which will be discussed later, we may call it "quasi-understanding". In the life-community, people share common experiences via the "quasi-understanding" in the "mutual experiencing" and realize that they are members of the community, and hence should be commonly responsible for it. In the life-community as such, the principle that is followed is a sort of "principle of representable solidarity", namely, "the individual is in principle 'representable' by other individuals according to law" (Scheler 1980a, 517; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 527). The most typical cases for this are marriage, family, clan, hometown group, and the like. As is embodied by the case of "family", a life-community may undoubtedly include its minors, e.g., a child whose "self-consciousness" is as yet indefinite.

Essentially speaking, people in the life-community lead a “natural” life, whereas in the “society [Gesellschaft]”, life is an “artificial” one in which single persons are associated with each other via a sort of particular conscious act to “artificially” constitute a society. In some sense, the society can even be called an “association of individual persons”. In the society, an individual person is considered to be a “person proper”. As a result, the “individual”, in the genuine sense of individual spiritual person, is here confused with the “single” human being and, consequently, these individual persons in the society are in essence “*originaliter equal and of equal value*” (Scheler 1980a, 519; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 530) . It is on this ground that what seemed to be formally unrepresentable “individual persons” are in fact exactly representable in the society, insomuch as each citizen is identical to every other on the level of the “material” (the non-formal). In a society, each individual person is conscious of himself precisely as an individual, and hence there is no “co-experiencing” of a “common living” or “reliving” among his fellows. The association between them therefore is not immediate; rather, they grasp each other by means of a sort of *mediate understanding*, specifically, an analogy that mediates between them.<sup>21</sup> Due also to a lack of such an immediate “mutual understanding”, “groundless and primordial suspicions” are pervasive among members of a society, just like “groundless trust” is pervasive among the members of life-community. In this connection, the fundamental social principles, by which the interactions among members of society as an “association of individual persons” are mediated, take the form of a kind of “contract”. Thus, among members of a society, there is no common responsibility, but merely the “one-sided” self-responsibility of each person for himself and for others. There is not any form of solidarity, but merely the similarity or dissimilarity among individual persons or the “interests of class” they represent. My responsibility for others or for some social stratum is based essentially on a one-sided “self-responsibility”, or, essentially speaking, on the self-responsibility for upholding “contracts”.

---

21 Some scholars call this “mediate understanding” “self-centered understanding of the other ego” (cf. Denninger 1967, 170 ff.).



Of the essential kinds of social units, the highest form is person-community [Personsgemeinschaft], which is also called by Scheler “a solidaristic realm of love” of persons (Scheler 1980a, 527; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 538) or “a realm of love of all finite persons” (Scheler 1980a, 535; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 547.). Here, I’d like to note that although many scholars consider the “collective person” to be the highest form of the essential kinds of social units, a consideration that is not unreasonable, we still must differentiate between the “collective person” and the “person-community” for the sake of clearly understanding the collective person itself and the essence of the “person-community” as a social unit or, simply, for the sake of convenient discussion. The “collective person” refers to the *abstract* essence of person proper which, simultaneously, may become a *concrete* act-center of the total world.<sup>22</sup> In this vein, the collective person may also be a social unit or a “person-community”. As was stated above, the consciousness of the collective person and of the individual person may be contained in the performance of the concrete phenomenological acts by each finite person, that is to say, “the individual and collective persons in the nature of the uniform finite person” are of “co-originality”.<sup>23</sup> Each finite person *is simultaneously* an individual person and a member of the collective person, and, what is more, it is an essence knowable apodictically that the “being simultaneously” of the individual and the collective in the acts of each person should be the case, and each finite person should also experience itself in this way. Each finite person grasps with evidence the being of other persons, and, just as evidently, he or she experiences him- or herself as a member of collective person. As a consequence, as with a person’s understanding of him- or herself, so also is his or her “understanding” of other persons *a truly immediate one in toto*, an immediate understanding in the “inner perception of others”, and, in the end, is a genuine and complete understanding that can

22 Cf. Scheler 1980a, 526; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 537 ff.

23 Cf. Scheler 1980a, 524 (footnote); E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 535 (footnote 189).

only be founded in “love”.<sup>24</sup>

It is exactly such finite persons embracing genuine and complete “understanding” who become members of a “realm of love” or “person-community”, in which each member is a unique individual person and hence absolutely unrepresentable, and in which each member or individual person and each collective person is self-responsible, and, moreover, each member is co-responsible for the collective person and for other individual members of the collective community, and the collective person itself is also co-responsible for each of its members. On this account, the co-responsibility as such is manifested in “mutuality” rather than “isolation”, and, at the same time, it will not completely exclude the self-responsibility of the both. In this sense, for other individual persons, each individual is not only co-responsible *qua* a “member” in the collective person (like the bearer of some post or the possessor of some status in social structure), but it is, first and foremost, co-responsible *qua* unique individual person and a bearer of the conscience of individuals. Therefore, that which is followed in this “realm of love of all finite persons” is nothing other than the apodictically unrepresentable principle of solidarity which means that “in *this* sense the principle of solidarity is for us an eternal component and a *fundamental article of the cosmos of finite moral persons*” (Scheler 1980a, 523; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 534). The model of purely spiritual collective persons with which Scheler provides us is: the cultural collective person, the ([nation] state or cultural circles), and the collective person of the religious community.<sup>25</sup>

164

---

24 Angelika Krebs has once attempted to treat Scheler’s notion of “mutual feeling [Miteinanderfühlen]” in his *Sympathy* as corresponding to the essential act of “person community”, and she has expressed many inspiring reflections. I have also experimented with similar trains of thought. Nevertheless, to discuss the social unit here by means of the several acts of sympathy in *Sympathy* brings about far more difficulties than the inspirations it may give us (cf. Krebs 2010, 9–43).

25 Cf. Scheler 1980a, 533 ff.; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 545.

---

#### IV. Solidarism: “The Third Path”

Here it is of course necessary to limit ourselves to the most fundamental principles of “a theory of all possible essential social units” whose full development, in Scheler’s view, will constitute the presupposition or basic problem of philosophical sociology and socio-political ethics.<sup>26</sup>

Speaking on the whole, the mass, life-community, the society, and person-community constitute the essential types of social units. From the viewpoint of phenomenology there are two essential traits that need to be stressed for the four types.

In the first place, there are essential relations between these four types. Let us tentatively set aside the combination of individual persons without self-consciousness, namely, “the mass”, inasmuch as, essentially speaking, this social unit as such is by no means forever fixed, that is, people may join in a mindless riot today by being infected by the mob without inquiring into whatever the reason the riot was for, but withdraw from it the next day. In terms of the other three social units: 1) all the “social” units are necessarily founded in the units of life-community. The founding relation here, of course, does not mean the foundation between two real social groups but rather between “two essential structures of social unification”. It is manifested in three ways: first, the individual person as a member of some society must have been at one time a member of some life-community, say, when a member of some society acts as required by his/her social status, he/she must simultaneously be or have been the son/daughter of a family; secondly, there must be a fundamental contractual principle that gives to the unified society its roots in the principle of “solidarity”. The foundation of the duty to keep mutual promises is essentially located “in the solidary obligation of the members of the community to realize the contents that ought to be for the members” (Scheler 1980a, 520; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 531); thirdly, conventions and artificial terminologies that support the social form of mutual awareness have their roots in the natural language, and the languages of those conventions can themselves be established through natural language and remain dependent on the categories of meaning it possesses. On

26 Cf. Scheler 1980a, 515; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 525.

the basis of the “dependency” in these three aspects, the social unit of society is essentially rooted in the life-community.<sup>27</sup>

2) Meanwhile, the two essential forms of social units of society and life-community both “belong to” the highest form of person-community. This is because, in the view of Scheler, the former two essential forms are so constructed as to serve the latter one, and to realize it; and, although the highest essential form is apodictically not a mere synthesis of the first two, the essential characteristics of both are nevertheless co-given in it: the independent, individual person, as in society, and solidarism and real collective unity, as in the community.<sup>28</sup> There is not only the original self-responsibility but also the original co-responsibility in the highest form, in which the individual and collective persons are in an essential relationship of manifest connection.<sup>29</sup> It is exactly due to its essential nature that the person-community is the essential form of the highest social unit. The community has its ultimate foundation in the idea of the person, and it is not the values of the community, but the values of the person that are the highest values. It is precisely due to the fact it contains the values of the “collective person” that the person-community is higher than the other two essential forms of a unified social entity.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, the differentiation of the four essential forms of social units is never a chronological differentiation of positive, longitudinally developed socio-historical social formations. Scheler does not mean to say that the mass comes to be before the life-community develops, then after it the society, and finally the development of the person-community, which together embody a linear “development” process (from the lower to the higher kind). Scheler refuses firmly such a theory of generation and development of social formations, since, in his view, these four essential forms of social units essentially were “present *at all places and at all times* in some measure and in some order. The only changes that occur in the real subjects of these types are the sizes of the groups that fulfill them, the world of *goods* [*Güter*] in which these types of *values* are

---

27 Cf. Scheler 1980a, 520 ff.; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 531 ff. Cf. also Scheler 1973c, 226 ff.; E. t.: Scheler 1954, 231. Cf. also Scheler 1986a, S. 265 ff.; E. t. Scheler 1987, 137 ff.

28 Cf. Scheler 1980a, 527; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 538 ff.

29 Cf. Scheler 1973c, 212; E. t.: Scheler 1954, 216 ff.

30 Cf. Scheler 1980a, 514; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 524 f.

---

represented, the organizations of communal groups, etc.” (Scheler 1980a, 530; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 541 ff.) This means that the four essential forms are in essence one “form”, which determines the “limits” of the development of social unity during the factual development of history. What is historically variable, is simply the “content” and “material” of mass, life-community, society, and collective person, and at all times the four essential forms have been present in various mixture in the social units of the facts of historical communities, and the only difference is that in a certain historical period, one essential form dominated, or one “preferred [Vorziehen]” structure, one ethics became dominant. Fundamentally, we can note that the “particular cases” of the four essential forms in any certain fact of history of social units, such as in modern society, we can see both the rioting “mass” and the “life-communities” such as marriage, family, and, of course, “society” and “[nation] state”, etc. “There are also certain essential relations among and within social units.” (Scheler 1980a, 543; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 556)

Insofar as this is concerned, “the third path”, presented by Scheler, which is identical to neither the means of the individualism nor that of the universalism, is first and foremost a path of “principle”, rather than a concrete historical and practical social formation. However, he later posed corresponding ideas in his studies of sociology and politics.<sup>31</sup> What is certain, is that his positive sociology and politics are essentially founded on “solidarism” or the “principle of solidarity” which we discussed here as principles.

“What are the essential elements on which this great and sublime principle rests?” (Scheler 1980a, 523 ff.; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 535) Scheler answered his own question: the principle of solidarity ultimately rests on two essential propositions. First, a community of persons belongs to the “evidential essence” of a possible person. This essence is evidently self-given in phenomenological insight, and it does not, in principle, rely on any empirically real connections whatsoever, be it with some social formation or with Christianity. This is the *foundation* that makes moral solidarity possible. Secondly, what makes

31 For instance, during the interval of 1910s and 1920s, he presented a theory of “prophetic socialism” or “Christian socialism”, which aroused heated disputes. Cf. Scheler 1986b, 259–272; Leonardy 1976, 242 ff.; Henckmann 2006, 12 ff. As to more detailed references about Scheler’s studies on social politics, cf. Lichtblau 1999, 7–31.

it necessary is the formal proposition concerning the essential opposition or reciprocity and opposite or reciprocal values of all morally relevant comportment, viz., the aforementioned phenomenological essence of “essential social acts” and the essence of their corresponding (reciprocal) value constitute the *necessary foundation* of the principle of solidarity.<sup>32</sup> On this ground, “solidarism” or “the principle of solidarity” is in essence a principle of “meta” thinking of phenomenology rather than a positive socio-political theory.<sup>33</sup>

*Translated from the Chinese original by Lin Zhang*

---

32 Cf. Scheler 1980a, 524; E. t.: Scheler 1973a, 535.

33 Many thanks to Prof. Eugene Kelly for modifying the English version of this essay.

---

**Bibliography | Bibliografija**

Denninger, E. 1967. *Rechtsperson und Solidarität. Ein Beitrag zur Phänomenologie des Rechtsstaates unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Sozialtheorie Max Schelers*. Frankfurt am Main/Berlin: Suhrkamp.

Henckmann, W. 2006. "Bemerkungen zur Entwicklung des Solidaritätsproblems bei Max Scheler." In *Solidarität. Person & Soziale Welt*, ed. by Chr. Bermes, W. Henckmann and H. Leonardy, 9–28. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann Verlag.

Keller, Th. 2002. "Liebesordnungen." In *Max Scheler. L'anthropologie philosophique en Allemagne dans l'entre-deux-guerres. Philosophische Anthropologie in der Zwischenkriegszeit*, ed. by G. Raulet, 126–157. Paris: Maison des sciences de l'homme.

Krebs, A. 2010. "'Vater und Mutter stehen an der Leiche eines geliebten Kindes.' Max Scheler über das Miteinanderfühlen." *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 35(1): 9–43.

Leonardy, H. 1976. *Liebe und Person. Max Schelers Versuch eines „phänomenologischen“ Personalismus*. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff.

Lichtblau, K. 1999. "Einleitung." In Max Scheler, *Ethik und Kapitalismus. Zum Problem des kapitalistischen Geistes*, ed. by K. Lichtblau, 7–31. Berlin.

Nietzsche, F. 1999. *Nachgelassene Fragmente 1887–89. KSA 13*. Ed. by G. Colli and M. Montinari. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag.

Scheler, M. 1954. *The Nature of Sympathy*. Trans. by P. Heath. Intr. by Werner Stark. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

---. 1972. *Vom Umsturz der Werte. GW III*. Bern/München: Francke-Verlag.

---. 1973a. *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Value*. Trans. by M. S. Frings and R. L. Funk. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

---. 1973b. *Selected Philosophical Essays*. Trans. by D. R. Lachterman. Evanston: Northwest University Press.

---. 1973c. *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie/Die deutsche Philosophie der Gegenwart. GW VII*. Bern/München: Francke-Verlag.

---. 1980a. *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik. GW II*. Bern/München: Francke-Verlag.

---

---. 1980b. *Die Wissensformen und die Gesellschaft. GW VIII.* Bern/München: Francke-Verlag.

---. 1986a. *Schriften aus dem Nachlaß. Bd. 1: Zur Ethik und Erkenntnislehre. GW X.* Bonn: Bouvier-Verlag.

---. 1986b. *Schriften zur Soziologie und Weltanschauungslehre. GW VI.* Bonn: Bouvier-Verlag.

---. 1987. *Person and Self-value.* Trans. by M. S. Frings. Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers. (This is a translation of only two of the *Nachlass I* essays, and it includes an essay from *Vom Ewigen im Menschen.*)

---. 1993. *Schriften aus dem Nachlaß. Bd. 5: Varia I. GW XIV.* Bonn: Bouvier-Verlag.

Sokolowski, R. 2000. *Introduction to Phenomenology.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**170** Zhang Wei. Forthcoming. "Is Scheler's Phenomenology of Person Transcendental?" In *Wurzeln der Technikphilosophie. Max Schelers Technik- und Zivilisationskritik in unterschiedlichen gesellschaftlichen Kontexten (Scheleriana. Bd. 6)*, ed. by Z. Davis, S. Fritz and M. Gabel. Nordhausen: Bautz Verlag.

---