



THE FORMS OF SYMPATHY AND UNDERSTANDING OF OTHERS' EXPERIENCES IN SCHELER.

As Formas da Simpatia e o seu Papel na Compreensão das Vivências Alheias em Scheler

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Las Formas de Simpatía y su Papel en la Comprensión de las Experiencias de Otros en Scheler

Abstract: The objective is to describe the main features of the sympathy phenomenon from Max Scheler's phenomenology. The central problem is to show how sympathy shows itself as a privileged "place" for understanding the experiences of others, because it implies a psychi-c-affective identification with whom one sympathizes and accepts. However, compassion and co-rejoicing cannot be understood as the apprehension of psychic contents unrelated to the reproduction of the feelings of the other, equating mistakenly sympathizing with emotional infection. Consequently, in the first place, some reasons and ways of transformations of anthropologies and historical consolidation of the modern *ratio* that led to such mistake are outlined. Then, after distinguishing the plural forms of sympathy, showing its law of internal reasoning, the discussion turned to the meaning of how sympathy is to suffer and to rejoice by spelling out its intentional structure. To know the other, however, is not only to unite affectionately with others, but the free decision, proper of a spiritual being, to take part in the opening of the personal being of others, to participate in their intentional acts. It follows, then, that sympathizing presupposes the supreme form of love.

Key-words: Feelings, sympathy, love, knowledge of each other.

Resumen: El objetivo es describir las características principales del fenómeno de simpatía a partir de la fenomenología de Max Scheler. El problema central es demostrar cómo se muestra la simpatía como un "lugar" privilegiado para la comprensión de las experiencias de otras personas, porque implica una unificación psíquico-afectiva con la que uno simpatiza o da la bienvenida. Sin embargo, la compasión y el regocijo no pueden entenderse como la aprehensión de contenidos psíquicos no relacionados con la reproducción de los sentimientos del otro, equiparando erróneamente la simpatía con el contagio afectivo. Así, primero, se describen algunas razones y formas de transformación de las antropologías y la consolidación histórica de la relación moderna que condujo a tal error. Luego, después de distinguir las formas plurales de simpatía, mostrando su ley de fundamento interno, se discute en qué sentido la simpatía es sufrir y regocijarse al deletrear su estructura intencional. Sin embargo, conocer al otro no es solo unirse afectuosamente con los demás, sino la libre decisión, propia de un ser espiritual, de participar en la apertura del ser personal de los demás, de participar en sus actos intencionales. Se deduce finalmente, entonces, que simpatizar presupone la forma suprema de amor.

Palabras clave: Sentimientos, simpatía, amor, conocimiento del otro.

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Palavras-chave: Sentimentos, simpatia, amor, conhecimento do outro.

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Introduction: On the importance of questioning the sympathy phenomenon

In the wake of Scheler's phenomenology of emotional life, these lines treat the theme of sympathy. In the context of this philosophical horizon, to raise the theme of sympathy is to confront the question of its role for ethics and for any pedagogy – the latter, in the broad and fundamental sense of leading man to himself – whose aim is not only the development of the rational capacities of human beings, but also the decisive implication of the forces of the heart and affections in the constitution of the *ethos* of the individual, of a people or a nation, from a certain historical period. In this sense, this is a question about the importance of sympathy, raised here within the narrow limits of the cooperation of sympathy with the knowledge of the experiences of the other. Certainly, to be affected by the joys and pains of others is to open the door to understanding their inner lives, without which the joyful communion or the compassion between human beings would be impossible. Other aspects of sympathy which would be impossible are the sadness with the joy of the other – that is, envy – and the cruelty that rejoices in the suffering of others.

In the present times, the implication of these feelings in human knowledge and action has become a question of great importance. Furthermore, we watch presently since the collapse of the civilizational project that decides the ethical and epistemic questions, the historical destiny of men in a purely rational sphere, and arbitrarily goes against human passions and affections. The reassessment of sympathetic conduct, then, may shed some light, for example, on the current state of ethical problems. The world without sympathy (not only without compassion and joyful communion, ethically positive phenomena, but also without their negative counterparts), if it is possible to conceive it at least in the imagination, although to some extent predictable from the experience of the present time, surely it would be an inhospitable world, barren as a desert, therefore, poor in meanings that are born of human living on earth; in short, it would not be the *ethos* of a human – too human – reality. Indeed, in the world of mere things or calculable facts in which the technical-scientific rationality, instrumental in nature, would absolutely reign, a profound spiritual and human indigence would certainly also reign (or is already largely in force). As Husserl (HUA VI, p. 4) stated, “merely fact-minded sciences make merely fact-minded people”.

Given this indigent context, sympathy is here taken as an urgent matter. However, the relevance of questioning the question of sympathy or any other is, therefore, recognition of the importance of the question to us. To recognize in the questions, through all the fundamental possibilities of questioning, the dignity of being questioned, is to be summoned and sacrificed for them in search of the meaning of human historical existence. So, we are existentially implicated with the questions. Otherwise, from the point of view of the issue of sympathy, we are always affectionately linked to the things, facts, and people with whom we question the issues. We give importance, therefore, to what we love. Thus, it must be remembered that for all the historical creations of the spirit – which are the fruit of the various modes of questioning the questions – some finesse or forces of the heart, neglected by the sciences and all the dynamisms responsible for the civilizing process of the last centuries, are required. In particular, sympathy reminds us of something essential and forgotten, but common to all essential forms of inquiry.

Considerations in this sense, however, go far beyond the present purpose of indicating the participation of feelings in the knowledge of certain “objective” data. Specifically, it is proposed to focus on the phenomenon of sympathy and its participation in the understanding of other people's experiences. Phenomenologically, this purpose is achieved if, previously, it breaks with the prevailing prejudice, according to which sympathizing would be a mere feeling, the same as the other feels, in equal intensity, preserving the quality of the feeling of another (suffering, for example, the pain exactly the same as the other in an identical way). However, such pre-understanding makes sympathy if not a reproductive and imitative mechanism of the emotions and feelings of others, not to say that it transforms it into a reactive feeling. The necessary prior deconstruction of this interpretation, then, involves the discussion of the reasons and paths through which the richness and depth of the stratification of emotional life is leveled on the surface of the mere sensation with its bio-physiological laws, as if it were the only layer. It is an objectification of human feeling at the expense of ignorance and denial of the intentional and comprehensive character of emotional life. In this deconstruction, even if indirectly, it is highlighted why sympathy is so easily exalted as a valuable ethical attitude or its lack of condemnation in present times is condemned. However, this exaltation or condemnation carelessly becomes a mere reaction of being sorry or sympathizing, subdues it to a certain extent to a “letting itself be infected by the suffering of others”, denying, moreover, the plural forms of sympathetic acts.



(Un)Ways and reasons of consolidation of rationality devoid of the forces of the heart

The modern *ethos* is extremely favorable, as current history has shown, to the unretainable growth of the system focused on the end of things, with its goals of organization and total control. Driven by technical-scientific rationality, it is characterized by being a system at the service of a machinal and global power, against which, in the late nineteenth century, Nietzsche was one of the first to raise his voice and criticism. If in this power into which the *ratio* some vital impetus vibrates, even if it is the tendency of human living to turn against and despise itself, this power's dynamism is that of the relentless pursuit of its conservation and elevation. The essence of all power is, therefore, the desire to surpass itself, the desire of superpotentialization. Thus, it is fair to extend the question that Heidegger (2006, p. 8), at the conference *What is this - philosophy?*, asks about the essence of philosophy, shifting it to the broad horizon of the essence of human living with its multifaceted ways of realizing itself: Where and by whom is it decided that the *ratio* is the mistress of man, of his action, of his thinking and of his knowing? Did not man take possession of this disposition, and, in present times, did it not dominate him, as if by revenge, reversing the order of power and will? It is in these embarrassments that we (co)imply ourselves when we turn to the importance of questioning the phenomenon of sympathy by realizing the contempt with which affective "knowledge" has been disqualified and postponed.

Now the ancient anthropologies conceived man from what is supernatural and spiritual in him; therefore, what appears to be the most noble, the most divine or demonic – the latter concept, in all its ambiguity. And even with this look at the spiritual heights of himself, despite the lightheadedness, "man," as Scheler warns (2007b, p. 175), "had a markedly deeper awareness of his animality in times when he thought himself a god than in times when, laughing maliciously, he called himself an animal". The time of this mocking malice of the spiritual is that of modern anthropologies. Unlike the former ones, they made a downward movement, subjugating all human dimensions to their constituent and not despicable animality. It is in this offspring that I wanted to value human corporeality and carnality, but, unlike what was intended, man, with all his dimensions, also living in the spirit, was lowered to the organic, biophysiological, cerebral levels, because of a naive understanding of the *human* sense of being body, of being flesh, of being ζώσ. Certainly, because it was forbidden to think of it as βίος, that is, as an incarnated spirit, temporally and historically existing. Inevitably, human life has been reduced to bio-neurophysiological mechanisms. We also see this movement of descent – not to say, decay –, of animalization according to the specific laws of those mechanisms and, consequently, of decay in the understanding, in the sense of the condition of man being an incarnated existence, of its being not purely spiritual, but embodied.

In this one-way downward, feelings also descend to a lower level, reduced to the sensations and sensory states of the physical body, and thus have become somewhat irrational, dominated by the "automatic" and unintentional mechanisms of organic reaction. The feelings were imprisoned in the skin of the physical body. However, other feelings coexist with sensory feelings, they constitute the nobler dimensions of man, being responsible for the awareness of himself, of his corporeality and of his situation in the world (Scheler, 2000a, p. 331-345; 2008a, p. 25-30. 38-40). In the second layer of the depth of emotional life, there are the vital feelings. They are irreducible to the sensations and localized sensory states caused by the irritation and arousal of external factors, because they belong to the wholeness and unity of consciousness of the lived body or self-body (*Leib*). This consciousness of a body as a whole, of course, is that of a lived-body self, intimately and directly linked to body consciousness, perceiving itself as embodied in a situation lived through, for example, feeling itself, vitally well or feeling depleted. In this intimate connection with the body, the self, however, also knows of itself as a particular and concrete individual, is aware that to him belongs an interiority that manifests itself in a certain flow of experiences that are his own and no one else's. In the absence of this awareness, he would not penetrate his own bodily nature and could not reap it as "my body." Genuine corporeality, therefore, is not known through knowledge of organic reactions, but through psychic or soul-related feelings which constitute the third degree of the stratification of emotional life. These, in effect, already present themselves in a certain way independently of the lived body's givenness (*Gegebenheit*): one feels sad and one suffers profound psychic pain, even when feeling bodily well-being. By means of soul feelings, then, man is in another stratum of emotional life, that of the qualities of self. At the deepest level we find the spiritual feelings, those referred to the core of the spiritual person. Due to this reference to this center which is free or indifferent to psychophysical laws, those feelings escape the strictest control and supervision of self and never materialize themselves as moods. It is the feelings that capture the meaning of personal existence, denounce its absence when it is obscured, but they are free from any psychic motivation, any attempt by the self to create, invent, or maintain the meaning of life itself. They are born, grown and consummated from the center of the person, from the abysmal and personal depth of each human being. However, they "overflow" in their surrounding world with their objects, coloring it with a certain



emotional tonality. Finally, thanks to spiritual feelings, the human being knows himself body, flesh, but he also knows himself as unique and unrepeatable, called to materialize himself historically as the task of singularization as a person in the world.

Considering this rich stratification of the sentimental life of man, one can see that his animated body was subjected to the laws of intellectual-scientific knowledge. The laws of his corporeality, from the Modern Age, have exclusively become natural laws. Also from his soul (psyche) with his inner experiences, when psychic life and soul-related feelings were subjected to the laws imposed by empirical psychology. The laws of understanding (of self and other), governed by man's spiritual and personal being, no longer inhabit his lived body and soul. In the same way, the spirit and its peculiar way of knowing and feeling itself, in the name of scientific rigor, could also only be explained, and to this end it was necessary that the same laws be applied to this dimension of the profound. Knowing oneself and others, knowing the soul-related experiences of others, is, in the descending movement mentioned above, only possible under the laws that matter to a theoretical perspective of the knowledge of life, not the *comprehensive knowledge* of living. But the experience of living is not to explain oneself, but to understand oneself: "According to his being-*so* (*Sosein*, essence) and his noetic correlate-acts, but the person and his only-understandable noesis (is spirit)" (Scheler, 2009, p. 219). Knowing about oneself and others is only achievable through understanding and its own laws, knowledge that not even intrapsychic consciousness can perfectly accomplish, especially when its essence and dynamism are theoretically determined. For, this way, the psychic-individual causality, inseparable from each self, concretely determined and with its unique motivations (derived from the understanding of meanings), is inevitably replaced by natural causality, that is, by a mechanical correspondence between cause and effect, according to models and generic types (Scheler, 2000a, p. 520-521).

Therefore, both on the physical and soul-related levels, that historical-descending path that man has pursued in his quest for self-determination is done by appealing to natural laws, by adopting a theoretical-objectivating attitude in the interpretation of how he is himself, that is, in the determination of his essence. An obvious finding, however important, because it sheds light on the fact that sympathy is an increasingly rare phenomenon today. For, if the emotional structure of man, under the power of the laws of technical-scientific knowledge, is diverted to the monotony of sensory feelings and to the unique level of sensory states, any communion of feeling is obstructed. Only in the dimensions in which feelings are made a genuine intentional act, directed at the other in a movement of comprehensibility, therefore, not only being shown as pure reactive mechanisms, is it possible for a human being to feel with the other, to feel the rejoicing and suffering of others in unity with them, as well as resent joyfully for his pain or sadly for his joy. We sympathize because we are given, beforehand, to intentionally understand the psychic experiences of others. On the contrary, sensory feelings, being always present and organically localized states, are characterized by an act of feeling devoid of original temporality, since they cannot be *pre-sensed* (*vorfühlen*) in the presage of a waiting, *re-felt* in memory, again felt in prolonging it or holding it in another way (*wiederfühlen*), or successively felt by another through a meaningful intentional act (*nachfühlen*), and finally *con-sented* (in the sense of participating through an agreement of the heart, *mitfühlen*) (Scheler, 2000a, p. 336). All this is impossible, for example, for the painful state of a toothache. Located on the periphery of the other's physical body, attached to its physiological mechanisms, hermetically closed to comprehension, it can be only the lonely pain of the other.

In *Vom Sinn des Leidens*, Scheler (2008a) points out the reasons for this objectification of the human condition through scientific knowledge, which also affects nature in civilization's growing struggle against its dangers. Considering the historical development of associative forms among humans, from the ontological-experiential point of view, this objectivation has its roots in the search of man to placate suffering, in the effort to control the natural tragedies, in the contour of the fragility of the human body, in the struggle against the vicissitudes of human bonds and against the failures of the regulatory norms of social institutions, always greater with the strengthening and enlargement of the complex structures of the State and society. In the organization and economic division of labor accompanied by the hyper-specialization of knowledge and by the increase in wealth, in the intense expenditure of energy on work, in the sophistication of culture, customs and feelings, in short, in various spiritual aspects specific to western peoples, the desire for assurance and increased happiness, it is notorious the longing for assurance and the increase of happiness, or, even better, the intensification of pleasure mainly through the search for resources that soothe the pain and reduce the painful sensations. Throughout the civilizing process, there is a quest to live without pain and suffering that characterizes, in axiological terms, the spiritual history of western societies as a process motivated by an eudemonistic valuation of civilization and culture which in modern times has very specific traits (in general, linked to the economic values of work and profit). In a certain sense, this eudemonistic interpretation is hedonistic, because it links the increase in happiness with the elimination of suffering and the intensification of pleasure and well-being. For the realization of this dream of humanity's full happiness, it is undeniable that the emergence of science and its splendid development played a significant role, for example, in promoting the advancement of the means, instruments and technical mechanisms created by it for the rational domain



of nature. In the growing technical struggle of civilization against nature, however, the power given to man by the sciences certainly did not lead to happiness, as Freud (1962, p. 34) diagnosed early in the twentieth century when describing the “deep and long-standing discontent with the existing state of civilization” of modern man. Thus, on the contrary, there is a quantitative increase in pain and suffering, as well as a growing qualitative variety of ways of suffering. The ability to endure the same sensations of primitive man and the elementary sufferings of human living, for example, the fear of death, is diminishing; an inability that worsens as the increase of civilizing progress. The joy of primitive societies, Scheler observes, was more continuous and rarely disturbed (Scheler, 2008a, p. 49), even though these societies were more exposed to natural dangers and susceptible to natural catastrophes. It is concluded, then, that the historic path of invaluable civilizing progress actually represents a huge regression.

From the point of view of the ways in which Western-European humanity found to practically and theoretically conceive of instinctive and emotional life, to live it and consummate its meaning, civilizatory development may be characterized by a loss of its sympathetic capacity in favor of growing “hypertrophy of the intellect” (*Hypertrofie des «Verstandes»*) (Scheler, 2009, p. 42). In symbolic-spiritual terms, this situation is evident. The model of civilized man, in times characterized by extraordinary progress and technical application in the field of nature seeking to control suffering, is undoubtedly depicted in the image of the adult male, that is, of humanity determined by the clarity of logical-mathematical rationality that would have in this rationality the most excellent strengths and might. Modern man, in a paradigmatic way, expresses himself in the figure of “*homo sapiens*” who, as a member of a hyper-virile intellectual civilization, submits all noble values and goods (natural, vital, spiritual and religious) to the only group of goods and values: those of utility (Scheler, 2009, p. 114-115). The gradual historical consolidation of this image, culminating in the bourgeois type of “*homo capitalisticus*”, it is affirmed that the understanding of humanity from the adult who stunted the vivid imagination of the child age, lost its primordial and archetypal eidetic images, a phenomenon accompanied by the regression of the perception of the meaning of the transcendent which primitive peoples were concerned with finding everywhere and protecting in an original way. In this symptomatology, Scheler reads of the evolution of cognitive forces that deepens in the diminished capacity of civilized man to unite affectively with other human beings and, in universal cooperation, with the living being in general and with all nature in a cosmic perspective, as attestable in primitive cultures¹. In them, on the contrary, this broad sympathetic capacity is associated, in turn, with the knowledge which is symbolically attributed as specific to the infantile world and associated with the intuitive forces proper to the feminine². And this is, by no means due to the archaic humanity’s unreasonable estimate of them as underdeveloped forms of knowledge, but rather by their knowing with intuitive clarity the positive value of these forces. Therefore, because of the primitive knowledge that they are the only ones capable of coming into communion with the dark and ineffable depths through an affective unification with the real, not only the one who lives and breathes, and thus capable of directing the human being to a comprehensive and erotic knowledge in the original sense of the term. It is not by chance that it is the woman who, from the most archaic cultures, is the guardian of the noblest values and goods, that of life through maternal care (the “natural right” over children) and spiritual and religious values, against subordination to the utilitarian and economic imperatives of everyday subsistence needs. On the contrary, in the civilization of progress and utilitarianism, the fruit of the much-acclaimed evolution, only remnants of this capacity to unite affectionately with the living universe are found. The last of the men who knew how to revive it would have been Francis of Assisi (Scheler, 2009, p. 94, 97-98), in whose spirituality the archetypal relationship with the feminine, in the figure of mother earth, prevails in harmony with the light from the sun brother, paternal and male figure of the good Lord and his creator *eros*, which flows into a vital-cosmic sympathy with all infrahuman nature.

1 Described, for example, by Jung (1988, pp. 24-25) as a psychological phenomenon of an individual identifying himself with someone else, be it an animal, plant or some object: “Among such people, whose consciousness is at a different level of development from ours, the ‘soul’ (or psyche) is not felt to be a unit. Many primitives assume that a man has a ‘bushsoul’ as well as his own, and that this bush soul is incarnate in a wild animal or a tree, with which the human individual has some kind of psychic identity”. For this reason, tribes believe that they have several souls and, among the original peoples, the most common mental accident is the fragmentation or dissociation of the soul in many individuals, a certain “loss of a soul”. On the other hand, “this belief expresses the feeling of some primitive individuals that they each consist of several linked but distinct units”. In turn, Scheler (2009, p. 30) recognizes in these phenomena authentic primitive identifications, placing at their side the cult of ancestors present in primitive peoples as an expression of the identification and emotional connection of descendants with their predecessors. For him, the current phenomena of the masses, as happened between German citizens and the *Führer*, prolong this dimension of primeval historical times.

2 The Greek language gives an example of this linkage. Uniting oneself in heart to another, taking part in another’s affection, is named *sympathéo* (συνπαθεῖ), a verb from which derives the word *sympátheia* (συμπάθεια) and gives rise to the English word “sympathy”. However, to be touched in the depths of one’s being, in Greek, is said with the verb *splágnchnizo*, σπλαγγχνίζω. By naming this typically human disposition, in an active and passive sense, it means to prove compassion, to be willing to suffer it deeply. Such wanting and allowing oneself to succumb to compassion can be seen through the noun correlated to the verb that names the act: *splágchnon*, σπλάγγχνον. However, before connoting the act of compassion, the referred noun denotes “viscera”, “womb”, as well as “maternal lap” and “uterus”. Only metaphorically, the noun has the meaning of spirit and heart as the place of affections, as well as what is contained in this sphere in particular, specially the affection of tenderness and compassion. Following these linguistic indications, it is clear that compassion has to do not with a mood that affects the superficiality of organic sensations or with any passing psychic commotion. Actually, compassion affects the human being in the entrails of his being, taking him with an affective-receptive tone capable of awakening the deep creative forces of its spirit and, thus, making it fruitful and generative, regardless of its gender.



However, the overemphasis of the cognitive forces of civilized man is also, paradoxically, their decay, especially by a law of grounding the dimensions of the human, according to which they cannot rise above themselves if the inferiors remain underdeveloped. If man is the only living being who, by virtue of the spirit, is the 'ascetic of life', one who is able to refuse mere effectiveness as the last idea and origin of things, therefore, whose mode of being means 'to cast a vigorous 'no' against this kind of reality'(Scheler, 2008c, p. 42, 44) in order to ascend to the highest and noblest, the following need is unavoidable:

If man is to achieve the full realization of his ideal capacities, his various emotional powers must *all* be cultivated, and not just one or another of them. The reason for this has already been given, namely the strict order of dependence which obtains between emotional acts and functions. There can be no full development of the higher, though necessarily rarer, emotional powers in man, where the lower but more common ones have not been fully cultivated. The sense of unity with the living universe, so excessively predominant among the Indians and the Greeks, may be lost in an individual or an entire cultural epoch; it may be thought to be no authentic source for metaphysical knowledge of those aspects of the subsistent universe which can only be grasped in this way; more commonly still, it may be held that its cognitive significance and value have been superseded by science, or Christianity, or humanism; but the effect is to cut away the ultimate roots upon which all the 'higher' forms of sympathetic and emotional life depend for their subsistence (Scheler, 2009, p. 112)

The emotional identification or the sense of unity (*Einsfühlen, Einfühlung*) is just one of the most archaic forms of sympathy. For this reason, however, it is capable of reaching the entire cosmos. Its primitive and pre-theoretical character is its life force. Notwithstanding the renegade in the history of Western humanity, it is the source of primordial knowledge, a kind of knowledge that is fulfilled without judging the other's experiences, nature or any animated being, as well as the qualities of these experiences. It is not, therefore, a pure act of the intellect, much less the knowledge of an expectant who, in a theoretical-cognitive posture, thinks he knows what another feels and, reproducing the feeling, believes to live the same as the other lives: he rejoices with him or pities him, taking his pain and joy as his own. But this may be but an emotional infection, as is customary with herds of animals; also when men meet in mass and present a depersonalized behavior. Indeed, it is because of this intellectualist attitude that to sympathize is taken solely by projecting oneself into the other's emotional life, without intentionally addressing one's situation or source of pain and joy, and naively the feeling of another is mechanically reproduced. To sympathize is not mere knowledge or judgment concerning the other's living experience, it is a true *feeling* the feeling of others, which, however, does not imply to feel the *same* as the other, to participate subjectively in the experiences of others through euphoric or pitying sentimentalities. And it is not only by compassion and joyful communion that one sympathizes with the experiences of others, as well-shown by indifference - in the sense of "automatic", that is, deprived of the comprehensive intentionality of the noetic-spiritual motivation, free by nature (Scheler, 2009, p. 56-57) - of its most primitive form in face of the emotionality that is currently given to such ways of sympathizing. From the genuine psycho-affective identification of sense of unity to the comprehension of the feeling of others in an intentional act directed at him, through the intentional feeling with the other (directed at the same value complex), there is a very varied concreteness of phenomena, modes and sympathetic functions. In the passage from pole to pole, there is the opening up of various deviations in the forms of emotional infection, of psychic introjections. Disregarding, then, the multifaceted forms of sympathy is to go to the theoretical distortions of the phenomenon, privileging a knowledge of the affective and soul-related experiences unfounded on the phenomenal basis itself.

Knowing about the emotional life of human being is like a ladder that rises to the highest species of knowledge and leads to the proper forms of spirit, towards love. However, to deny the first steps is to step on the wrong foot and to stumble upon the first steps. It is, of course, still a false step towards a pathology, however exalted as a moral act, when one would use or exacerbate the virtue of compassion. Sign and consequence of our inexperience with the joy that comes generously and freely from the deep center of our souls. We know so far little of joy, because it betrays us the more we make it the goal and destiny of our calculated pursuits, our productive doing, our happiness-assuring projects (Scheler, 2008a, p. 64-65; 2008b, p. 75-76). Finally, it betrays us more as we make of it merit of our acting and distinction from the ethical subject. On the contrary, we live on this spiritual aliphilia - namely, the joy of making sublime and grandiose the value of suffering for the pain of others, a certain eagerness for compassion which makes us forget joy and ties sympathy to the dominant prejudice that reduces it to the mere feeling the same as the other, just as the other feels. In the perspective of a criticism of the resentful valuation that results in an axiological inversion - in this case, the overestimation of the compassion of the suffering of others accompanied by the underestimation



of congratulation with the joy of the other – Nietzsche’s Zarathustra most certainly preaches: this ignorance of joy is our original sin, not the lack of compassion as a single synonym for sympathy. “So be warned against pity: *from there* a heavy cloud shall yet come to man!” (Nietzsche, 1999, pp. 115-116)³.

The multiple faces of sympathy and its role in the knowledge of other people’s experiences

Is to sympathize the same as to feel the pains and joys of others? Because of the narrow field of view from which the question is usually formulated, the answer to it must firstly be negative. It is that, in the narrowness of sight, it operates a negative restriction in the essence and forms of sympathy, which comes from various factors already signaled. The answer operates a negative restriction first due to the fact that the laws of internal reasoning of sympathy phenomena⁴ are completely disregarded. Taken together, what these laws translate is that the sublime forces of spirit or heart need, in order to develop, the full unfolding of the most primitive potentialities, which implies the cooperation of different emotional acts and knowledge of values. In fact, in order to reach the highest spiritual form of the forces of the heart, namely, the non-cosmic love for the person⁵ (with his noetic acts, understanding their meaning), a love that still shows itself as broad and universal

3 It should be remembered with Scheler (2009, pp. 28-29) that, on the other hand, Nietzsche’s judgment on compassion, despite his penetrating criticism of the positivist understanding and evolutionist theory of the phenomenon, is still not cleared of the trend to interpret it from the affective contagion. Consequently, Nietzsche would have made an erroneous valuation of compassion by determining it, essentially, as an instinct, indeed as depressive and contagious. In the direction of this critique of the vitalist-mechanical understanding of sympathy (*Mitfühlen*), this argument is taken up in *Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen*. In this work, when demonstrating the resentful character of the modern conception of love as humanitarianism, Scheler (2007a, p. 98) emphasizes that genuine love for the human person is reduced to an ardent and enthusiastic feeling of the suffering of others. However, this act could not be mistaken for true sympathy, but only as a manifestation of the modern and bourgeois resentment. Thus, it is a supposed reproductive interiorization of other people’s emotional states which is based on the overestimation of the psychophysical dimension of man, with its laws, in the elucidation and understanding of typically spiritual phenomena. As a consequence, the resulting value judgments would be valuational farces, since they are based on the inversion or turnaround of values, born of resentment, which subjugates the “order of the heart” to the peripheral laws of sensitive affections. Therefore, according to Scheler (2000a, p. 283; 2007a, p. 65), Nietzsche himself, although he criticized this resentful inversion and falsification of values, would be, in a way, bound by the tendency to determine ethics and moral acts from vitalist principles, coming to the conclusion that the sympathy and the inherent feelings would be only manifestations of the decay of life (mere contagions, it was said above; a certain emotional contamination propagated by the instinctive “conscience” proper to herds or flocks of animals). Thus, compassion and sympathy as such would be instincts contrary to those that preserve and enhance life. Roughly speaking, this tendency, dominant from the 17th century onwards, is oriented towards restricting all the dynamism of emotional life to states of emotion or moods, and explain it exclusively based on mechanistic principles, including applying them to the conservation and enhancement of life. It results not only in an erroneous conception of the meaning of human life and its manifestations (growing, conservation, evolutive development and others), as well as in ethical principles which do not allow the reference of the essence of life to higher values, namely, the spiritual and the sacred values. With this, all these values and the spiritual acts, proper to the most noble stratum of human life, are sent to the realm of vital feelings, to the impulses and sensitive tendencies inherent to any living being, to mere animality. It should be added that, likewise, all other spiritual feelings, such as happiness, despair, torment or peace of “conscience”, should not be understood from the psychophysical laws of human life, resulting in the same error above in considering vital values as supreme. Hence, in the definition of genuine sympathy, it is important not only to have the table of values in good order, retaining the value of congratulation with the joy of others as the noblest value, but also to have fixed that, where sympathy occurs, what is decisive is neither the joy nor pain, but rather the reference to what is noblest: in sympathy, one goes to pain or joy because they are manifestations of the suffering and rejoicing of a spiritual person and, as such, a very unique and irreplaceable being. For this reason, sympathy presupposes love for the individual person (cf. note 06). In any case, Nietzsche had the merit of identifying a disguised form of sympathy by denouncing it as a painful reaction of weak men to the pain of others, although he mistakenly called this typical reaction to (ardent) sensory affectation by the name of sympathy. In such a daily posture and understanding, in fact, it is directed at the very reaction of pain, the sympathy is converted into mere joy with the very ability to be sorry (Scheler, 2009, p. 53).

4 The internal relations and the genetic development of the sympathy phenomena expressed by this essential law of foundation are described in *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie* (Scheler, 2009, pp. 105-111). In summary, they are: I) *Einsfühlung* (affective unification) is the foundation of *Nachfühlung* (vicarious feeling), the act of feeling that “repeats” the experiences of others, its emotional act, that is, an act that reenacts in those who feel the feeling of others, constituting the first a phenomenologically distinct psychic fact; II) This form of feeling sympathetic is, in its turn, the foundation of *Mitgefühl* (fellow-feeling), literally, the feeling-with, however, as a comprehensive act that intentionally addresses the experience of others - sympathy in the strict sense, the sympathy itself; III) This last act founds love for man (*humanitas*) or benevolence; IV) Love for man underlies non-cosmic love of persons, including God. Above, the interrelation of these acts is described, however vaguely, only to the extent necessary to clarify the argument at the present moment of the discussion, the indispensable cooperation between them. Certainly, much more is needed for a clear phenomenological description of the interdependence of these phenomena.

5 As the most noble form of love, it has the meaning of a universal bond, the awareness of a solidarity based on the link and ontic-metaphysical unity of all individual beings. It is the love that goes beyond the concrete interpersonal relationships, from human person to human person or from human person to divine person, through which it gets deeper and deeper into the knowledge of the other as being unique in its gender, that is, very singular and irreplaceable, at the same time that breaks with the intermediation of previous understandings, for example, social relations with their previous determinations of roles. In this sense of overcoming, non-cosmic love should not be understood as contrary to love for the person, but as its destiny, in the sense of expanding knowledge in the love of the other to the vastness of personal existence as a spiritual principle of the world, a concretization singular inserted in the whole and in the unity of all entities. As Scheler (2009, p. 136) admits, this love is neither conceived nor sustained without a theistic basis. In Christian terms, the personal relationship with God does not exclude love for one’s neighbor and all other finite beings; on the contrary, it requires a loving everything and everyone in God and from God. For the context of the discussion, however, the ontological-experiential aspect, the vital-cosmic affective unification as the opposite and basal pole of this personal communion with God, should be emphasized, since eros is necessary as a fundamental and inherent tendency to human life itself, so that human life shows itself as the mysterious contact with universal life, as a “desire” to unite with the whole. For in its absence or concealment, as in the modern world, men would not feel vitally linked to the entire cosmos, including organic nature, to the earth as their “great and eternal mother”. The inability of this cosmic affective unification of modern man is seen in the destruction of nature for capitalist purposes, in the domination of the organic world through science, as well as in the restriction of the “object” loved by man, however, as an abstract subject of reason, which founds modern humanitarianism (love for all men, not for the person in the concreteness of his uniqueness and, therefore, in truth and strictly, not for any human being). As much as love is a spiritual act and, therefore, free from all psychophysical determination of the human structure, also in its highest form it needs close cooperation from this basic “love”, more strictly saying, from this elementary function of sympathizing, which is affective unification.



for humanity as such. However, it is not a question of loving an abstract being of reason, but rather of *humanitas* as the concrete sphere in which the other's otherness is donated, which, in its difference, becomes as "real" as the one who loves him. Spontaneous love for the other is needed, simply because he shows himself as another human being (Scheler, 2009, p. 107) and, as such, holder of unique value (s). For, sympathizing is closely linked with "having-for-real" the subject with whom one feels with; otherwise, there would be a situation of autoeroticism, egocentrism, solipsism or the like, in which one has the other only through a representation, such as (self) image, illusion or fiction. Without this way of sticking to the *alter* and dwelling with it as a unique "reality", concretely existing as a being-person with its very particular values, therefore, it would not be possible to intentionally address the feeling of others (*Mitgefühl*). On the other hand, however, it would not be known who the other is precisely in the singularity of his condition, with his lived experiences (not the mere knowledge of his real being), if the human being lacked the power to tend to the neighbor who understands him as another "I" in the individuality of his lived experiences (certainly, as long as the person known has already spontaneously opened himself to this knowledge), as, for example, when someone intentionally reaps another one's pains and joys and is able, thus, to participate in this other one's reality - as it happens when one feels the regrets and the joys of a romantic character. However, this sympathizing tendency is generally indifferent to personalized values and, therefore, it needs the love that impels it to a genuine understanding of others' experiences; otherwise, without the unveiling and the manifestation of the other as the presence of an individual spiritual center in man, that is, exclusively within the limits of feeling-with, the other could be so easily restricted to a generic self and, concomitantly, the love is restricted to the psychic act or experience that addresses merely humanity as a genre or abstract being of reason. So, ontologically, the loving act has the primacy, since the being-person in man, in his noetic acts, takes the self as a psychovital reality only as the substructure and instrument on the basis of which it is possible to build knowledge of the other, in the sense of spiritual understanding, based on evidence of your personal worth. However, in the order of the development of the experience in which one person becomes aware of the other, as this understanding happens, the order is reversed and the intentional and comprehensive tendency of feeling-with-the-other takes precedence:

A person (his pure conscious acts and the significance thereof), cannot become available to the spiritual comprehension of others save by the prior establishment, through fellow-feeling (*Mitgefühl*), of parity of esteem for the reality of the vital self, or its substrate, on either side; and by an ever-deeper penetration of the spontaneous goodwill so engendered, up to the very threshold, as it were, of human personality itself (Scheler, 2009, p. 109).

This sympathizing tendency, in turn, would be blocked from its very roots if, by chance, man lacked the strength, at a clear distance, to feel what the other feels, but without taking the feeling of his neighbor as his own, but "reproducing" himself successively in a comprehensive act (*Nachföhlung*, vicarious feeling). But how would such a distance be possible if communion with others was not lived beforehand and if specific communities of life were not previously established among men? Rather, the primeval experience of feeling of unity with each other (*Einsföhlung*) in the set of subjects is necessary, most often with that group in which the members share the same values and share the same axiological hierarchy, e.g. the family or the most immediate social group. This most immediate group can, however, expand to a pre-theoretical awareness of people, culture, and even ancestral attachment. Unlike previous experiences, intentional in essence, this affective identification and unification with a certain "gender" of subjects is a subconscious event, the result of automatic action (not free, in radical opposition to spiritual acts) and restricted to the scope of psycho-vital consciousness. Thus, the "superior" forms of sympathizing are founded on the scope of living the same throughout experiencing oneself, living in relationships with oneself, with others, with nature. To the extent that sympathizing goes beyond this original dimension of living, in the intent of intellectual or merely intrapsychic-subjective purity, it naturally falls into the representation or fiction of the qualities of the situations with which it sympathizes something entirely possible through the *nachföhlen*. But the human being does not unite affectively with a fictitious image or construct or idea, and every genuine feeling-with would, by principle, be prevented.

In second place, the alleged restriction of the essence and of forms of sympathy has its origins in the intellectualist conduct in which the phenomenon of sympathy has been interpreted. This conduct was responsible for converting, roughly speaking, the intentionality of the feeling-with or of the feeling which is directed to the affective acts of the other, in the subjective reproduction of the experiences of others. About this reversal, much has been said before and, by distinguishing between identification and infection, we will continue to clarify it. Finally, the abovementioned restriction is due to the utilitarian appreciation and practice of sympathizing, which results in the overestimation of the modes of congratulation and compassion, however with a predominant tendency to value the second in relation to the first. Certainly, the whole restriction is an ontological and evaluative constraint that has its sources in the intellectualist and bourgeois conception of love, prevailing since modern resentment has transformed loving into: doing good; promoting human well-being to the greatest extent possible; and, finally, not wanting the good and helping, philanthropically,



whatever it is, just because it resides in it the abstract universal human being, bearer of rights (Scheler, 2007a, p. 78-79, 97). And this resentful love, by assigning Christianity to other paths, has become a feeling of (false) pity for the perverted, the “smaller” ones, the deprived, miserable or sick, the victims of natural, social and economic disasters. So, since love is confused with the pathological hunger for compassion and simultaneously, as warned by Kierkegaard (1980, p. 118-119), compassion is aesthetically subjected to the phenomenon of misfortune, restricting it to the “the most paltry of all social virtuositities and aptitudes”. Thus perverted, “sympathy, so far from being a good to the sufferer, is rather a means of protecting one’s own egoism”.

Individually and collectively, all these factors show how far sympathy is from the mere feeling the same pain as the other, and from the rejoicing in the same joy. This means: it is phenomenologically separate and radically distant from emotional infection (*Gefühlsansteckung*), a phenomenon so naively prized in morality and everyday conceptions. In order to avoid the current and erroneous equation of authentic acts of understanding the life of others with these phenomena, Scheler (2009, pp. 25-26) emphasizes something that is essential to them: because they lack their intentionality which is essential to the feeling or perceiving affective (*Fühlen*) of other people’s experiences, it is the true contagious emotional states (*Gefühlszustände*)⁶ that, by automatic and unconscious processes, become a collective feeling. Therefore, they are not immediately referred to an *original* and personalized feeling, but to processes of mediation of a sensation that, only later, through reflection or memory, are referred to objects and situations. The association with the possible cause of feeling is mechanical, casual, and often hypothetical because the infected subject cannot clearly refer to what in some circumstances made him happy or sad. In these emotional states, one falls without knowing the cause. Most of the time, it is content with indicating: “an energy that vibrates in the air!”. Its mode of infection, by its essentially mechanical character, happens most often through expressive phenomena and the constant repetition of the *same* expression, for example through the euphoric excitement of the mass or of a given festive environment. This is how the collective circumstance takes the spirits of the subjects involved in the process of contagion in such a way that they indulge in the feeling that, in turn, arises independently of conscious goals and spreads beyond the deliberate purpose of the infected subjects. It is difficult, then, to determine its provenance; on the contrary, one infects and is infected in a reciprocal process of infection, generating as if an accumulation of collective emotions, as in the fact of the formation of public opinion. In these states, by the way, the presence of the internal experiences of a given subject may be completely missing and, consequently, also the intention to participate in the pain and joy of the neighbor. One can, for example, be infected by *Stimmung*, the affective tone that inhabits the landscape, the climate, the territory, a people or group of people. It is precisely in this that the spreading of joyful communion or compassion does not prove to be authentic forms of sympathy. If the other is lacking in one’s concrete inner world, one only rejoices in his own joy, even though one is surrounded by happy people; one is saddened by one’s own grief, although one weeps with others. It is only when one welcomes the joy of others as the actual happiness of another or when one commiserates with the other one’s pain that does not belong to one, that the contagion is undone. Without the experience of the neighbor as neighbor (of the another with his sorrows and joys) and the distance that opens in proximity, it is not sympathy, but selfishness; then, the alleged ethical posture of suffering-with would be a masochistic multiplication of miseries.

Meanwhile, it is fair to stress an ambiguity: the sense of unity is also a form of infection, despite its original character. It is so only insofar as it is the phenomenon responsible for identifying those who unify in primitive “sympathy.” It is, therefore, an identifying event, events in which the egos involved merge and, because their causality is strictly vital, it is not exempt from decaying into complete egoistic confusion, in the absorption of one of the egos in the psychic flows of the others, annihilating the intentional distance between them. When (con)fusion happens, it oscillates on two poles: the idiopathic (the alien self is totally absorbed in the sympathizing ego) or heteropathic (the sympathizing self is lost and loses itself in the ego with which it sympathizes). Not every merger, however, needs to be (con)fusion. In this sense, genuine examples of this phenomenon are the affectivity of primitive peoples, totemism, the religious mysteries of antiquity, the relationship between hypnotist and the hypnotized, the phenomenon of mutual fusion brought about by the sexual act, among others analyzed by Scheler (2009). Preserving their original dynamism, these fusions allow an affective-cognitive encounter with the thing or the person unified. In human exchanges, they are, in fact, of great importance for the knowledge of the experiences of others, precisely because of the main characteristic that differentiates affective identification from all other sympathizing phenomena and functions. They take place within the framework of the essentially unitary psychophysical and spiritual constitution of man, in the “in-between” established between the noetic-spiritual acts responsible for the personalization of the contents of the inner life and the bodily dimension with their organic sensations and sensible feelings, therefore, in the “middle sphere” of vital consciousness. This is, therefore, the area of activity of the specific functions of psychic life:

It is that climatic region of the soul to which belong the energies of life and death, the passions, emotions, drives and instincts; (these are of three types: the instinctive appetites of hunger and thirst, the erotic life-instincts and their derivatives, and the instinctive desire for power, dominance, increase

⁶ For the delimitation of emotional states, as opposed to the original and intentional feeling, *Fühlen von*, cfr. Scheler, 2000a, pp. 262-263.



and reputation). It is impulses such as these which may lead, in their conscious manifestations, to the sense of unity and to identification proper. (Scheler, 2009, p. 46).

Through all the deep connections established in this region, the affective unification leads to sympathy as pre-conscious relationships are themselves formed and, then, give rise to vital psychic unity. Although they do not constitute a spiritual participation in the life of others and, on the contrary, they require a certain movement of “depersonalization” of man by not being aware, for a moment, of his spiritual individuality, descending from the noetic sphere, these connections are nonetheless supraempirical. For in this humble stripping of his spiritual dignity, man is not reduced to brute animality, to that “herd animal” – to use an expression dear to Nietzsche which usually relates to the moments when he behaves like a mass gregarious. On the contrary, it rises nobly above its drives (Scheler, 2009, p. 46). Thus, authentic affective identifications are neither as mechanical as bodily sensations, nor imitative as mere infection of emotions. Instead, by promoting the ego’s descent from the heights of pure reason and the abandonment of the dictates of reason, the affective identifications encourage an intimate adherence to the Other, giving the basis for knowledge of the experiential flow of the Other’s psychic world, from its content and internal dynamism, and not, thus, as an external bystander with the use of objectifying theories.

However, sympathy, as a *sui generis* phenomenon, presents something else that differentiates it from those even authentic merges. First, it needs to be the experience of intentionally addressing one’s personal acts. As said, they are the understanding of a feeling-with that knows the distance that tears and distinguishes myself from the other. Where there is no otherness and original understanding of otherness, there is no sympathy either. In fact, to sympathize is not only to live the same as others did, but the free decision, proper to a spiritual being, to take part in the opening of the personal being of others, to participate in their intentional acts in the unique way that acts allow such participation: co-performing or consummating coactively (previously, during or successively) the same feeling (Scheler, 2000a, p. 386). Therefore, it is not enough only the original feel-with – that is, to be in the same affective movement that intentionally addresses a certain object, person or circumstance that, with its values, makes one happy or makes one suffer. Although this heroic feat, as it were, is radically disposed to go beyond the egocentric to feel the same as the other in the mere repetition of his fears and enjoyments, by allowing both the sorrow and the cause of the penalty (as well as the rejoicing and that which gives rise to joy) is one and the same thing, it is still necessary a “transcendental turn” to the experience of the Other, in the sense of being detained close to the other, in the nearness of (individual) distance. Sympathizing itself, therefore, does not arise automatically or merely by reproducing the experiences of others, but rather by an intentional turn allowed by acts of understanding which perceive, exclusively through the emotional functions, the pain and joy of the other (Scheler, 2009, p. 24-25). Only in the sense of pain and joy being understood and lived as phenomena belonging only to others, sympathy, then, has something reactive, specific to a non-objectifying act, but receptive by intention, therefore apt to grasp the value of other people’s experiences. Thus, to sympathize is the fearless willingness to remake the experiences of another affectively without taking them as one’s own. Of course, this is to relieve them, sending them to oneself in a “gesture” of welcoming. However, based on that intentional turn made by the act of addressing the feeling of others (*Mitgefühl*, to feel companionate), this re-consummation does not degrade in feeling the same as another, usually triggered by the automatism of emotional infection precisely when such a basis is lacking.

Secondly, sympathy itself goes far beyond affective identification. Because it installs itself in the middle of the organic structure and the free center of spiritual acts with their correlated objects, the affective identification does not penetrate this last layer, which is the personal being. Now, the full awareness of the otherness of others cannot arise through comprehensive knowledge without an apprehension of the individual contents, however ineffable, which constitutes the concrete uniqueness of the person; it is not effective through the knowledge that accounts for particular experiences, but limited in the psycho-vital sphere. Otherwise, as commonly happens in some psychological theories, there is always a tendency to subject the particularity of another’s psychic experiences to the laws of association mechanisms; a tendency to generalize of another’s qualities and to conform them to a human typification system in relation to their psychic structure; finally, a tendency to interpret the other on the basis of the understanding of its social being, according to the image and social relations of the group to which it belong (Scheler, 2009, p. 131), that is, a tendency to transform the particularities of the psychic experiences into phenomena of consciousness and knowledge of the psychic facts which have their origin in certain (pre)judgments and social roles. Consequently, roughly, in order for sympathy to exist as a human phenomenon, too human, and, thus, to be a pure and clear source of knowledge of the spiritual unity of the other as its most original being-so, or the most singular way of being itself, it is of the essence that the forces of the spirit need to be intertwined in affective identification. It is crucial that, in sympathy, all the powers of the spirit or of the heart, not only the psychic-vital, gradually develop themselves until they reach the highest spheres.

By way of conclusion, it is necessary to remember, rather, allude to the fundamental notion of Scheler’s phenomenological thought: if it is admitted that man, in the depths of his essence or spiritual condition, is not *ego cogito* or *ego volens*, but yes an *ens amans* (Scheler, 2000d, p. 356), only when the individual exchange is guided by spiritual love for the person, that it is possible to penetrate the mystery of his own and others’ singularity.



The original knowledge of oneself and of the other, in Scheler's phenomenology, presents this inescapable mark of the act of love which, being the only act that anticipates knowledge by previously recognizing the good and values of the beloved, is able to guide the relationships of a person with itself and with other people. In this way, when it comes to knowing the truth of the Other, it is necessary, indeed, to admit an affirmative answer to the question whether to sympathize is to feel the pains and joys of the other, however only when this act of feeling-with shows itself in the sense of a "loving transcendental turn" towards another's affective world. And from the point of view of the most ethically valuable, sympathizing is more than compassion. It is the starting point for a great love that overcomes compassion, that rises beyond suffering (intentionally) with the other, to create what you love by letting it be and to call upon the beloved to become fully the good that it is. And, in this, above all else, to congratulate yourself.

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