

## Some Reflections on Lonergan and Scheler: Bias and Ressentiment

### Abstract

In dealing with questions involving aesthetics, be it the philosophy of art or history, or say of morality and ethics, the person encounters a mysterious entanglement of the concrete and contingent on one hand, and of the universal and essential on the other. In any one encounter we may give preference to either the concrete/contingent or to the empirical (universal/essential) elements. .

In his groundbreaking book *Insight*<sup>1</sup>, we can see Lonergan focusing more on the universal and essential side of such issues, in his second main work, *Method in Theology*<sup>2</sup>, we see him extending his scope of thinking towards the concrete, the question of feelings in the religious sphere and in grasping values. In *Method*, Lonergan refers to Scheler's analysis of value-feelings, in *Insight* he mentions this philosopher not even once.

And yet man is a unity of body and soul. One can now either consider the more intellectual side of this unit or the physical and emotional side. Affections and feelings can be viewed from a point of view asking about how much they strive to a spiritual order and from the intellectual side how much it gains or losses from impulses generated from the body. Finally, one can reflect rather on the unity of both which comes to be expressed in a term such as “the reasons of the heart.”

(It's important here to note Lonergan's appreciation for Scheler: calling to mind Lonergan's indebtedness to Scheler—Scheler's notion of ressentiment will give a much richer level of meaning to Lonergan's notion of bias.)

### Recommended Literature

Manfred S. Frings: *The Mind of Max Scheler: The First Comprehensive Guide Based on the Complete Works* (Marquette Studies in Philosophy, 13)

Max Scheler, *Ressentiment* (Marquette Studies in Philosophy); with a good Introduction of Manfred S. Frings

C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (free available on the Internet)

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, vol. 3, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); hereafter cited in text as (LI)

<sup>2</sup> Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1972); hereafter cited in text as (LM)

## Max Scheler

A brief word first about Scheler--Frings, who is the scholar who administered Scheler's written estate, wrote about him<sup>3</sup>:

Max Scheler (1874- 1928), by testimony of almost all contemporary European philosophers, was one of the most brilliant thinkers in our century. As Heidegger once put it, there is no present day philosopher who is not indebted to him. [...]

[... ] with the sudden death of Scheler, Europe had lost one of its greatest minds it ever had. Whereas his name was in circulation everywhere during the twenties, including in Asia and the Americas, his fame faded away like a comet after his demise at the age of fifty-four. He left behind many printed works and thousands of posthumous manuscripts, all of which material was suppressed by the German Nazi regime during 1933 and 1945. Publication of his works took only a slow start in 1954. So did translations of them. As it is rather common in the humanities, quickly emerging interests in particular areas and authors who are "in," shifted Scheler's name until recently more into the background of philosophical discussion. (*SchR*, 3)

## Introduction

I would like to ask you a question: Which of the predicates in the two columns are more adequate to be ascribed to the painting (I am showing here a picture of Cézanne: The Mount Sainte-Victoire)?

cool	sublime
pretty	awesome
nice	wonderful

Nowadays, many intellectuals would say that such predicates are only names for subjective feelings without having any reference to the "reality" of the painting.

Another example:

A woman being close to tears, says honestly: "I don't feel good." A man replies laughing: "Very nice, I feel wonderful".

<sup>3</sup> Max Scheler, *Ressentiment* (Marquette Studies in Philosophy) 1994, with a foreword of Manfred Frings; hereafter cited in text as (*SchR*). Lonergan, in *Method of Theology*, refers to: Manfred Frings, *Max Scheler*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1965.

I think we would agree that this answer is not appropriate and find that a word of sympathy or comfort would have been better. The man's answer, however, would have been correct if such a statement "I do not feel good" would only be the expression of a subjective feeling without having a slight connotation such as: I would need help.

There exist complex feelings such as rancor, pride, *ressentiment*, and a question arises whether they describe a only subjective emotion or if more is involved. Since some of these feelings implicitly contain a value judgment, Is it is good or bad (?) etc., this could mean assuming feelings and emotions cannot be a sort of answer to a trans-subjective reality that the values implicitly contained in them would only be an illusion. Max Scheler is known as a thinker who devoted himself to the question of the objectivity of value-feelings. Dealing with Scheler's term *ressentiment*, I hope that I can shed some light on the relation of Lonergan to Scheler.

## Different Kinds of Thinking

To illustration this difference, we take two short texts from each of Lonergan and of Scheler. Right at the start of *Insight* we can read:

Archimedes had his insight by thinking about the crown; we shall have ours by thinking about Archimedes. What we have to grasp is that insight

- (1) comes as a release to the tension of inquiry,
- (2) comes suddenly and unexpectedly,
- (3) is a function not of outer circumstances but of inner conditions,
- (4) pivots between the concrete and the abstract, and
- (5) passes into the habitual texture of one's mind. (*LI*. p. 28)

In contrast, two texts of Scheler right at the start of his book on *ressentiment*:

There is a progression of feeling which starts with revenge and runs via rancor, envy, and impulse to detract all the way to spite, coming close to *ressentiment*. Usually, revenge and envy still have specific objects. They do not arise without special reasons and are directed against definite objects, so that they do not outlast their motives. The desire for revenge disappears when vengeance has been taken over, then the person against whom it was directed has been punished or has punished himself, or when one truly forgives him. (SchR, p. 30)

It is a proven phenomenal fact that the relation between two terms (for example, colors, sounds, faces, etc.) can be contained in the perception of one of these terms alone. Thus we may be struck by the particular resemblance of one face to another which yet we cannot picture, but have to seek in our memory.

The awareness of a relation here determines the conscious appearance of the second term. There is, indeed, phenomenal proof that there are pure experiences of relatedness, which select and actualize their terms only afterwards. (SchR, p. 36)

Lonergan, in the example above, reflects on insight, as mental operation; whereas for Scheler the focus is on feelings. Insights into insights are easier to comprehend than insights into feelings. The analysis concerning the preconditions of an insight are likely to be understood easier than the analysis of the preconditions of feelings such as rancor or envy. The experience of an insight, for example, the sudden understanding of interrelations in a simple example of geometry, is clearly set out whereas the experience of rancor or envy is much more diffuse. Nevertheless, they are not mere subjective data.

Feelings as rancor, envy, or *ressentiment* imply a trans-subjective reference. A thinker's sensitivity for the experience of mental operations must not be at the same time a sensibility for diffuse feelings. In a similar vein, a bright analytical thinker can feel rather helpless when being asked to interpret a painting. The reflection concerning questions such as "what do I do when looking at a painting?", or "what do I understand when doing so (?)" is quite different than the mental procedure by which the content of a painting comes to be expressed in words.

In *Insight*, Lonergan elaborates on an epistemology favoring the correctness by which anyone can convince himself who is willing to reflect on his own operations of perceiving, understanding, and judging. Lonergan's philosophy of interiority is well placed to be used as a measurement for implicit or explicit epistemologies of other thinkers. Anyone reading *Insight* is overwhelmed by the analytical clarity of the text and the intellectual power which is expressed in it. He might be so fascinated that he does not recognize the newness which emerges in Lonergan's second major work *A Method in Theology (MIT)*. At least at first reading (MIT) cannot be so easily illuminated in the sharp light of the intellect which *Insight* conveys.

In *Method* Lonergan writes:

Faith is the knowledge born of religious love.

First, then, there is a knowledge born of love<sup>4</sup>. Of it Pascal spoke when he remarked that the heart has reasons which reason does not know. Here by reason I would understand the compound of the activities on the first three levels of cognitional activity, namely, of experiencing, of understanding, and of judging. By the heart's reasons I would understand feelings that are intentional responses to values; and I would recall the two aspects of such responses, the absolute aspect that is a recognition of value, and the relative aspect that is a preference of one value over another.

<sup>4</sup> Here and further, underlining added by myself.

Finally, by the heart I understand the subject on the fourth, existential level of intentional consciousness and in the dynamic state of being in love. The meaning, then, of Pascal's remark would be that, besides the factual knowledge reached by experiencing, understanding, and verifying, there is another kind of knowledge reached through the discernment of value and the judgments of value of a person in love. (MIT p. 115)

Thus, there is a knowledge "born of love". And there are "heart's reasons" that are "feelings that are intentional responses of values". Let us compare this with what Frings, a scholar of Scheler, writes about value-feelings in his introduction to Scheler's book *Ressentiment*.<sup>5</sup>

First of all, values are given to us in feeling them. True, they can be thought of, and willed, but only after they have passed through feeling them. This is analogous to colors, says Scheler's, which can only be seen. Just as colors are given to us "in" seeing them, or sounds "in" hearing them, values are first given to us "in" feeling them. (SchR, 11)

What Lonergan writes on "heart's reasons" in *Method* does not contradict what he elaborated on reason in *Insight* because it is a broadening and deepening of it. Feelings play a different role in different realms of human reality. Some examples concerning these differences with, say, regarding a solution of a problem of geometry; or, to a question asking whether a painting is valuable or not; or, whether my intentions are morally good or not. Under the influence of Hildebrand and Scheler, Lonergan began to recognize more and more the role and impact that feelings convey. From one vantage point Scheler's "value-feelings" do not stand on solid grounds metaphysically. Moreover, the same could be said of Saint Paul, and many saints and people who are more authentic in their daily living than many others who are well-read in Lonergan's philosophy of interiority.

From Scheler's intuitive way of thinking and his phenomenology of value-feelings we can also gain an understanding of the moral insights of great cultures and religions. For those in whom moral distinction is commonplace moral feelings are on a par with mental operations. And that holds equally true for the deeply religious. For it is with ordinary people who intuitively grasp that community life is not possible without any ethical order.

Moreover, the contention frequently heard that values are only relative to corresponding cultures can be invalidated by a comparison of the moral heritage of peoples.<sup>6</sup> Long before any philosophy existed, there were people who had deep insights into moral reality. This fact can hardly be explained without the assumption of a sort of objectivity of value-feelings.

<sup>5</sup> Max Scheler, *Ressentiment* (Marquette Studies in Philosophy), 1994, introduction by Manfred S. Frings; hereafter cited in text as (SchR).

<sup>6</sup> See appendix in: C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*. This book is available for free on the Internet.

In his reflections, Scheler, was not free of what Lonergan would call picture-thinking. On the level of values, however, this epistemological deficiency is outweighed by his high sensitivity of recognizing value-feelings and by his capacity of interpreting them. With regard to the three conversions mentioned by Lonergan -- intellectual, moral and religious conversion -- it could be said, that, in a phenomenology of value-feelings, the moral and religious conversion is more important than the intellectual one.<sup>7</sup>

Feelings with respect to say the word, friendship, is for Scheler a complex issue that comprises both an intellectual and emotional component. In a phenomenological sense, however, such complex feelings are simple at the same time. Friendship comprises a set of elements: sensuous feelings, memories, insights, and decisions etc., which are not 'neatly arranged' but overflow one into the other. However, they form a unity (a phenomenological unity so to speak) constituting a real friendship between and among individuals. Like friendship, *ressentiment* is such a complex-simple (mixed set of) feelings.

## Ressentiment -- Bias

The word *ressentiment* comes from the French<sup>8</sup> and, with regard to its scope and connotations, it does not have an English equivalent. This is why the translator prefers the French versions to English *resentment*. The natural meaning of the word is:

First of all, *ressentiment* is the repeated experiencing and reliving of a particular emotional response reaction against someone else. The continual reliving of the emotion sinks it more deeply into the center of the personality, but concomitantly removes it from the person's zone of action and expression. It is not a mere intellectual recollection of the emotion and of the events to which it "responded" -- it is a re-experiencing of the emotion itself, a renewal of the original feeling. Secondly, the word implies that the quality of this emotion is negative, i.e., that it contains a movement of hostility. (*SchR*, p. 25a; Introduction by Frings)

In many respects, Scheler's reflections about the meaning of *ressentiment* reads like what Lonergan has to say about the meaning of bias. Bias is an obscuration (a blocking—a refusing to understand) in our capacity for intellectual-rational operations and *ressentiment* is a disturbance of feelings with far reaching consequences. Lonergan writes about Scheler's *ressentiment*:

According to Scheler, *ressentiment* is a re-feeling of a specific clash with someone else's value-qualities. The someone else is

<sup>7</sup> See Lonergan, *Method of Theologie*, chapter 10.2: Dialektic.

<sup>8</sup> c.1600, from French *ressentir* "feel pain, regret," from Old French *resentir* (13c.), from *re-*, intensive prefix, + *sentir* "to feel," from Latin *sentire* (see *sense* (n.)). From: <http://www.etymonline.com>.

one's superior physically or intellectually or morally or spiritually. The re-feeling is not active or aggressive but extends over time, even a life-time. It is a feeling of hostility, anger, indignation that is neither repudiated nor directly expressed. What it attacks is the value-quality that the superior person possessed and the inferior not only lacked but also feels unequal to acquiring. The attack amounts to a continuous belittling of the value in question, and it can extend to hatred and even violence against those that possess that value-quality. But perhaps its worst feature is that its rejection of one value involves a distortion of the whole scale of values and that this distortion can spread through a whole social class, a whole people, a whole epoch. So the analysis of *ressentiment* can turn out to be a tool of ethical, social, and historical criticism. (MIT p. 33)

Further, Lonergan's term *scotosis*, which is essential for his understanding of bias, has an equivalent in Scheler's interpretation of *ressentiment*: *cross-eyed*. Lonergan writes:

Let us name such an aberration of understanding a scotosis, and let us call the resultant blind spot a scotoma. Fundamentally, the scotosis is an unconscious process. It arises, not in conscious acts, but in the censorship that governs the emergence of psychic contents. Nonetheless, the whole process is not hidden from us, for the merely spontaneous exclusion of unwanted insights is not equal to the total range of eventualities. (*LI*, p. 215)

And Frings on Scheler's *cross-eyed*:

[It is] an uninterrupted blind impulse to detract. When people deride classical music [...] because they have no appreciation of either, there is not necessarily *ressentiment* involved but likes or dislikes. But when someone derides anything he comes across with, there is a blind value detracting present. There is neither a particular, nor a particular class of objects around this person which is not subject to his derision. He suffers from a plain, continued obsession to detract and to belittle the value of whatever, indeed that of the whole world. (SchR, p. 20)

For Lonergan, "a refusal to understand" is the cause of what he calls 'dramatic bias' in an individual:

Our study of the dramatic bias has worked from a refusal to understand through the series of its consequences. There result in the mind a scotosis, a weakening of the development of common sense, a differentiation of the persona and the ego, an alternation of suspicion and reassurance, of doubt and rationalization. There follow an aberration of the censorship, the inhibition of unwanted imaginative schemes, the disassociation

of affects from their initial objects and their attachment to incongruous yet related materials, the release of affective neural demands in dreams, and the functionally similar formation of screening memories. (*LI*, p. 220)

About the root of Scheler's *ressentiment*, Frings writes:

[*Ressentiment*] takes its root in equally incurable *impotencies* or weaknesses that those subjects constantly suffer from. These impotencies generate either individual or collective, but always negative emotive attitudes. They can permeate a whole culture, era, and an entire moral system. The feeling of *ressentiment* leads to false moral judgments made on other people who are devoid of this feeling. Such judgments are not infrequently accompanied by rash, at times fanatical claims of truth generated by the impotency this feeling comes from.

There are various kinds of impotencies from which, strangely enough, the very strength of *ressentiment* feelings well up. They can be psychic, mental, social, or physical impotencies, disadvantages, weaknesses or deficiencies of various kinds. (*SchR*, p. 6)

He continues explaining:

Feelings of resentment, however, are irritated by the *unattainability* of positive values that others represent. Therefore, the inner experiences with others and of himself are in constant disarray. There is always present in *ressentiment* a disorder of the heart or a "*désordre du coeur*." That is, *ressentiment* is a state of constant aberration from the order of values, from the order of feelings and of love in which acts values are first given, i.e., from the "*ordo amoris*" or the "*ordre du coeur*." (*SchR*, p. 6)

Reasoning about values cannot stop the emotive disorder to occur and continue. It might at best recognize the disorder when, for instance, a *ressentiment*-subject says, "There is something wrong with me." But this is very rare among those subjects, and it neither nullifies the experience of the disorder felt among positive and negative values, nor does it help to rationally recognize the higher values to be attained [...] (*SchR*, p. 6)

Impotence, the root of *ressentiment*, can be brought in relation to what Lonergan calls "moral impotence", which is the inability to free oneself from a morally bad habit. Both bias and *ressentiment* result in an reversal of values. As to Lonergan

man begins to rationalize, to deform knowledge into harmony with disorderly loves. (Lonergan, *Collection*, (CWL 4) p.26



And again Frings:

While the failure to realize a certain positive value, and while this continues to irk the *ressentiment*-subject, the feeling of *ressentiment*, to boot, also raises those values it indeed can realize; that is, those values that the impotency allows the *ressentiment*-subject to attain: (*SchR*, p. 9)

*Ressentiment* is not only a matter of the underprivileged. Many aspects of contemporary culture are due to a *ressentiment* of people who are very successful according to prevailing values but, because of their life style, they are almost required to limit developing more human qualities that make for a fuller life such as with family, the joy of art and literature, music, philosophy or religious studies. We should then not be surprised that attacks on the values of family, culture and religion are launched especially from this side. There is

a stealthy societal resentment creeping among those who lack fullness of personality but compensate their hollow selves by judging others by the quantity of their work and success, all independent of social stations. It is therefore false to assume that only socially disadvantaged persons can suffer from *ressentiment*. There is a tragic lack of love in society. (*SchR*, p. 12c)

The interpretation of a poem or a painting requires a different approach than the analysis of our mental operations. Scheler's sensitivity in discovering and his great skill in placing such things as poems and paintings within a frame of understanding is a valuable supplement to Lonergan's analysis of intentionality. Lonergan writes:

Where mind is experience, understanding, judgment; and heart is what's beyond this on the level of feeling and 'is this worthwhile?'—judgment of value, decision. Without feelings experiencing, understanding, judging is paper-thin. The whole mass and momentum of living is in feeling.

Feelings: there's a whole series of categories on them—to go into them would take too long. You get them in Scheler, and then von Hildebrand, in his *Christian Ethics*, distinguishing different kinds—different meanings of the word 'feeling,' different types. (Lonergan, *A Second Collection*, p. 220f)

We are aware of Lonergan's transcendental precepts that result from his intentional analysis. The first precept is: *be attentive*. We know simple examples, such as Lonergan's circle, in which all conditions can easily be noticed, which have to be taken into consideration in order to solve a problem. But what is the fulfillment of the precept *be attentive* in everyday life with all its inconsistencies and vicissitudes What an abundance of conditions; what a chaos of emotions! To *be attentive* in terms of Lonergan

also means to strengthen our sensitivity in detecting our feelings and of the art in interpreting them.

In conclusion then, in addition to a clear mental of cognitive philosophy, what is of equal importance is the role of our feelings in such areas as one's devotion to literature and to arts or working at being a good friend. That is why we need to be attentive to such thinkers such as Scheler and well as Lonergan is are great importance.