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THE EXPERIENCE OF VALUE. THE INFLUENCE OF SCHELER ON SARTRE'S EARLY ETHICS

abstract

Jean-Paul Sartre is often portrayed as a philosopher whose ethics would inevitably have subjectivist or relativist outcomes. Yet, even in Sartre's early works there are several stances that blatantly belie this image, relying rather on an objectivist conception of value that he notably draws from Max Scheler. The aim of this paper is thus to investigate the influence of Scheler's moral reflection on Sartre, arguing how it can represent an original and fruitful starting point to approach Sartrean ethics. To this aim, we will first report on and discuss some passages from Sartre's early works where this debt is most noticeable. Then, we will provide an overview of the Schelerean legacy, arguing how it represents for Sartre the very opening of the ethical issue addressable in phenomenological terms, avoiding the dead end of Hume's and Kant's more classical positions, while at the same time being consistent with other peculiar themes of Sartrean philosophy, namely existence and historicity.

keywords

Sartre; Scheler; Ethics; Existence; Phenomenology.

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1. Introduction

Most of the interpretations that have questioned the possibility of bringing to light a consistent ethical theory from Sartre's work in recent decades have largely concentrated on the notions of authenticity and bad faith or on that of engagement.[1] Such notions, in fact, would seem to reveal the one-sidedness – if not the uselessness – of reading Sartre as an author who rejected the theme of values altogether. On the one hand, this perspective has the undoubted merit of mitigating the stereotypical and sadly widespread reception of Sartrean existentialism as synonymous with nihilism or ethical relativism *tout court*.[2] On the other hand, however, such a recurrent emphasis on the aforementioned notions – repeatedly questioned by Sartre himself[3] to the point of almost completely renouncing the use of the term "authenticity", especially since the mid-1950s – has, perhaps unintentionally, obscured the theoretical complexity of the problems underlying his moral reflection. Indeed, Sartre's ethics is profoundly informed by his confrontation with various positions in the philosophical tradition, some more classical, while others contemporary to him. Among these, a prominent author, who in the 1920s was at first even more present in French philosophical culture than Husserl himself (Waldenfels 1983, cf. p. 36), is Max Scheler.[4]

In this article we intend to focus on Scheler's influence on Sartre and, in particular, on how some main tenets of his material axiology have been assimilated into Sartrean ethics, interestingly appearing in works devoted to much different themes. In this sense, we will try to show how Scheler's moral reflection translates into Sartre's question of "value-" or "moral qualities", which on the one hand allows him to ground ethics in experience, opening up a fruitful avenue of inquiry in this field to his eyes flawed by impasses, and on the other hand reconciles with other distinctive themes of Sartrean philosophy, namely existence and historicity. Through this reading, whose interest will be more markedly theoretical

1 Some of those who have done so are Bell (1989), Charme (1991), Santoni (1995) and Cooper (1999, Ch. 10). For a more recent work in this direction, see also Russo (2018).

2 A portrayal that popular aphorisms – such as Sartre's (1978) statement that "it amounts to the same thing whether one gets drunk alone or is a leader of nations" (p. 627) – have powerfully contributed to creating.

3 For Sartre's criticisms of his attempts to come up with an ethics see, among others, his interview with Michel Contat (Sartre, 1977, pp. 60, 74-75), "An Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre" (Silverman & Elliston, 1980, pp.233-34) or "Conversations with Jean-Paul Sartre" (De Beauvoir, 1984, p. 182).

4 Concerning Scheler's influence on French authors of the time, including Sartre, see Waldenfels (1983, Ch. I, Para. 2.b), Leroux (1994) and Agard (2011).

than philological, we hope to show that there are other ways – alternative to the overused ones of authenticity and bad faith[5] – to approach the body of Sartrean ethics that are both philologically legitimate and philosophically pregnant.

2. "Reading Scheler made me understand that there existed values..."

Forty years ago, an important critic like Spiegelberg could say he was struck by Sartre's ignorance of the phenomenology of value undertaken by Scheler, whose name actually appears in *Being and Nothingness*[6] only six times, labelled by Spiegelberg (1981) as "few insignificant references" (p. 105). Just two years later, the appearance of Sartre's unpublished works on morality completely ruled out this idea, providing evidence not only of his acquaintance with Scheler,[7] but also of a meaningful debt to him. One of the most important quotes testifying this debt can be found in *War Diaries* (written in 1939-40), where Sartre (1999) admits:

> reading Scheler made me understand that there existed values. Basically, until then, quite absorbed by the metaphysical doctrine of salvation, I'd never really understood the specific problem of morality. The "ought-to-be" seemed to me to be represented by the categorical imperative; and since I rejected the latter, it seemed to me that I rejected the former with it. But when I'd understood that there existed specific natures, equipped with an existence as of right, and called values; when I'd understood that these values, whether proclaimed or not, regulated each of my acts and judgements, and that by their nature they "ought to be": then the problem became enormously more complex (p. 88).

These few but extremely meaningful lines clearly indicate in what specific sense the encounter with Scheler represented for Sartre a veritable turning point. In fact, as he himself admits, Sartre was previously inclined to understand the issue of morality as phenomenologically pointless. Adhering rather confidently to Hume's law and, at the same time, identifying the normative sphere (i.e., what "ought to be") with the Kantian categorical imperative, he believed that rooting morality in "being-in-itself" (to use the lexicon of *BN*) was impossible or, worse, specious. Starting from these premises, the only remaining room for ethics would be the rhetorical one, where purely verbal formulations such as "ought", "must" or "shall" would be imposed on experiences in themselves autonomous from the morale sphere. In short, the idea underlying this argument is that *there is no such thing as moral experience* and, consequently, it would be neither reasonable nor possible to develop a *phenomenology of morality*.
To the dead end represented by these two positions, which for Sartre at first constitute (rather naively) the only alternatives in ethics, it is precisely Scheler's proposal that allows for an alternative path to be found. And this path, on closer inspection, represents for Sartre the very opening of morality as a problem that can be addressed in phenomenological terms, insofar as, just as "every kind of cognition is rooted in experience", then "ethics, too, must have its foundation in 'experience'" (Scheler 1973, p. 166). The issue with which Sartre is thus confronted is none other than the central thesis of Scheler's material axiology, namely that "there are *authentic* and *true* value-qualities [*Wertqualitäten*] and that they constitute a special domain of objectivities, have their own *distinct* relations and correlations" (*ibid.*, p. 15). It is

5 As suggested by Anderson (2002).
6 Henceforth referred to as "*BN*".
7 Sartre read Scheler in the early 1930s at the French Institute in Berlin, but – as he explains in *What is Literature?* – it was only the advent of the Second World War that compelled him to consider the possibility of an ethics irreducible to bare individual will (Sartre, 1988, p. 177).

then worth considering some passages from Sartre's work in which, somewhat unexpectedly, this perspective is effectively put to the test.

2.1. Moral qualities in Sartre's early works

In *The Transcendence of the Ego*, published in 1936, Sartre (2004a) already gives evidence of this when he writes:

> It is just as if we lived in a world where objects, apart from their qualities of heat, odour, shape, etc., had those of repulsive, attractive, charming, useful, etc., and as if these qualities were forces that performed certain actions on us (p. 11).

Not only does Sartre take account here of so-called "secondary qualities", such as smell or colour, but he even adds further, equally real and irreducible ones. It is extremely important to note from the outset how Sartre, in introducing this theme in passing, does not merely mention the existence of such qualities, but immediately relates them to the practical sphere: quite obviously, appearing repulsive leads one to move away, whereas looking attractive tends to bring one closer. Without dwelling too long on this point, which will be further addressed below, we would like to indicate even now how Sartre recognises in the above-mentioned qualities the capacity to *motivate* – and precisely in this resides their being *moral* qualities. Only three years later, this same theme would be taken up again in the famous and dense article on Husserlian intentionality, where Sartre (2002) speaks as follows:

> So it is that all at once hatred, love, fear, sympathy – all these famous "subjective" reactions which were floating in the malodorous brine of the mind – are pulled out. They are merely ways of discovering the world. It is things which abruptly unveil themselves to us as hateful, sympathetic, horrible, lovable. Being dreadful is a property of this Japanese mask, an inexhaustible and irreducible property which constitutes its very nature – and not the sum of our subjective reactions to a piece of sculptured wood (p. 383).

This time the focus seems rather to be placed on the *passive* character of the experience of moral qualities. The ironic reference to traditional mentalist conceptions of emotions and the term "subjective" put in quotation marks indicate Sartre's effort to insist that, where moral qualities are given, they are encountered as being in themselves. In contrast to the prevailing interpretation of Sartre as a philosopher of the pure subjectivism of value, passages such as the one just quoted suggest his attention also to the "*discovery*" of worldly moral qualities independent of oneself.
This same aspect would then be reiterated in 1940, when in *The Imaginary* Sartre (2004b) emphasised the intentional component of emotional states, in effect suggesting that, if an emotion is experienced, it must necessarily take place in a worldly correlate, which is *not* the emotion itself. In the author's words,

> the feeling of hate is not consciousness of hate. It is consciousness of Paul as hateful; love is not, primarily, consciousness of itself: it is consciousness of the charms of the loved person. To become conscious of Paul as hateful, irritable, sympathetic, disturbing, attractive, repulsive, etc., is to confer on him a new quality, to constitute him along a new dimension (p. 69).

These considerations are particularly interesting, since they witness a pursuit of the process of dementalization inaugurated by phenomenology and its transposition by Sartre to the sphere

of morality. Discovering moral qualities in the world means here insisting on the *experiential and not intellectual* nature of this encounter and, at the same time, definitively expelling the psychologistic prejudice concerning a presumed interiority of consciousness.[8] Thus, "hating another is just a way of bursting forth toward him; it is finding oneself suddenly confronted by a stranger in whom one lives, in whom one suffers from the very first, the *objective quality* 'hateful'" (Sartre, 2002, p. 383, emphasis added) – where "objective" has the double meaning of being *in re*, within things,[9] and of being non-arbitrary, not deliberately created.

2.2. Moral qualities in Sartre's Being and Nothingness

In addition to the occurrences in his early texts, Sartre gives ample evidence of taking the issue of moral qualities very seriously in his seminal work. Towards the conclusion of part four of *BN*, he indeed conducts widespread analyses of what he unequivocally calls "quality as a revelation of being". The basic idea is that just as being is structured as a world through the manifestation of potentiality and equipment,[10] so too it comes to phenomenalise itself also and precisely through qualities (Sartre, 1978, p. 600). Thus, it is only by engaging with a qualitative world – and not with a jumble of unrelated and meaningless entities – that consciousness inhabits being. Indeed, it is in these pages that Sartre develops what he calls a "psychoanalysis of things", devoting rich investigations to the perception of qualities such as sliminess, liquidity, stickiness[11] and to the emotion-laden reactions they can provoke.
Although only a few parts of *BN* are explicitly dedicated to the issue of moral qualities,[12] it is difficult not to notice how it in fact repeatedly appears in many other sections of the text and even in the discussion of some key concepts of Sartre's whole philosophical system. Consider for example the very notion of *nothingness*. As is well known, to introduce this question in *BN* Sartre resorts to the idea of "*négatités*",[13] i.e., what Husserl (2001) might have called unfulfilled expectations.[14] Alongside this, however, Sartre (1978) provides other cases where a "pre-judicative comprehension of nothingness as such" (p. 9) is given, namely that of *destruction*. Through destruction, he says, the intrinsic *fragility* of things – i.e., "a certain probability of non-being for a given being under determined circumstances" (p. 8) – is announced to us. The decisive point that Sartre intends to convey here is that nothingness is not a merely conceptual category, but something one has an actual and non-arbitrary experience of. Also, it is only against the background of such experience that one has an *immediate* understanding

8 It is no coincidence that the quoted passage appears precisely in a paragraph entitled "affectivity". A similar approach can be widely found in the important 1939 text on emotions (see Sartre, 2014, especially from p. 34 onwards). However, we will not discuss here the positions advocated in that work, since the overlapping between the question of values and moral qualities and that of emotion – albeit to some extent transpiring in the present article – would risk being misleading in the absence of more detailed analysis.

9 In this regard, one does not experience moral qualities as *relations* between self and object. As Scheler (1973) points out: "I directly experience the roughness, not myself, a thing and roughness as a way of relating us" (p. 243).

10 The reference is clearly to the Heideggerian notion of "*Zuhandenheit*". It might not be a coincidence that in the same paragraph (§15) of *Being and Time* where Heidegger (2001) introduces the topic of things as equipment, he relates it to that of "things invested with value" and asks: "What does 'value' mean ontologically?" (p. 96).

11 Reiterating how they "are as real as the world" and whose experience "has nothing in common with imagination" (Sartre, 1978, p. 600). It cannot be ruled out that Sartre inherited his sensitivity to this theme from Aurel Kolnai's (2003) "*On Disgust*" of 1929, as suggested by Didi-Huberman (2000, pp. 220-3), if not by Scheler (1973) himself when he discusses the qualities of "inviting", "attracting", "disgusting" and "repelling" referring to "nutritive value" (cf. pp. 245-246).

12 In addition to the one just mentioned, see p. 186 onwards.

13 A term coined by Sartre and retained in its original version in Hazel Barnes' translation of *BN*.

14 One of the most famous illustrations of *négatité* is that of Pierre missing at the *café* (Sartre, 1978, pp. 9-11). Another example with the same meaning is given in Sartre's autobiography "*Les mots*", where Mr. Simonnot is described as "absent in the flesh" at a party where he was expected (Sartre, 1964, p. 91).

of nothingness, whose *idea* is but a further abstraction.[15] Yet, by virtue of our foregoing considerations, it is quite easy to notice that Sartre's description of how we experience destruction is significantly accompanied precisely by an emphasis on moral qualities. For what is the "fragility" of being if not a moral quality?[16]

The same seems to be true and all the more so of *BN*'s other key notion, i.e., that of being. To cope with the difficulty in delineating this limit concept, Sartre attempts to make it more discernible precisely by describing it through moral qualities. Especially in the introduction ("The Pursuit of Being"), being is attributed an almost incalculable series of properties such as density, roughness, massivity, plenitude, compression, fullness, opacity, solidity and the like. As is evident, these characteristics, all of which have a strongly corporeal and touchable connotation, do not refer directly to something physical. Rather, through them Sartre again intends to suggest the experiences in which being as "in-itself" seems to become intuitable. Thus, instead of unsuccessfully attempting to portray an impossible non-subjective experience of being, he prefers to indicate experiences in which the independence and self-subsistence of being-in-itself are given by analogy in more tangible phenomena.[17]

Passages such as those just recalled allow us to underline at least two aspects. The first is that Sartre's regard for the problem of moral qualities is not episodic or confined to places in *BN* devoted to values or the psychoanalysis of things. Rather, as we have just observed, this question permeates the author's thought more transversally, crossing some of the most decisive reflections of the entire Sartrean philosophy. The second point is that through the discussion of moral qualities, Sartre seems to reveal his need to attribute a *pre-judicative status to value*. As Detmer (1988, pp. 135-6) sharply suggests, there would therefore be an important parallelism between the theme of nothingness and that of value. In fact, for Sartre the possibility of encountering nothingness in the world on the level of experience has the capital function, borrowed from Heidegger, of arguing its irreducibility to logic: it is not banally the adverb "not" that (surreptitiously) introduces nothingness in a linguistic act, but, on the contrary, it is only on the basis of the prelogical givenness of non-being that the particle "not" can in general make sense (Sartre, 1978, p. 6 ff.). Now, something similar seems to be said for the sphere of value. Experiencing specifically motivating moral qualities would thus not mean simply ushering in a new class of phenomena *ex abrupto*, but rather *providing moral discourse with an experiential foundation*. If this were not possible, moral judgements could be reduced to mere language-games, fictitiously introduced through modal verbs like "shall", "must", "should" or "ought". The very fact that Sartre dealt with the moral problem throughout his life seems to us a living witness of his refusal to dismiss this issue so roughly.

3. Scheler's legacy: the experience of value

Having discussed the various passages quoted so far, we can finally try to summarize and fix more precisely Scheler's theoretical contributions to Sartre.

First of all, Sartre learns from Scheler that, just as there is a phenomenal field of numbers as ideal and objective entities grasped by a certain kind of intentionality, similarly there is a phenomenal field of values, as "Value-qualities [...] are '*ideal objects*' as are qualities of colors and sounds." (Scheler, 1973, p. 21).[18] In addition, in accordance with the phenomenological

15 The debt to Heidegger's inaugural lecture in 1929, "*Was ist Metaphysik?*", is quite evident here.

16 As a further proof of this, Sartre (1978) adds that the fragility of a being makes it "precious" (p. 8).

17 Something very similar happens in the famous passage of the chestnut root from "*La nausée*". Here, in order to provide a literary sketch of contingency, Sartre (2007) – through the words of Roquentin, the novel's main character – likewise makes very extensive use of moral qualities, such as gentleness, abundance, tenderness, moldiness, bloatedness, obscenity, absurdity, gelatinity, softness, weakness (p. 104 ff.).

18 As Scheler himself points out (1973, p. 165), the term "ideal" should not be misunderstood here as synonymous

"principle of all principles" (Husserl, 1983, §§19, 24), namely that all knowledge must be traceable back to the presentive intuition [*gebende Anschauung*] from which it arose, values are given in intuition. This, however, does not have an intellectual character: "Value [...] does not deliver itself to a contemplative intuition" (Sartre, 1978, p. 38); rather, "*Wertnehmung*" – or "*Werterfassung*", as Sartre himself calls it (1992, p. 252) – is the grasping of values as tangible contents of worldly experience.[19]

A further heritage of the Schelerian lesson is the objective nature of values. This aspect, extensively argued by Scheler and in several regards, primarily depends on the fact that values are given as a content being-in-itself: just as it is intrinsic to the experience of any spatial object its irreducibility to the perception that grasps it, likewise "it is a phenomenological fact that in feeling a value, the value is given as *distinct* from its being felt [...]. For this reason the disappearance of this feeling does not cancel the being of this value" (Scheler, 1973, p. 244). In addition to this, they have an objective status because "*value-qualities* do not change with the changes in things" (*ibid.*, p. 18), just as they persist on the occurrence of changes in the feeling of the subjects who experience them too.[20] Moreover, their objectivity also depends on their intersubjective validity, since "it is of the *essence* of *moral values* as autonomous objects that are independent of the processes of their real comprehension to demand recognition from all" (*ibid*., p. 176).[21] These elements are all assimilated by Sartre, as evidenced by several passages in *BN*, such as where he says that "Value in its original upsurge is not *posited* by the for-itself [i.e., by the subject]" (Sartre, 1978, p. 94), thus weakening the claim that it would be the *activity* of consciousness that projects them into the world.

Finally, and this is perhaps the most important legacy, Sartre inherits from Scheler the thesis that "value-facts [exist] as *primordial phenomena* that do not admit of any further explanation" (Scheler, 1973, p. 252). This means that morality does not need to be grounded in other levels, since it is in itself foundational: the phenomenon of value is something irreducible and with which we are originally acquainted, that is, we are originally "engaged in a world of values" (Sartre, 1978, p. 38).

with the abstract. Consistent with the Husserlian approach, the phenomenal field of values is constituted by idealities in the sense that it "represents an objectively fixed set of general objects, sharply delimited by an ideal law, which no one can either add to or take away from" (Husserl 2008, p. 233).

19 Other than Scheler, Sartre may also have borrowed this idea already from *Ideas I*, the text from which he probably drew most on phenomenology, where Husserl (albeit in passing) writes: "this world is there for me not only as a world of mere things, but also with the same immediacy as a world of objects with values, a world of goods, a practical world. I simply find the physical things in front of me furnished not only with merely material determinations but also with value-characteristics, as beautiful and ugly, pleasant and unpleasant, agreeable and disagreeable, and the like." (Husserl, 1983, p. 53).

20 "The feeling-state of the ego that is connected with value-experience and the expression of the state may diminish to a zone of indifference *without* any diminution of this *value* or of the degree of the comprehension of this value or our beginning to dwell in it. Thus we can coolly confirm the value of an ability, even a moral value of an enemy, without enthusiasm and expression of it. Yet such value is *fully* given. The *value* can also remain constant before our eyes while our feeling-state and its expressions undergo manifold changes" (Scheler, 1973, p. 173).

21 The insistence on the objectivity of values should not, however, be misunderstood as implying their absolute existence independent of all subjectivity; it does not, indeed, violate the phenomenological principle whereby every object contains in its very conception the reference to at least a possible experience of it. As Scheler (1973) makes clear, "we do not accept an absolute ontologism, i.e., the theory that there can be objects which are, according to their nature, beyond comprehension by any consciousness. Any assertion of the existence of a class of objects requires, on the basis of this essential interconnection, a description of the kind of experience involved. In other words, according to their essence, values must be able to appear in a feeling-consciousness" (p. 265). For this reason, we disagree with Agard (2011, p. 27) when he suggests that Sartre's critique of the "spirit of seriousness", which "considers values as transcendent givens independent of human subjectivity" (Sartre, 1978, p. 626), would be addressed to Scheler.

3.1. Out of the dead end: Sartre's rejection of the positions of Kant and Hume

That values admit of no further explanation means, then, that any moral theory that does not start from them can only be derivative and artificial. This is the breaking point that Scheler's legacy yields in Sartre with the dead ends of Kantian morality, on the one hand, and that of Hume, on the other.

Against Kant, it is important that "one renounces this error of reducing the being of values to oughtness, norms, imperatives" (Scheler, 1973, p. 241), for it is the "ought" that is grounded in value and not the reverse; indeed: "Whenever we speak of an ought, the comprehension of a *value* must have occurred. [...] That a deed "*ought*" to be presupposes that the "ought" is grasped in the intention of the value of the deed" (*ibid.*, p. 184). This stance allows Sartre to account for the motivational poverty of Kantianism, namely of why the maxims that succeed in passing the formal test of the categorical imperative and thus are compatible with the moral law regularly turn out to be generic, impersonal and, therefore, ultimately unmotivating. From a Schelerean perspective, this paradox simply ceases to be so: if a duty does not motivate, it means that it is not a matter of value, hence that *we are not really dealing with a moral experience*. Conversely, if a duty motivated, it would be the value it conveys that did so, and not its uncontradictory nature in terms of universalised practical reason.[22]

Sartre's reaction to Hume and to his "no ought from is" is more complex, and this is because Sartre partially shares this thesis, even after the reading of Scheler. In 1943, for instance, he still maintains that "ontology itself cannot formulate ethical precepts. It is concerned solely with what is, and we cannot possibly derive imperatives from ontology's indicatives" (Sartre, 1978, p. 625). It follows that, if value has to be accounted for, its status is bound to be more ambiguous: "value has being, but this normative existent not have to be precisely as reality" (*ibid.*, p. 92), namely, "the being of value qua value is the being of what does not have being" and thus "Value is beyond being" (*ibid.*, p. 93).[23] The whole dispute with Hume lies in the meaning of the term being, since for Sartre "not having being" does not simply signify not existing or not taking part in reality. Quite the contrary, it is precisely nothingness, i.e., the virtuality that exceeds finite existence that is – as Sartre (2004b) says of imagination – "the implicit sense of the real" (p. 188). Nonetheless, value must come to manifestation, and this is where Scheler comes to the rescue: "as Scheler has shown – writes Sartre (1978) – I can achieve an intuition of values in terms of concrete exemplifications; I can grasp nobility in a noble act." (p. 93). In short, Scheler arouses in Sartre the need for a sensitive intuition of value, despite its having "a phantom being" (*ibid.*, p. 203).

Yet, this shift has enormous consequences insofar as, marking a definitive departure from Hume, value-qualities cannot be equated with secondary qualities, as colours or smells, since they rather possess the very specific capacity of *motivating*. For instance, the property of "being slimy" can induce a reaction of repel and the slimy thing, says Sartre (1978), "in the disgust which it inspires can be explained only by the combination of this physical quality with certain moral qualities" (p. 605).[24] Values thus not only arouse reactions or open possibilities in a generic sense, but they motivate, that is, they foster certain behaviours over

22 For a broader examination of Sartre's critique of Kant, see Linsenbard 2007.

23 Other passages testifying to this can be found when Sartre (1978) says that "Value derives its being from its exigency and not its exigency from its being" (p. 38) or when, a few years later, he (1962) would ask: "What is a value if not the call of something which does not yet exist?" (p. 35).

24 To this regard, Sartre will even go so far as to say of the slimy: "We shall call it an Antivalue" (p. 611), at least apparently hinting at Scheler's proposal of a hierarchical relationship between values (cf. Scheler 1973, Part I, chap. 2.3). However, as acknowledged by some scholars (Münster, 2007, p. 129), this is one of the aspects with respect to which Sartre reserves the most skepticism, in fact reflecting a more general French caution toward any enunciation of a hierarchy of values (cf. Leroux 1994, p. 337).

others, "as if these qualities – as said in one of the first passages we quoted – were forces that performed certain actions on us" (Sartre, 2004a, p. 11). This is why Sartre speaks of values as appeals to action latent in the world, as when he (1978) says that "values are sown on my path as thousands of little real demands" (p. 38).[25]

3.2. An ethics between history and existence

Sartre's existentialism is characterized by the reference to the unsurpassable particularity of existence, although this trait is at times overstated. Therefore, in antithesis to the abstractness of ahistorical universalism, for Sartre (1992) "Ethics is an individual, subjective, and historical enterprise" (p. 7). Yet, is not Scheler's material axiology, despite the legacy illustrated so far, openly at odds with this most fundamental instance of Sartre's?
While surprising, rather the opposite is true. Several of Scheler's passages testify, in fact, to his deep sensitivity to the themes of individual existence and history. As to this second aspect, for example, Scheler (1973) writes that the "variety of the types of moral ideals of life that we find in peoples and nations are by no means objections to the objectivity of moral values"; on the contrary,

> it is precisely because it belongs to the essence of extant values to be fully realized by only a variety of individuals and collective individuals and a variety of levels of concrete and historical development of these that the existence of these historical differences in morals is not an objection to the objectivity of moral values, but is on the contrary required by it (pp. 492-493).

Accordingly, the fact that values are encountered and known only at a given, i.e., finite, moment in time does not contradict their objectivity, as "the '*historicity*' of their comprehension (and the cognition of their order of ranks and laws of preferring) is as essential to them as is the historicity of their realization or their realization *in a possible* '*history*'" (*ibid*. pp. 493-494). In this sense, the objectivity of a value does not consist in its necessarily existing, but in the fact that its validity cannot otherwise be recognized intersubjectively and intertemporally *when* it appears and when it does so to a transcendental subject. Whereby, "It is therefore also possible that certain moral value-qualities will be comprehended for the first time in history, and that they will appear first, for example, in the feeling insight of a *single individual*" (*ibid*, p. 272).
This calls into question the other aspect of apparent incompatibility between Sartrean existentialism and Scheler's axiology, namely, individuality. With respect to this, Sartre maintains for example that the validity of any value must still be traced back to the subjectivity for which it is valid, for in the light of different projects or purposes a same value-quality may be either good or bad.[26] Here, again, Scheler's theory turns out to be unexpectedly consistent, as when he suggests that there can be "also the possibility of an evidential insight into a good whose objective essence and value-content contain a reference to an individual person" (*ibid.*, p. 490). To this regard, Scheler speaks of an "individual-personal value-essence", where "Essence [...] has nothing to do with universality" for it "is the foundation of both general concepts and intentions directed to particulars"; hence, "there are essences that are given only in one particular individual" (*ibid.*, p. 489). Indeed, he even introduces the only

25 As Anderson (1979) also holds, for Sartre "Values call for, or even command, action; their very being is in being a demand for realization" (p. 23).
26 For instance, concerning the sliminess we have already discussed, he says that "it is precisely within the limits of *this* appropriative project that the slimy reveals itself and develops its sliminess. From the first appearance of the slimy, this sliminess is already a response to a demand, already a *bestowal of self*" (Sartre 1978, p. 606).

seemingly paradoxical notion of a good that is objective but only in relation to the individual, namely, of a "good-in-itself-for-me", such that "this content places me in a unique position in the moral cosmos" (*ibid*., p. 490). In this manner, the objectivity of value does not dismiss the particularity of existence and of individual destiny, since values, even when hierarchized, "do not in themselves incorporate all possible moral values through whose realization the person attains salvation" (*ibid*., p. 492). In short, as for Sartre, for Scheler, too, there is an unrepeatability of existence – to which he refers through expressions with religious tones such as "call", "vocation", "mission" or "election" – that *must* be accounted for. Thus,

> Every moment of life in the development of an individual represents at the same time a possibility for the individual to know unique values and their interconnections, and, in accordance with these, the necessitation of moral tasks and actions that can never be repeated (ibid., p. 493).

In this perspective, shared by both Sartre and Scheler, values thus turn out to be neither universal to the point of being acontextual, nor particular to the point of being unable to make any claim to intersubjective validity; neither natural and eternally existing, nor segregated in a uniquely particular epoch and unattainable outside of it. Scheler's theory, then, seems to constitute the promise of a solution to Sartre's concern for a truly concrete ethics, that is, one capable of accomplishing a "synthesis of the universal and the historical" (Sartre, 1992, p. 7).

4. Conclusion

Needless to say, the framework we have tried to outline does not even remotely resolve the question of value in Sartre. Actually, it cannot be said to have exhausted even Scheler's sole contribution to him, nor the overtly problematic aspects that emerge from this legacy. Just to mention one of these, while both authors agree that value is not a psychological but an *ontological* issue, it is still rather problematic *what* its ontological status actually is. Indeed, on the one hand Scheler (1973) is quite clear in remarking that it is "necessary to reject the assertion that values 'are' not, that they only '*obtain*' [*gälten*]. [...] Values are facts that belong to a specific mode of experience" (p. 187); on the other hand, however, Sartre (1978) points out that "the being of value qua value is the being of what does not have being. [...] To take it as being is to risk totally misunderstanding its unreality and to make of it, as sociologists do, a requirement of fact among other facts" (p. 93). Sartre is thus reluctant towards the conception of value as a fact in the full sense, and this is because to understand it as a fact would render it contingent and deprive it of the unconditionality that, precisely by virtue of its unreality, makes it compelling; it would then be a mere "coefficient of adversity", part of the "situation" like other facts, so that action would be exercised *on* values and no longer *by reason* of them.[27] In short, for Sartre "the contingency of being destroys value" (*ibid*.).
Between the two authors, in sum, there are irreducible differences that do persist. In particular, in order to fully frame the meaning that value takes on in Sartre, it is inevitable to investigate the specific role it plays in relation to other key concepts in his philosophy – notably to action, imagination, possibility, lack and, ultimately, to reality as inhabited by the nothingness that human consciousness is.[28] Nevertheless, we think it

27 Though, to be fair, Scheler (1973) himself specifies that material axiology must not be misunderstood as a perceptual naturalisation of value: "Moral facts, as opposed to the sphere of meanings, are *facts of non-formal intuition, not* of sensible intuition, if by 'intuition' we mean immediacy of the givenness of an object and not necessarily a picturelike content." (p. 166).

28 In this sense, a question that, if not unresolved, remains at least ambiguous is the role that, for Sartre, values play in the constitution of reality. Sometimes, in fact, Sartre (1999) seems to suggest a founding function of values, as when

is evident in the light of the path taken so far that there is "no incompatibility between existentialism and a non-subjectivist phenomenology of values" (Spiegelberg 1981, p. 105), to the extent that some scholars have felt legitimized to speak even of an "ethical objectivism" in Sartre (see Detmer, 1988, p. 178 ff.). Hence, although this neither replaces nor excludes other more classical Sartrean themes, we believe that the recovery and deepening of Scheler's influence on Sartre is an operation of great importance for reasons not so much philological as theoretical.

In this perspective, indeed, not only is Sartre redeemed from the oversimplified portrait of a subjectivist philosopher with which too often he has been identified, but more importantly, are brought to light the complexity and rigor of his ethics, which takes its cue from a close confrontation with the debate of the time, especially in the phenomenological field. In this sense, we believe that the phenomenology of value derived from Scheler could be a fruitful starting point for re-reading Sartre in this direction, reassessing notions such as those of authenticity and bad faith with which his ethics has too often been considered to begin, but also to end.

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he writes that: "The object's value [...] is *truly* constitutive of the object" (p. 50). Other times, however, he seems to consider it as a sort of secondary quality, supervening on an already constituted matter, as when he (2004b) says of moral qualities that "when they disappear – as in the case of depersonalization – perception remains intact, things are not touched, and yet the world is singularly impoverished" (p. 69).

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