THE VALUES OF WAR AND PEACE: MAX SCHELER’S POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS

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Max Scheler’s contribution to the early development of phenomenology is second only to Edmund Husserl’s. What perhaps distinguishes Scheler’s early contribution is his willingness to examine phenomenologically social and political phenomena. Not only did this early trajectory lead him to develop a non-formal value theory, but it also enabled him to engage directly in the political problems of his time. Like many of his contemporary intellectuals, Scheler was an adamant supporter of German aggression during the onset of World War I, and he wrote many works during this time demonstrating the value and justification of the war. In only a few years’ time, Scheler’s position on the value of war shifted dramatically and he began to defend a position of peace and pacifism. The aim of this paper is twofold: (1) to clarify the early themes and influences in phenomenology that prepared Scheler for his analysis of war and peace; and (2) to illustrate how Scheler’s analysis offers the possibility of concretising the present experience of war and the possibility of peace.

Pre-World War I Germany was a country of two distinct personalities. It was, on the one hand, the Germany of Bismarck, the Germany of political might and ambition, a Germany of the sword. It was also the Germany of Goethe and Kant, a cosmopolitan Germany of reason and love of humanity, a country dedicated to peace. These two Germanys did not so much split Germany in two, as they expressed a living dualism in the people of Germany. German intellectuals were no exception, and while teaching, the great humanitarians and writers on behalf of peace became some of the most vociferous defenders of Germany’s aggressive posturing leading up to the Great War.¹ No thinker of this time more fully lived this dualism than Max Scheler.

During the final years of his life, Scheler would come to characterise this inner antagonism between the sword and the pen as the tragic, peculiarly German opposition between power and spirit, and he understood this opposition to be responsible not only for the Great War but also for the rising fascism that spread throughout German youth during the later 1920s. Scheler’s own life was the living embodiment of this antagonism, exemplifying both extremes. During World War I, Scheler wrote extensively in support of the war and in support of Germany’s higher moral and political obligation, which was used to justify it. He even held an official post in the office of propaganda for the war. Then, at the close of the war, his life took a dramatic shift, a shift he would refer to as something less than a religious awakening. Confessing his own moral failings, he wrote about guilt and repentance for the war, and attempted to show how the Christian ideas of community and love could serve as the most profound resource for a cultural and political rebirth in Germany. The pendulum of the antagonism between power and spirit had clearly swung to the other side, the side of pure spirit. Scheler’s political transformation, however, was not yet done. His philosophical interest eclipsed phenomenology and expanded into areas such as the sociology of knowledge, the philosophy of history, metaphysics, epistemology and, perhaps most importantly, philosophical anthropology. Each of these new projects provided a distinct avenue of thought for attempting to reconcile and ultimately unite the movements of power and spirit, a unification captured most perspicuously in the title of his essay, “The Eternal Idea of Peace and Pacifism.” Scheler’s final movement in thought was an outright rejection of his earlier thought.

Although Scheler moved beyond the limits of phenomenology proper, my interest in this paper remains phenomenological. Using Scheler’s descriptions, I seek to explore the manner by which war and peace can be understood as modes of disclosure. It is, therefore, not my intent to provide either a theory of the “just war” or a roadmap to peace. Rather, I wish to describe, to borrow a phrase from Scheler, the “genius” of war and the genius of peace. Curiously, the genius of both, as described by Scheler, is quite similar, attesting in part to the precariousness of political action.² There is, however, one important difference between these distinct modes of disclosure. Whereas war remains at the level of the possible, peace transcends, by virtue of its eternity, and reveals the possibility of the impossible, the realisation of


² Hannah Arendt perhaps best characterises this precariousness when she describes it as the distinction between the total annihilation of war and the emancipation of all mankind through revolution, determining the very existence of politics from the beginning of our history. See Arendt, On Revolution (New York: The Viking Press, 1965), 1.
that which has never been and that against which history and the present overwhelmingly speak. The idea of peace issues forth a call “from above” to transform the present conditions in such a manner that what ought to be can become a reality for the first time. What this shows is that the genius of war and the genius of peace are of two different kinds. Acts of war refract present conditions and necessity; acts of peace are revelatory acts, outstripping the present in light of future impossibilities. This difference of disclosure calls forth a radical difference in political responsibility, where acts of peace come to participate in, and are thus responsible for, the realisation of the good, the just and the right.

The Genius of War

The year 1914 was filled with vehemence if not prophetic declarations of not only the necessity but the brilliance of war. There was, for example, the 1914 Manifesto of the Ninety-Three German Intellectuals to the Civilized World, a mighty defence of Germany’s justification in declaring war, but also an exultation of the war as an advance of the highest form of culture. Other notable thinkers, including Thomas Mann, would follow a similar political path to Scheler, lending enthusiastic support for the war, but later regretting this early involvement. The sentiment of these leading intellectuals is perhaps best conveyed in the words of Scheler’s teacher and mentor, Rudolf Eucken, who wrote in August 1914 that “the war would ‘bring about the sweeping purification and edification of the soul.’”

The theoretical basis for such enthusiasm rested in two main lines of thought. First, there was the continued suspicion of the spread of Enlightenment ideas, particularly as they gave rise to a growing mechanism of nature and of social existence, to a radical sense of individualism over and against the bonds of Gemeinschaft, and to a spirit of capitalism that threatened to infiltrate all forms of human existence. The war would serve as a necessary form of resistance to this growing tide of Enlightenment ideas and once again demonstrate the unmistakable originality of the German people. The second strand was rooted in the long-standing heroic nature of war. Nineteenth-century philosophers such as Hegel, Trierzsche and James famously defended the irreducible value of war against such earlier thinkers such as Kant and Goethe. Eucken, for example, sought to describe the emergence of spirit out of life, and located the actions of war as one of the key elements. Not only would Germany be able to recapture its beginning, but it would also be able to ring in a new Germany by virtue of the heroic, creative powers of war.

Scheler would capture the sentiment of these two strains under the heading “the genius of war.” He wrote a series of essays during the early part of the war attempting to reveal this genius: Der Genius des Krieges und der Deutsche Krieg (1914), Europa und der Krieg (1915) and Der Krieg als Gesamterlebnis (1916). His intent was to show not only that Germany was justified in its aggression, but also that war was an essential element of human existence. These works on the value of war were, of course, not the only works to appear at this time. Scheler was also busy working on his more notable works, such as his magnum opus, Formalism in Ethics and a Non-Formal Value Ethics, and The Nature of Sympathy. It is only from our present perspective that these latter works seem to stand in contrast to the former. How could a person who wrote on the absolute and irreplaceable value of persons, of the original act of love and a genuine meaning of sympathy, also write on the positive value of war? Scheler may have been an extraordinary man of his time, but this apparent contradiction in thought was rather ordinary for that time.

Scheler’s approach to mending these apparently opposing strands of his thought was first to show that war is “natural” to the human being both as a vital being and a spiritual or cultural being. For both natures of the human being, war is a means of original growth. Scheler’s claim that the root of war lies in the nature of life itself rests upon his notion of life. Scheler is perhaps best known for his work on the person and spirit, but it is his defence of the vital sphere of existence that fuels much of his early criticism of capitalism and then his later criticisms of the mechanisation of nature. In his essay on ressentiment, Scheler claims that at the heart of the spirit of capitalism is a reversal in value, a promotion of utility over vital values and thus a relativising...

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4 Rudolf Eucken wrote one work dedicated primarily to the virtue of war, Die sittlichen Kräfte des Krieges (Leipzig: Gräfe, 1914). He wrote numerous works on the problem of the emergence of spirit from life, most notably, perhaps, Life’s Basis and Life’s Ideal: The Fundamentals of a New Philosophy of Life, (tr.) A. G. Widgery (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1912).

5 Scheler’s Genius des Krieges was, according to the historian Jeffrey Verhey, the most popular and most reviewed work during this time. See Jeffrey Verhey, The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth, and Mobilization in Germany (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 128. Hereafter referred to as MMM.
of all life to its use value. It is in this essay that Scheler first gives voice to life as an independent movement with its own integrity and course of development. He writes, for example, that life is “a tendency to grow, unfold and develop.” Later, in his metaphysics, Scheler further refined his understanding of the movement of life, a movement independent of the movement of spirit, as an urge seeking a maximisation of reality and qualitative forms, and minimisation of strenuous energy output.

Life as development and growth serves, for Scheler, as the “true root” of war. By life, in this context, Scheler means the life of the people, the people as merely vital beings. It is but the natural expression of life for the state to grow and become. The conflicts that arise between living beings or, rather, the vital urges of the state, are a mere consequence of different vital beings expressing their distinct types of unfolding and development. (PPS, 31) World War I was not simply a matter of Germany naturally expanding itself, but of the conflict of a multitude of expanding states that included Germany as well as England, Russia and the other countries of Asia. At the level of the vital sphere of human existence, war and the Great War were merely the expression of life, its unfolding, expansion and self-defence.

To counter the thought that war was somehow contrary to life, that the evolution of life would reveal the fruitlessness of war and that pacifism was the evolutionary end of life, Scheler further argued that the tendency of life is an overcoming of life. Again, referring back to the essay on resentment, Scheler locates sacrifice in the movement of life itself. (VUW, 76) Life overcomes itself by sacrificing itself. Through sacrifice, life becomes more than life; it becomes the “beautiful life.”

With respect to war, the sacrifice of life is for the sake of culture. (PPS, 41-42) According to Scheler, war’s vital significance is not fully grasped until it is seen as a critique of the dominant ethos of capital-ism, Darwinian evolution, the mechanisation of nature and individualism; these reductive strands of culture posed a threat not only to German culture but to life itself. War is the expression of life sacrificing itself so that it may emerge renewed, thus allowing the greater cultural spirit of Germany to survive. When Scheler dedicated his writings on war to the “soldiers in the fields,” he did so in a show not only of solidarity but also of admiration of their sacrifice, a sacrifice not afforded to Scheler himself, the older intellectual.

This theme of a defensive posturing against the annihilating forces of capitalism and Eastern orthodoxy is taken up again when Scheler turns to the cultural significance of war. As was the case with the vital sphere, showing the spiritual significance of war is intended to show the sense of a culture is given a new expression that is unique, but which assumes and takes for granted its developed process. In times of peace, there is no conscious reflection on who or what we are as a culture, which carries on in its stability in its present form of development. Peace functions as a mode of forgetfulness, whereas war functions as a reminder, a reawakening of a culture. Awakening this resource provides the inspiration to create anew according to that which a culture is.

The notion that at the origin of any culture lies a resource from which a culture continues to draw is a notion Scheler develops at greater length in his later writings on the sociology of knowledge. For Scheler, every culture is itself its own Zugang, its own unique access to the meaning of the human being. This mode of access is irreplaceable and with the destruction of a culture comes the end of that access, an access and thus expression of human being that will never be again.

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7 Max Scheler, Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die Materiale Wertethik. Gesammlte Werke II, (ed.) M. Scheler (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1966), 283. Hereafter referred to as FEMW. See also Scheler, VUW, 75.

8 Max Scheler, Schriften aus dem Nachlass, Band II Erkenntnislehre und Metaphysik. Gesammlte Werke XI, (ed.) M. S. Frings (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1979), 186. Hereafter referred to as SN II.

9 Max Scheler, Politisch-Pädagogische Schriften. Gesammlte Werke IV, (ed.) M. S. Frings (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1982), 35. Hereafter referred to as PPS.

10 Max Scheler, Schriften aus dem Nachlass, Band VI Varia II, Gesammlte Werke XV, (ed.) M. S. Frings (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1997), 161. Hereafter referred to as SN VI.

War as a defence of the unique and irreplaceable is the second manner in which war takes on cultural and spiritual significance. Scheler strictly equated the war against England with a war against the imperialism of late capitalism. He even went so far as to say that the battle against the “motherland of late capitalism” was itself a war against capitalism in general. (PPS, 54) Hence, war is not merely an act of physical aggression, but a form of cultural critique that was not possible earlier. (PPS, 89)

In later writings, this identification of England with late capitalism and the understanding thereby that England, not Germany, was the aggressor, is a position that Scheler would come to regret. He would, in fact, admit to his own *resentment* with respect to England and to the need, therefore, to repent of his actions during the war. Nonetheless, at the time of the war, it was this idea of war as a defence of one’s unique culture that served both to reveal the inherent value of war and to render Germany’s actions as just. The war against the imperialism of late capitalism—a form of imperialism whose ethos is to reduce all value to utility—had, for Scheler, a liberating force. (PPS, 53) Germany would once again be able to create itself through a non-mechanistic and non-utilitarian form of life. A war with England was the opening of new possibilities for what Germany could become.

According to the hierarchy of values, there is one type of value that is higher than culture and spirit. It is the value of the holy. In his defence of the war, Scheler ascends to the holy, and at this level we discover, according to Scheler, the true genius of war.

As Scheler had to show that war was an essential aspect of the human being, he also had to show that war is not contrary to, but an expression of, God’s being. Two points are important here at the outset. First, “God is,” as Scheler writes, “also God of power, is all powerful.” (PPS, 86) Scheler never reverses this position regarding the relation between power and war. In his later politics, Scheler regards power as the means by which to realise value, and thus power participates ultimately in the becoming of the holy. The question is not whether power is in itself immoral, but whether the power drive tends toward a humanisation or a bestialisation of power. The same is meant here in these wartime writings when he locates power in the nature of the divine.

The second point concerns the problem of death. Scheler commits himself to the position that death in a just war is a death without hate and even a death with an attitude of the highest respect. (PPS, 56) What Scheler has in mind here is the Christian idea of the love of one’s enemy as the love of one’s neighbour. Scheler’s prejudice in favour of the heroic meaning of war is nowhere more pervasive than in these passages, where violence is described as an act of love and respect. In her essay on the *Iliad*, Simone Weil shines a convincing light on the nature of violence in war, an act that can be nothing other than a death wish and can produce only radical depersonalisation. Scheler eventually follows suit and reverses his position on the possibility of a loving act of violence. Yet, for Scheler to reveal the holy significance of war, he must demonstrate how acts of violence are acts wherein the other is disclosed as a person.

To be clear, Scheler’s suggestion that war and violence do not run contrary to God’s love does not mean that any war or act of violence is an expression of God’s love. Only the just war can be understood as an expression of love. Crucial, then, is the nature of disclosure in the just war. War is not creative of love, nor of justice. War, according to Scheler, does not possess a creative power, but, rather, reveals what is already present. (PPS, 276) What is present, always already present, is the *a priori* obligation that the good shall be. (FEMW, 100) In the context of war, the good is the call of justice to which one must respond. This turning and taking up of the task of justice and the good is, for Scheler, the meaning of living the moral life. War is that which awakens us from our slumber so that we can hear the call and thus take up the task of the moral life once again. (PPS, 12) War is thus nothing less than “the storm of the moral world.” (PPS, 70)

Only persons can respond to the call to justice; that is, the realisation of justice in the world is a personal task. To awaken from the slumber that settles over a people during times of peace means, then, that they awaken to themselves as more than mere animals, directed by self-interested drives, to themselves as persons. (PPS, 89) The act in war that most profoundly discloses the person as more than the sum

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13 For Scheler, there were two conditions that a war must meet for it to be just. First, the threat must be imminent and serious; and second, the war must correspond to the genuine collective will of the people. (PPS, 101) World War I met both conditions, at least for the Germans. As I discuss later, Scheler never fully gives up the idea of a just war and even in his final phase, wherein he advocated peace and pacifism, he still held to the position that the use of force was at times necessary and thus justified.

14 Weil writes, for example, “A man stands disarmed and naked with a weapon pointing at him; this person becomes a corpse before anybody or anything touches him.” Simone Weil, The Iliad or The Poem of Force, (tr.) M. McCarthy (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1991), 5.
of natural motives is the act of sacrifice. The willingness to sacrifice one’s will to live leads directly to the measureless resource that is nothing other than God. (PPS, 99) Residing, then, in the necessary sacrifice entailed in war is the genius of war, a returning to the deep and universal resource of God.

Scheler develops this religious awakening and moral turning at the level not merely of the individual, but of the collective unity of the people. For Scheler, war is the strongest community builder in history. “And it is in this sense that I call war the greatest aid of the light, holy and beautiful genius of love.” (PPS, 280) The reason Scheler gives war such a designation has nothing to do with the creation of a mass mentality, a form of collectivity of which Scheler remained adamantly critical. Rather, it concerns the manner in which the call to justice is heard—that is, not as an individual, but as a member of a community. War is fought for one’s country. When I am called to sacrifice for a higher justice, I am called uniquely as a person of a people. Every such person is called in a unique and irresistible manner, but the call nevertheless is given to the we; I am called with my people.

As we proceed up the hierarchy of value, the obligation to realise the positive values becomes ever more individual. (FEMW, 501) Thus, at the level of the holy, I am called absolutely such that no one could take my place. When the call takes on the collective nature that it does in war, the same process takes place, but in respect to the absolute uniqueness of a people. Hence, war expresses the realisation that I am not a member of just any community, but of this one, I am a person within the German people. In times of peace, writes Scheler, we focus only on the individual trees; we are concerned primarily with our own interest, and take the community as a whole for granted. War allows us to see the forest through the trees, so to speak. (PPS, 276) As a people taking up the call to justice, this forest becomes ever more distinct. My interests are placed in their proper moral context, i.e., as an expression of the good of the whole.

Scheler placed much hope in the collective nature of the experience of war. He went on to speak, in his wartime writings, of a sense of Europe as a growing people in solidarity that would arise from the war. In fact, he understood the war as a declaration of an either/or: Either Europe emerges from this war a greater, more unified moral force, or it is destroyed. There was, at this time for him, no third option. Scheler would go so far as to write that World War I was the first collective experience of humanity as whole, the first world collective experience. (VEM, 104) Yet he also admitted that this collective experience was an experience of hate. (PPS, 287) His wartime writings had aimed to direct this new collective possibility away from hate in a manner that would reveal the underlying love, even holy love, directing all people. History had something different to say on the matter, and, thankfully, so did Scheler.

The Value of Peace

Despite his own and Germany's failure with respect to the war, Scheler’s social-political thought remained deeply immersed in the real politics and social climate of Germany. Like many of the German people, Scheler quickly grew suspicious and discontented with the war—though, like many of his fellow intellectuals, he was not as quick as the “people” of Germany to change moods. Saddled not only with the crushing humiliation of losing and having to take full responsibility for the war, thereby bearing the guilt for the millions dead, but also with the great economic depression, inflation, debt and high unemployment, Germany fell into a deep cultural crisis. Nowhere was this crisis more apparent than in the dysfunction of the short-lived parliamentary government of the Weimar Republic. Scheler would spend the remainder of his life seeking a way out of, and warning of the catastrophic dangers percolating within the crisis.

The Great War, as all wars inevitably do, had failed to achieve what it had set out to do. In the period immediately following the war, Scheler took up what would be his most religious thought and writing. His social-political writings at this time focussed primarily on the value of the Christian meaning of community. Through a collective act of repentance, Germany and Europe as a whole would be able to begin anew, to experience a type of cultural and social rebirth. Scheler did not wish to make the German government Catholic, but rather, wanted to draw upon the genius of the Christian notion of community to provide Germany with the resources with which to rebuild and overcome.15

During this time, he had relatively little to say on the genius of war. His thought is preoccupied with the problem of recovery after the war. In many respects, this period marks the swing of the pendulum, so to speak, to the other side of the bipolar personality of Germany, to the side of the dove. It was a time of healing, of recovering a lost unity and greater European community. Scheler’s reported religious awakening

15 Scheler wrote many essays on the possibility of renewal through the Christian idea of love and community. See, for example, ”Die christliche Liebesidee und die gegenwärtige Welt” (VEM, 355–401) and ”Vom kulturellen Wiederaufbau Europas” (VEM, 403–99).
at this time did not lead to any significant transformation in his political thought. He continued to work within the same political paradigm. His aim was still to recapture some lost origin of the German people, but now as a recapturing of the Christian sense of community through repentance, rather than as a lost sense of culture through the act of war.

Scheler’s true political transformation did not take place until the early 1920s. Politically, there were new problems to face: a failing democracy, a rise in fascism, growing political apathy and an ever greater threat of a second, and much more violent, world war. Yet, it is his work in the sociology of knowledge and, more importantly, philosophical anthropology that brings about the transformation in Scheler’s political thought. His central or key discovery at this time was the interplay between the real and spiritual factors of history. For Scheler, spirit is powerless, at least in the sense that it is unable to create and realise anything in the world on its own. Rather, spirit depends on its parasitic relation to the real factors for its realising power. The only inherent power spirit has in relation to the world is to guide and channel the real factors according to deeper, personal values such as culture and the holy. It is not my intent here to develop Scheler’s dualistic conception of the human being and the human world. I wish to focus only on one aspect of the relation between spirit and the real factors, namely, the spiritualisation of power, one of the three basic real factors.

Scheler’s essay “On the Eternal Idea of Peace and Pacifism” was intended as the second part of his larger work, _Politik und Moral_. It is significant that his treatment of peace should follow his exegesis on political theory. Politics, according to Scheler, is and will always be a question of power. Hence, peace is never achieved by ridding the world of power. Contrary to the thought of liberal pacifism, at least as Scheler understood it, the aim of politics is not to expunge relations of power from human existence, but to transform them. Power is a fundamental life drive, a basic expression of the vital being of human being. As the spiritualisation of this basic life drive, politics is a real factor of human social and cultural coexistence. The first part of Scheler’s late political work was to show how the drive to power is transformed by deeper cultural values and thus how power functions as the realising factor of these values. In the second section, Scheler’s attention turns to the manner in which an “eternal” idea, an idea that has yet to be realised, can and does function in the movement of human history. Thinking the idea of peace within the context of his blossoming philosophical anthropology leads Scheler to reverse his earlier position on the genius of war.

In order for Scheler to disaffirm his earlier defence of war and of German aggression during World War I, he had to rethink four fundamental positions: (1) War is “natural” to human existence; (2) war is a rebirth and resurgence of a culture; (3) war creates unity; and (4) a just war is a holy war, a collective act wherein a people are called to the good. It is particularly the latter three points that describe the so-called genius of war. Scheler changes his position on all four points and thereby denies that war has any inherent value. He does not, however, go so far as to advocate what he calls instrumental pacifism. For reasons I will discuss below, the practice of pacifism to settle matters of war remains, according to Scheler, untenable. This is not, however, because of the genius of war or military action. The reason lies in the real factors of the present world. Pacifism in any form is untenable simply because the world is not yet ready, i.e., has yet to be fully spiritualised in accord with deeper personal values. War is an unfortunate fact of the present world, but it must not be and, more important, it should not be. The idea that war ought not to be is a total denunciation of his earlier wartime position. A credible rejection of the genius of war rests on his ability to show that peace is indeed an eternal and positive value.

A defence of the eternal idea of peace begins by showing that, despite a history of war and violence, neither war nor violence is an inherent quality of the human being. In his earlier defence of war, Scheler argued that war is a natural expression of life. Life, or rather the life drives, are ever expansive movements, movements that inevitably meet resistance. In his later work, Scheler retains this basic definition of life, describing it as the basic _Drang_ or urge that is life itself. What changes is that he situates this basic urge within the drama and development of history. All life, according to Scheler, passes through distinct movements. As an individual life moves through adolescence into adulthood and then old age, so, too, does humanity. At the level of the social, each phase is distinguished by the dominance of a particular life drive. Early in a culture, the reproductive or sex drive reigns supreme, and hence social existence is dominated by the family. The second stage sees the rise of the power drive and, consequently, the rise of power politics in the form of the nation-state. Finally, the drive of acquisition and nutrition comes to dominate, giving rise to the dominance of the economic, the phase in which we live, an age dominated by capitalism.16

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16 DWG, 41; see also Max Scheler, _Schriften aus dem Nachlass, Band IV Philosophie und Geschichte. Gesammelte Werke XIII_, (ed.) M.S. Frings (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1990), 131–32. Hereafter referred to as SN IV.
These stages unfold, for Scheler, according to a lawful structure, which he refers to as the law of the power drive. (SN IV, 93) Each of these three stages of history—the familial, power politics and the economic—is itself a result of a change in the object of power. At the outset, the object of power was other human beings and human groups, and hence power was expressed as power over people, as an expression of violence. As the life form of humans matured, the object of power turned to nature, first organic and then inorganic nature. In this phase, humans work cooperatively and collectively to end the suffering imposed upon them by the natural world. What we find, then, according to Scheler, is a tendency in life that moves from the mastery over humans to a mastery over "things." There is thus, at least for Scheler, a law of steadily decreasing violence in history. It is unclear, as Scheler remarks, where Germany in 1926 stood on this spectrum of decreasing violence (SN IV, 94), but that such a tendency exists in life is clear.

Important to note here is that this lawful development is the development of life and is not the result of any spiritual influence. Life proceeds in this way regardless of the different ideas and values that may arise in history. The influence of spirit in the developmental course of life is expressed in the particular manifestations of these different phases. For example, power politics, as well as the economic, can take many different forms. According to Scheler, nothing shows this point more dramatically than the differences in the development of the East and West, each of which has developed very distinct techniques with which to deal with suffering, whether caused by other persons or nature. Nonetheless, each broader cultural movement still experiences the stages of life. Scheler’s philosophy of history is an account of how spiritual ideas and values have been realised through the law of the power drive. Ideas and values do not move history, but rather determine the form it takes through its natural development.

There is a fourth stage of human development, which Scheler called the world age of balance (Ausgleich). This fourth stage would come about by the balancing of different cultures and world views. Each and every culture has developed its own distinctive techniques with which to deal with suffering. A balancing of these techniques would bring about a balancing of extreme conceptions of how to deal with suffering. By combining and integrating different ways of living, a new possibility of life, a type of new beginning for humanity, would be introduced. Consequently, a new human type would emerge. Rather than the familial, the political or the economic type, a more general type, or Allmensch, emerges. (SS, 151) Such a type—and it is unclear what this type means—would introduce a new form of life, and the development of life would begin again, anew. If such a balancing were to occur, and if such a type were to emerge—and these are big ifs—politics, understood as the art of weaving together fairly and peacefully the interests of the people, would ultimately no longer be necessary. (SN IV, 56) Only from the vantage point of history do we gain the perspective with which to see that violence and war are not natural to human beings. History thus far may have been a history of violence, but the human species is not a static or fixed form. Humanity is rather the “task of history and perhaps its result.” (SN IV, 91) Its past does not determine what it is or can become, and only shows that it will become something different.

Scheler’s rejection of war as natural to the human being only suggests that life tends away from violence. It does not show that humans ought not to engage in war. That peace is a good and consequently ought to be requires a different type of demonstration. Here we must appeal to spirit, or rather, the personal dimension of existence, for a moral defence of peace. Scheler had earlier justified the war based on its genius, by which he meant that it was a vehicle for the realisation of deeper spiritual values.

Scheler remained committed to two of his earlier points. First, every culture springs from some ingenious, essential, originary insight into the nature of things. All subsequent insight, thought and reason live within this original insight, which opens up a world in which all are fellow members. Second, every insight, and thus every culture, is absolutely unique and fundamentally irreplaceable. When a culture ceases to exist, access to that world is lost. During the Great War, Scheler used this fact to argue that Germany was simply defending itself against the cultural imperialism of England and Russia.

What changed for Scheler was his thinking of origins. Like life, spirit enjoys its own independent course of development. This development proceeds according to a certain style of being that is introduced by some original insight, and is then further stylised through the acts of a people. Cultural growth, however, does not take place by a returning to or reawakening of some forgotten origin. Rather, it happens through the individual and collective acts of a people. These acts take up the original style of a culture and creatively transform it into a particular person’s or generation’s style. The origin does not lie in the past and hence it is not a matter of returning to it. Present actions are already living out the beginning. The origin is always already present. It is not a matter of jarring ourselves out of some cultural slumber, but

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17 Max Scheler, Späte Schriften. Gesammelte Werke IX, (ed.) M. S. Frings (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1976), 145–70. Hereafter referred to as SS.
of recognising that one's present actions are responsible for the future course of a culture. Taking responsibility means, then, to act in such a way as to give expression to one's shared cultural style, never repeating what has taken place before, but taking this style up according to one's own person.

To use Scheler's own terminology, his earlier position suffered from a type of cultural pride. According to Scheler, pride is a condition rooted in fear and insecurity. Expressions of pride such as nationalism come about by virtue of some felt weakness. In response to this weakness, a people is compelled to defend its borders more vociferously and belligerently. (VUW, 23) Scheler's later notion of the world age of adjustment appeals to a sense of cultural humility, an openness to cultural difference, a willingness to learn from what the alien culture has to offer. The virtue of humility, contrary to Nietzsche's criticisms, is a show of strength. (VUW, 25) A humble person is open to the alien because it constitutes not a threat, but an opportunity. Openness assumes a deep-seated confidence. (VUW, 70–96) The resentment Scheler expressed toward England and Russia had its roots in fear and envy. It had nothing to do with Germany. If Scheler had been confident in Germany during this time, the cultural differences between it and England and Russia would not have been perceived as a threat. There may be differences that may not be able to be balanced or reconciled, yet these differences would not threaten a confident culture. Only a culture in crisis would believe itself endangered.

Cultural growth finds its resources in a sense of both collective responsibility and cultural humility. The orientation of growth is directed to the future, not the past. A culture, therefore, is a dynamic orientation toward the new, toward that which is other. War is a stultifying force. Even in the case of a defensive war—a type of war that Scheler still maintains is necessary and justified—a culture is secure within its borders and turned inward. Genuine, spontaneous growth happens only during times of peace, when a people are not required to defend themselves, but are, rather, free to experience what is other. A culture is not a wellspring from which many generations may draw. It is a resource that must be fed, cultivated and nurtured by a people with the spiritual freedom to think and experience new possibilities, possibilities that do not exist strictly within the limits of one's world view.

Scheler's notion here of a people bearing the responsibility for a culture through their collective and social acts leads further to his rejection of the genius of war. The dominant theme of his wartime writings was the process of unification that takes place for a people during a time of war. In his later writings on peace, Scheler returns to this theme again, reasserting his earlier conviction that war does indeed have a unifying force. He adds, however, an amendment to this idea. Namely, the types of unifications that are created through violence and war are always short-lived. (SN IV, 88) By contrast, culture has its own unifying force, a force that builds a much stronger bond and founds deeper collective unities.

The downgrading of the genius of war in Scheler's thought closely parallels what the German people had experienced during the war. There was, undoubtedly, a great show of enthusiasm by many people for the war early on. It lasted all of a month, August 1914. In the bigger cities, crowds gathered spontaneously to rejoice and sing the the Prussian song, “Deutschland über alles!” These celebrations moved the Kaiser himself to proclaim:

> From the depths of my heart I thank you for your expressions of your love, of your faithfulness. In the battle now lying ahead of us, I see no more parties in my Volk. Among us there are only Germans, and if some of the parties in the course of the past differences turned against me, I forgive them all. All that now matters is that we stand like brothers, and then God will help the German sword to victory. (quoted in MMM, 65–66)

This moment of German cultural unity took on a mythical character and was continually referred to throughout the war as a way in which to recover a lost unity and to bolster enthusiasm for the war. Ernst Troeltsch wrote of this moment:

> Under this incredible pressure German life melted in that indescribable wonderful unity of sacrifice, brotherhood, belief, and certainty of victory, which was, and is, the meaning of the unforgettable August. (quoted in MMM, 130)

The German government would continue to appeal to August 1914 until the end of the war. But it was a short-lived experience, seeming to prove only that enthusiasm “was real when the war was not.” (MMM, 125)

Scheler himself admits to being captivated by the early enthusiasm. This might explain why he ignored his own work in the Formalism and the Nature of Sympathy on the various strata of human unities. In this work, Scheler maintains a distinction between the masses or the herd,
and the collective person. Both the Kaiser’s and Troeltsch’s descriptions of that August day speak to the type of unity found in the masses. All differences melt away and the people become as one. In his descriptions of the collective person, Scheler maintains that there is solidarity, but it is unrepresentable. This means that the individual persons of a collective person retain their individuality. Curiously, Scheler makes this point in his review of Johann Plenge’s book, *1789 und 1914. Die symbolischen Jahre in der Geschichte des politischen Geistes*. Here, Scheler is critical of the individual personalism that lies at the basis of solidarity, a sense of the individual lost in the social that Plenge supports. (PPS, 592) His criticisms of Plenge anticipate his later support for the idea of peace. His hope had been that the war could produce the type of personal solidarity he was developing in his other, philosophical writings.

What later became clear to Scheler is that a genuine transformation of social existence only takes place “from above.” The move from, for example, the tumultuous unity of the masses to the deeper bonds found in culture is not a gradual move prompted by the more impersonal forms of coexistence. A move to deeper, more personal forms of coexistence and even solidarity is motivated by the deeper spiritual values of the person. No social phenomenon was more persuasive of this fact, for Scheler, than the rise of fascism in Europe and, in particular, in German youth. Scheler understood fascism as a type of “Über‐sublimierung,” a repression of spirit in favour of life. (SS, 66) Discontent with the decadence of modernity, fascism turned to violence as a creative power. Although Scheler shared many of the concerns about cultural decadence in Europe, he recognised that the violence cultivated by fascism and German youth would lead not only to the destruction of politics and the rise of the despots, but ultimately to unprecedented death and destruction. The way out of the crisis in modernity could only be through the solidarity found in the personal dimension of human existence, and this could take place only through a greater embrace of culture and spirit.

Scheler added little new with respect to the relation between war and culture. Much of his later criticisms of war can be found in his earlier thought; what changed is a matter of emphasis. Rather than war as the greatest force binding communities and creating culture, he writes of the relative power of war. What marks the decisive break from his earlier thought is his conception of the divine. Implied in his conviction that spirit is powerless is a God that does not have the power to create, a non-creator God that depends on the world to realise itself. God remains the God of justice and goodness that Scheler invoked during the war, but now the values of justice and goodness are themselves caught up in the process of becoming. Human action, the realising factor of spiritual values, is no longer regarded simply as defending justice and goodness, but as the very manner in which these values come to be. The consequence of this changed conception of God for the problem of war and peace is nothing short of dramatic. As we have seen, Scheler justified war and aggression on the basis of the theory of a just war, a theory by which war acquired a holy significance. Under the conception of a becoming God, any act of violence or war is considered a failure, humanity’s failure to fully realise the deeper spiritual values. Although certain acts of violence and war can be justified on instrumental grounds, they are now placed in the context of a call to transform the world such that war becomes unnecessary. A becoming God that realises itself in and through the world means that the world must change, that history must not determine the future course of humanity and, most profoundly, that our current actions are responsible for a world in which peace is not a real possibility, in which war still exists. The only trace of the holy in war is a negative one: war shall not be. From this trace, a call arises: I shall act in such a way that peace is no longer a mere idea, but reality.

Scheler’s growing discontent with the Catholic Church was perhaps most precisely expressed in his initial sketch of his proposed philosophical anthropology, titled *Die Stellung des Menschens im Kosmos*. From a self-described philosophical perspective, he situates religion in the all-too-human *Drang nach Bergen*, the urge to conceal. (SS, 69) When we take seriously the metaphysical experience of wonder, *thaumazein*, and the question, Why is there something rather than nothing?, we discover that the ground of being is dynamic and in a state of eternal flux. The meaning of being, the meaning of God, of the world and the human being have yet to be determined, and there is no clear sign of what they now mean or will mean in the future. Such an open-ended future and indeterminate meaning of the ground of being

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18 In fact, Scheler would describe at least four different social strata or levels of community: the masses, the life-community, society and the collective person, which includes the state, culture and loving community. See his *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie: Die Deutsche Philosophie der Gegenwart. Gesammte Werke VII*, (ed.) M. S. Frings (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1973), 105–10.

19 Scheler first develops this notion “from above,” in contrast to “from below,” in a work titled *Soziologische Neuorientierung und die Aufgabe der deutschen Katholiken nach dem Kriege, Politisch-Pädagogische Schriften, Gesammte Werke IV* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1982), 373–472. He takes this theme up again in an essay “Prophetischer oder marxistischer Sozialismus?” *Schriften zur Soziologie und Weltanschauungslehre. Gesammte Werke VI*, (ed.) Maria Scheler (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1963), 259–72.
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is unsettling, if not frightening. Rather than live through this uncertainty and dynamism, humans attempt to conceal the flux with a fixed conception of the divine; or in the words of Dostoevsky's character Ivan—channeling Voltaire—in the Brothers Karamozov, a work I shall return to later, "If there were no God, he would have to be invented."

Resisting this urge to conceal requires, according to Scheler, great courage. It requires not a rejection of God, but rather the willingness to take responsibility for the becoming of the divine. Religions that conceal the becoming of God and sever the relation between this becoming and human activity are irresponsible. It is no coincidence that Scheler's most concise statement of this new conception of the divine comes in the form of a footnote to his work on peace and pacifism. For peace to be a real possibility, Scheler must contest the religious notion that the earth is a fallen place and that peace can be found only in a world infinitely distant from this one. To cite Scheler at length:

Clearly, for any kind of peace that is the opposite of war, the concept of peace, as a metaphysical and religious value, becomes ever more meaningless the more the religious fate of the human being is mislaid in a "beyond [Jenseits]" of this world and the more God and world are thought as two substances: God as entirely and eternally perfected, and thus peace, while the world is essentially filled with strife and war.... We reject this "beyond" and "this side," these two substances, and further the concept of the absolute, all-mighty, good and wise God as the ground of the world. The ground of the thing [Dinge] is becoming-being, and is in solidarity with the world as history. It can thus not be "perfect peace" in God in so far as it is not in the world. In God, there exists an original tension between spirit and urge. We are neither "slaves," "servants," nor "God's children," but rather friends and fellow combatants with respect to peace that God and world have in solidarity. The self-realization of God does not take place with world history, without the history of the human being. The world is "manifestation," objective "appearance of its eternal ground," and the relation between world-ground and the world is not one of creator to created. (SN IV, 89, footnote)

A conception of two distinct worlds or substances conceals the relation of solidarity that exists between God and history as well as between God and the individual human being. The courage to stand upon a shaking ground is the courage to accept responsibility for the condition of the world today and to take action in order to change it. Peace is a marker of the course of humanity. War is not a sign that the human being is fallen and that this world is destined to violence, but rather a sign that this world is not yet what it can and should be.

Scheler's notion of a becoming God certainly raises more questions than it answers, and his premature death prevented him from completing his philosophical anthropology and metaphysics.20 There is one point, however, that is certain. The turn to the more speculative sciences was not a turn away from practice. While hard at work on his speculative metaphysics, Scheler took an ever more vigorous political stand, lecturing across Germany not only on peace and pacifism, but also on the dangers of the growing political crisis that threatened to bring about a second world war. These lectures served as the foundation for his courses in his new appointment at the Frankfurt school.

The First World War was also a call to action and, in defence of God's justice, it was heard as a divine call. For whom, however, do we act? In order to defend German aggression, Scheler had to appeal to some sacred idea of Germany, an idealised original notion, upon which to found a renewed national pride. Scheler was guilty, here, of concealing the fragile and shaking ground upon which Germany, and all cultures, stand. Germans were called to act for the sake of Germany. In only a few short years after Scheler's death, Germany and the world would discover the unimaginable horror such rhetoric could incite.

The call to act always comes from above, from an insight that sees what ought to be rather than what has been. Above are the deepest spiritual values, and peace, Scheler declares, is one of these. In fact, he describes peace as uralt, as the originally primordial. (SN IV, 79) All action is a response to the obligation that these deeper values place upon us as persons. The good shall be, even if it has never been. When the negation or opposite of these values take form in the world, we are called to destroy them. Because we live in a world that is not fully spiritualised, we are called to take military action. Yet this action always carries with it the additional call to act in such a manner—and always in such a manner—that such action shall never again be necessary. Solidarity with a becoming God means that neither our conscience nor our hands will ever be clean so long as political battles are drenched in blood. The co-responsibility entailed in the sense of solidarity with God does not mean that specific actions of mine are directly responsible for evil in the world. Rather, it means that we...
must ask a more radical question: Have I loved enough so that such hateful and violent actions are possible in the world? (FEMW, 526, fn.)

This call to love fully is identical to the type of love that Dostoevsky examines through Father Zossima, another character in his Brothers Karamazov. Father Zossima is Dostoevsky’s response to the nihilism embodied in the character of Ivan, mentioned above. Because of the meaninglessness of the world, a world in which innocent children suffer, Ivan rejects the world and chooses to leave. Father Zossima, however, takes the suffering of innocent children as a call to love the world, to participate in the world more fully.

Brothers, do not be afraid of human sin, love man in his sin, also, for his likeness of Divine Love is indeed the summit of love upon earth. Love the whole of God’s creation, both the whole and each grain of sand. Each leaf, each sunbeam of God, love it. Love the animals, love the plants, love every object. If you love each object you will also perceive the mystery that is in things. Once you have perceived it, you will begin untiringly to be more conscious of it with each day that passes. And at last you will love the whole world with an all-inclusive, universal love.21

Although Scheler’s political transformation with respect to the value of war and peace rests upon a new conception of the divine, the transformation itself is philosophical, not religious. It concerns the nature of the obligation to act. The call to act still comes from above. Yet it is no longer grounded in an ideal being, an ideal people or possibility. There are no values in themselves, only the beings that bear them. The call to act springs thus from the devaluation or demeaning of particular beings. We are thus called to act for peace, to realise peace on earth, because persons and other living beings still suffer from violence. The call comes from above, above this world that has known only violence and war. In solidarity with God and the becoming

21 Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, (tr.) D. McGuff (New York: Penguin Press, 2003), 412–13. As a side note, Dostoevsky remained a strong advocate of war throughout his life. Joseph Frank writes, quoting Dostoevsky in the final years of his life: “War has ‘the finest and most sublime consequences’ for the people themselves because war ‘makes everyone equal in time of battle and reconciles the master and the slave in the most sublime manifestation of human dignity—the sacrifice of life for the common cause. The landowner and the peasant were close to each other on the battlefield of 1812 than when living on some peaceful estate in the country.” Joseph Frank, Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time, (ed.) M. Petrusewicz (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 743.

world, we are called to act and hence to love more deeply as the contrast between what is and what ought to be increases. Peace discloses its genius by refusing to let the past determine the future and by demonstrating that love stubbornly persists, even in the most horrific of times.

Conclusion

Spiritualisation is the process by which peace becomes reality, and it is the notion that best characterises Scheler’s later thought. Placed within the context of a becoming God and world, it is also to be understood as the process wherein the human being fully realises itself. My focus in this paper has been on the process by which the human being realises itself as a political subject, as possessing the power to direct and ultimately transform the political. Politics is undeniably a matter of power—power over people. It is also a question of possibility, of making possible. Political subjectivity is the consciousness of one’s responsibility for what is and what might be possible within one’s political landscape. When humans become active political subjects, they determine, rather than are determined by, what is possible. Becoming a political subject means that a person must take responsibility not only for what is to come, but also for what has been. For Scheler, taking responsibility for a past drenched in violence and war begins by taking action to render war no longer a real or necessary possibility.

The idea of peace is an eternal reminder of what we as humans that share a world could be. This remembering functions as the opening of future possibilities, situating the person, rather than the state or its institutions, within the making of history. This remembering is also a re-calling, re-calling us to ourselves as actors who act for the sake of justice and goodness. If the rhetoric and propaganda of World War I has taught us anything, it is that the call to act can have horrific consequences. For this reason, the call “from above,” which issues from the values of peace, goodness and justice, cannot spring from some mythic conception of a people or a country, but only from the suffering and genuine welfare of each and every person. Scheler was not immune to the intoxicating force and meaning of war. History shows that most of us are not, which gives us all the more reason to proclaim the eternal idea of peace.

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