The Belief in Intuition: A Politico-Philosophical Reading of Henri Bergson and Max Scheler

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Accessibility
THE BELIEF IN INTUITION:
A Politico-philosophical Reading of Henri Bergson and Max Scheler

A dissertation presented

by

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The Belief in Intuition:
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Abstract

This dissertation examines the ethico-political implications of Henri Bergson and Max Scheler’s belief in intuition. Unlike many later philosophers, and against various predecessors and contemporaries—from idealists (ancient and early-modern), to neo-Kantians, Freudians, Marxists, pragmatists, and positivists—they believed that there is a human faculty, beyond reason and sensibility, that gives us access to a privileged kind of knowledge, namely “intuition.” The latter provides knowledge about something that is both deeper and more complex than matter, but still empirical; something given in experience, but not only through the senses. Their appeal to intuition in that sense—our capacity to turn to “the things themselves” as they are given in experience—accounts for their belonging to what in philosophy is normally known as phenomenology.

Through a close reading of their texts, this dissertation shows, in the first place, that the belief in intuition led, in each case, to a conception of individuality—or, more specifically, of personal uniqueness—as the acknowledgement of inner diversity, which nonetheless does not negate the reality of the person as an agent; hence, their so-called “personalism.” In Bergson, this means the articulation of a notion of the “inner life” as something that exists in time, always in flux, changing, and heterogeneous. It is further shown how this conception of individuality relates, in turn, to Bergson’s phenomenology of agency, which—against Kant’s rationalist conception of practical reason—constitutes what I have called a “phenomenology of hesitation.” According to
it, the oscillations of action in time and space are duly accepted as a constitutive trait of moral character. Moreover, it is argued that his conception of agency—founded on a non-sovereign will, and aided by habit and improvisation—is better endowed to deal with chance, contingency, and with our lack of control over the future.

In Scheler, for his part, our faculty of intuition is exercised through a hierarchy of emotions, which gives us access to a corresponding hierarchy of values. The dissertation shows how, for him, individuality is realized through our ability to discriminate between different nuances of emotions and values, without reducing any one of them to each other. Further, it explains that such a conception of individuality leads to distinctive notions of both autonomy and sympathy. The former presents a challenge to Kant’s principle of publicity, since it maintains that being responsible does not mean begin able to publicly justify the maxim of our actions, but depends rather on our capacity to listen and respond to the singularity of the voice of conscience. The latter presents a challenge to the Enlightenment sentimentalists, since it maintains that “true sympathy” consists in the capacity to understand the feelings of others, without however feeling as they do. Thus, Schelerian sympathy offers, or so the dissertation argues, distinctive protections for individuality against the socio-political threats proper to mass society.

Finally, this work examines the model of authority that corresponds to their respective notions of exemplarity; that is, the kind of authority that lies in a person, whose example has some moral claim on other people. Bergsonian and Schelerian exemplarity is similar in important respects to Max Weber’s conception of charismatic authority. However, Weber’s relativism about values, and his Kantian-inspired skeptical approach in social science, yield a notion of personality that is
“minimalistic,” or—as people would normally say today in political theory—“unencumbered.”

In contrast, Bergson and Scheler’s ideas on personal authority hold the promise of accounting for an encumbered or complex self, without therefore renouncing the aspiration to individuality and freedom contained in Weber’s examination of charisma. More specifically, it is argued, their insights suggest a way in which authority can be consistent with freedom—or perhaps can even contribute to our freedom and to the development of our personality.
Acknowledgments

I want to thank my dissertation committee, Richard Tuck, Michael Rosen, and Danielle Allen. Richard Tuck read multiple versions of every chapter of this dissertation, and in our discussions throughout these years, he oriented me with his critical eye and knowledgeable mind, and encouraged me with his warmth, humor, trust, patience, and curiosity. Michael Rosen’s advice and support were key to this project: his reading suggestions provided critical orientation, and the European Philosophy Workshop, which he hosts every year, constituted a welcoming and stimulating venue to present my work, both at the beginning and towards the end of the process. Danielle Allen gave me very helpful and timely advice on how to structure and present my ideas. My work, both formally and substantially, has benefited greatly from her rigorous reading and her wide-ranging approach.

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I take this moment to acknowledge Cecilia Zenteno, Roberto Ponce, Azucena Rojas, Chiara Superti, and Natalia Gutkowski for being like an extended family in Cambridge; Marcela Talamás, Adriana Ortega, Mónica Maccise, and Sandra López for being both a personal and a professional community for the last nine years; Francisco Cantú, for sweetening my graduate-student years with music, phone calls, books, and travels; Gema Santamaría for (among many other things) taking care of me the day I landed in the U.S. to start the Ph.D., and for making her apartment in New York a home for me during my first five years here; José Cruz for being with me as my oldest, indispensable, friend; and Daniel Aguirre for having greatly raised my standards of neighborliness, and for his company during the past year.
Finally, I thank my family, which is big and comprises multiple sources of affection and good wishes. However, most of all, I am grateful to my mother and father, Cecilia Altamirano and José Luis Alfaro, and my sister and brother, Mónica and José Luis. Their love and support allowed me to start and finish the dissertation. I dedicate my work to them.
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Abbreviations

Works by Henri Bergson


Works by Max Scheler

R  Ressentiment, trans. William W. Holdheime (Milwaukee, Wis.: Marquette University
Press, 1994).


Introduction

In 1973, Hannah Arendt wrote that Henri Bergson was “the last philosopher to believe firmly in ‘intuition’.”¹ In 1975, a reviewer writing for *The Review of Metaphysics* said of a book on Max Scheler, that the contribution which the author intends to make “to the complex question of absoluteness and relativity in ethics […] can be made only if there is a prior acceptance of Scheler’s philosophical belief in intuition. That, however—the reviewer adds—is a belief which few English and American philosophers share.”² Therein lies the original motivation for this dissertation: to see what it means and entails—ontologically, ethically, politically—to entertain such a belief. What follows, will explore that question with respect to ideas about the self, agency, and authority.

Before addressing those issues, one should ask first the following question: What does intuition mean in the context of Bergson’s and Scheler’s philosophies? In order to see its distinctiveness—and thus, the interest in studying it—it might be useful first to distinguish what they mean from at least two other ways in which the term “intuition” is regularly used in moral and political theory. The first one refers to the idea of “moral intuition,” often invoked in the context of the Rawlsian method of “reflective equilibrium.” In this sense, our “moral intuitions” are our “considered judgments about particular instances or cases,” which we will then revise, in reflective equilibrium, in light of the principles and rules that we believe are at the bottom of

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those judgments. The second one, refers to a position in ethical theory, normally known as “ethical intuitionism,” according to which basic moral propositions are self-evident, such that they can be known without the need of argument.

None of these corresponds to “intuition” in either Bergson’s or Scheler’s sense. In both the Rawlsian and the metaethical contexts, intuitions refer either to judgments (propositions about the moral character of a particular action, e.g., action ‘x’ is right, because it is an instance or application of principle ‘y’), or to our capacity to perceive such a propositional content. Now, for the authors that we will be studying here, intuition is, first of all, a human faculty, distinct from both reason and sensibility. This faculty, in turn, addresses something that is neither rational nor sensuous. In the words of Bergson which Arendt refers to in the quotation above, intuition aims at something that, being ineffable and immaterial, “slips away” at the philosopher’s attempt to see it and grasp it.

Against idealism (ancient or modern), and against the empiricism and materialism of the Enlightenment, Bergson and Scheler see intuition as the key to something that is both deeper and more complex than matter, and still empirical; that is, something given in experience, but not only through the senses. Hence, the title of Bergson’s first book, Les données immédiates de la conscience (in English, “the immediate data of consciousness”), and Scheler’s tag for what is given in intuition: “das materiale Apriori” (what is material and a priori, at the same time). Their appeal to intuition in that sense—the turn to “the things themselves” as they are given in

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experience—accounts for their belonging, to some extent or another, to what in philosophy is normally known as phenomenology.⁵

Now, such an appeal to intuition has often been identified with irrational, essentialist, or romantic perspectives, turning it into the likely seed of potentially violent perspectives—especially when transferred into ethical or political debates.⁶ That the connections between intuition and violence are plausible—and, indeed, historically true—is something that cannot be denied.⁷ However, beyond the always complex, often surprising, and undoubtedly revealing history of ideas, the treatment I give here to both Scheler and Bergson will yield different, more nuanced results. Through a hermeneutical approach to the texts, I offer a politico-philosophical reading which shows that intuition, in their sense, translates into a conception of the self based


on “inner multiplicity,” and a conception of freedom that—superseding the focus on the sovereignty of the will—becomes allegedly more capable of coping and coexisting with things such as hierarchy, uncertainty, and otherness.

Seen from the perspective of political philosophy, their so-called “personalist” perspective results in a critique of the liberal self—one that, however, is also contrary to various presuppositions and concerns present in both sentimentalism and romanticism.\(^8\) Just like the more anthropological and cultural strands of the Enlightenment (and similarly to the contemporary communitarian critique of liberalism), Scheler’s and Bergson’s accounts developed holistic and relational notions of the self. However, they both emphasized individuality and uniqueness, in a way that would not be completely foreign to (some versions of) liberalism.\(^9\) As we will see, the cornerstone of their respective reflections about the self is a “deep” or “dense” conception of the person, whose \textit{uniqueness} turns it into the eminent site of experience, and whose central faculty is, again, not reason nor sensibility (material or moral), but intuition.

More broadly speaking, Bergson and Scheler had several common “enemies”: a formalistic philosophical background, dominated by Enlightenment rationalism and Hegelian


\(^{9}\) Their approaches are also different from contemporary virtue ethics, although, in my opinion, they do have some overlap. In Scheler’s case see, for example, Eugene Kelly, “Revisiting Max Scheler’s Formalism in Ethics: Virtue-Based Ethics and Moral Rules in the Non-Formal Ethics of Value,” \textit{The Journal of Value Inquiry} 31, no. 3 (September 1, 1997): 381–97. Kelly says that even if Scheler’s ethics “is still a reflection of the Aristotelian foundation of an ethics of virtue,” the former emphasis on the person, and his rejection of “the Aristotelian notion of the human \textit{telos} and its situation in the \textit{polis},” mark important departures from the ancient theory of virtue (393). In Bergson’s case, the connection to virtue ethics can be fruitfully explored, I think, through the notion of habit. See Mark Sinclair, “Is Habit ‘The Fossilised Residue of a Spiritual Activity’? Ravaisson, Bergson, Merleau-Ponty,” \textit{Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology} 42, no. 1 (2011): 33–52; Melanie White, “Habit as a Force of Life in Durkheim and Bergson,” \textit{Body & Society} 19, no. 2–3 (2013), 240-262; and David Bissell, “Agitating the Powers of Habit: Towards a Volatile Politics of Thought,” \textit{Theory & Event} 15, no. 1 (2012).
idealism; a religious background dominated by pantheism; and an emerging materialist social science dominated by associationist psychology and evolutionary biology. At the political level, they resisted both the individualism and the collectivism that characterized capitalistic and socialist ideologies respectively. Against all those “depersonalizing” currents, both authors—seeking to overcome the division between subject and object—tried to keep the perspective of the former, that is, the subject (which, however, in Scheler’s words, becomes much more than just a privileged “object among objects,” (F, 375)), without therefore renouncing the reference to truth, reality, or objectivity. These are, in turn, according to them, given uniquely to a person through intuition.

Yet, the centrality of intuition must not suggest the idea that it exhausts the philosophical resources that both Bergson and Scheler make use of. A further feature of their works, one which I hope to capitalize on here, is the interdisciplinarity of their approach: writing at a time when disciplinary boundaries did not yet exist as we know them today, they took themselves to be engaged in an intellectual and spiritual enterprise that now would find its place in the overlap of philosophy, psychology, anthropology, sociology, theology, and natural science. From the perspective of today’s academic landscape, this feature offers, I think, the possibility of connecting different spheres of knowledge in different and refreshing ways.

The obvious complication of this enterprise is that, as I mentioned before, what is given in intuition is said to be “ineffable.” Therefore, any attempt to examine it discursively will surely run into some problems. These complications might be mitigated to some extent by the fact that perhaps today, 45 years after Arendt’s and the reviewer’s assessments quoted above were pronounced, the disbelief in intuition is not as thorough as it was then.\textsuperscript{10} Still, it is fairly

\textsuperscript{10} Moral realism, as present, for instance, in philosophers like Charles Taylor, is an important example to the contrary. I will address this connection in the following section.
widespread.\textsuperscript{11} Thus, the requirement for a more constructive reading of these authors (and, of course, of this dissertation) is, at least, not to repudiate in principle the idea that there is a distinct human faculty of intuition, and that—if paid sufficient attention to, if adequately trained—it can enrich reality in ways that neither concepts, nor matter (and, with it, passions, instincts, and drives) can.

Now, of course, the usual question is then, why Scheler and Bergson? There seem to be other authors who, especially after World War II, recovered some of the insights that I am interested in, and who, moreover, have been fruitfully studied in connection to political theory. Some examples are Hans-Georg Gadamer and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. I think there are good reasons to go back to these authors. First, consider that, even if today they are not part of the more mainstream philosophical canon, both Bergson and Scheler were, in their own time, widely influential, and in many ways key figures within philosophical, sociological, cultural, and political debates of the first half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. The poet Paul Valéry referred to Bergson as “the last great name of the history of European intelligence.”\textsuperscript{12} His ideas had a far-reaching impact in philosophy and the arts at the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, both in France and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{13} Moreover, his fame was not limited merely to intellectual and artistic circles: he

\textsuperscript{11} That is true, at least, for the more analytic approach in contemporary political theory.


became “the mundane hit of Parisian high life,” and presumably caused one of the first traffic jams in Broadway Avenue in New York, as “well-dressed auditors” wanted to arrive at his lectures at Columbia University.

Bergson served as a French diplomat after the First World War, but his influence in politics was widespread much earlier. Despite Bergson’s personal democratic and liberal convictions, his ideas had plenty of contemporary illiberal sympathizers (and, as I said before, many of them markedly violent) on both sides of the political spectrum. His influence reached anarchists, syndicalists, and communists (most famously George Sorel in France, but he also had considerable influence in Italy and Britain); Catholics (Charles Péguy, Emmanuel Mounier, and Jacques Maritain, through whom he became an considerable influence behind the Christian Democratic Movement); anti-colonialists (Bergson was a key inspiration for Léopold Sédar Senghor, first president of Senegal, and more generally for the Négritude movement in its resistance to French colonialism and racism; similarly, Bergson served as inspiration for Muhammad Iqbal, the main intellectual and spiritual figure behind the movement that created

14 George Steiner, “Mystic Master,” The Times Literary Supplement, February 28, 2003, http://www.thetls.co.uk/articles/private/mystic-master/. Steiner goes on: “The grandes dames dispatched their valets [to Bergson’s lectures at the Collège de France] to secure seats. No lecture-hall was spacious enough to accommodate the throng.”

15 Tom Quirk, Bergson and American Culture, 1.


18 See bibliography cited above in note 7.


Pakistan from the British Indian Empire);\textsuperscript{21} nationalists (José Vasconcelos and Charles de Gaulle—the latter was a great reader of Bergson, and explicitly interpreted his leadership in a Bergsonian light);\textsuperscript{22} and, finally, fascists (think of Mussolini’s cultural politics).\textsuperscript{23}

Scheler, for his part, even if less widely influential than Bergson in the English-speaking world, had a significant impact during his own life, both in Germany and in other parts of Europe.\textsuperscript{24} Heidegger referred to him as “the strongest philosophical force in Germany, nay, in contemporary Europe, and even in contemporary philosophy as such.”\textsuperscript{25} Scheler is considered one of the most original contributors to phenomenology in the early twentieth-century,\textsuperscript{26} in metaphysics as well as moral and social psychology, and one of the pioneers of the so-called “philosophical anthropology,” an intellectual current that springs directly from the personalist outlook that I described above.\textsuperscript{27} According to one scholar, “the whole argument between

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{21} Souleymane Bachir Diagne, \textit{Bergson Postcolonial: L’{é}lan Vital dans la Pensée de Léopold Sédar Senghor et de Mohamed Iqbal} (Paris: CNRS, 2011),
\item \textsuperscript{22} De Gaulle said, in full Bergsonian spirit: “By what sign do we ordinarily recognize the man of action, who leaves his mark on the events into which fate throws him? Isn’t it because he embraces a more or less long succession in an instantaneous vision? The greater the share of the past that he includes in his present, the heavier the mass he pushes into the future so as to weigh on the events in preparation: his action, like an arrow, moves forward with a strength proportional to that with which its representation was bent backwards.” (Quoted in Stanley Hoffmann and Inge Hoffmann, “The Will to Grandeur: De Gaulle as Political Artist,” \textit{Daedalus} 97, no. 3 (1968): 843). Cfr. De Gaulle’s ideas presented in this quotation with what I call below “Bergson’s alternative theory of value,” (chap. 1, pp. 53-66). Kévin Buton, “Usages de Bergson dans Le Fil de L’Epée de Charles de Gaulle,” \textit{Annales Bergsoniennes VII}, 259-284; and Patrick Romanell, “Bergson in Mexico: A Tribute to Jose Vasconcelos,” \textit{Philosophy and Phenomenological Research} 21 (1960): 501-513.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Contemporary scholarship on Scheler has been advanced mainly under the auspices of the Max Scheler Gesellschaft and, in the English-speaking world, by the Max Scheler Society of North America.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Martin Heidegger, \textit{The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 50.
\item \textsuperscript{26} See Sebastian Luft and Søren Overgaard, \textit{The Routledge Companion to Phenomenology} (New York: Routledge, 2012), chap. 3
\item \textsuperscript{27} See Martin Buber, “The Philosophical Anthropology of Max Scheler,” \textit{Philosophy and Phenomenological Research} 6, no. 2 (1945): 307–321; Karl-Siegbert Rehberg, “Philosophical Anthropology from the End of World War I to the 1940s and in a Current Perspective,” \textit{Iris} 1, no. 1 (2009): 131–152; and Jerome Carroll, “‘Indirect’ or
\end{itemize}
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[Heidegger and Cassirer] before, in and after Davos raged around the status of philosophical anthropology […]. Not only was philosophical anthropology the explicit theme of one of Cassirer’s lectures in Davos, but his other lecture was on Max Scheler, the spiritual-metaphysical founder of philosophical anthropology as a philosophical approach.”

Moreover, philosophical anthropology remains very much alive today in critical-theory circles, and in debates about identity politics, collective intentionality, and joint action.

Scheler was also the main founder of the “sociology of knowledge” in Germany, whose later continuation by Karl Mannheim, among others, sparked an important debate between the more idealist (Alfred Weber) and the more materialist positions (e.g. Max Horkheimer) within German sociology. He was an important interlocutor for significant cultural and political figures at the time, such as Walther Rathenau and Konrad Adenauer—it was the latter who invited him in 1918 to join the faculty of the research institute for the social sciences in


Cologne. Scheler was also one of the major influences for some of the intellectual and spiritual Catholic leaders of the past century: Romano Guardini and Karol Wojtyla (Pope John Paul II).

While today there are stimulating analyses and a lively scholarship interested in bringing both Scheler and Bergson back into philosophical debates (more so for the latter, at least in the English-speaking world), neither of them is part of the basic canon in political philosophy. Given that the authors are underexplored, in a context where yet there is enthusiasm and expertise in the field, the conditions are favorable to make a fruitful contribution to these debates.

Finally, as part of my effort to frame the discussion that follows, in the next section I will briefly situate the study of Bergson and Scheler—both early and powerful voices within the phenomenological movement—in the context of political philosophy today. I will do this through a comparison with one of the most important contemporary phenomenologists: Charles Taylor. The contrast with Taylor—as we know, a central figure in political philosophy for the last half century—will allow me to present the moral and political perspectives that both Bergson and Scheler open up regarding individuality and human agency, in relation to Taylorian themes such as language, identity, and authenticity. After that, I will conclude this introduction with an overview of the chapters of the dissertation.


33 Among the recent scholarship that I have found most helpful as I develop my own reading of the authors, are the works by Alexandre Lefebvre, Donna Jones, Richard Vernon, Frédéric Keck, Stephen Schneck, Philip Blosser, and John Nota.
Personalism vs. Authenticity: the disagreement over language and identity

Scheler and Bergson’s defense of personal uniqueness resembles in significant ways Taylor’s ethics of authenticity. Like Taylor, they contest the Enlightenment ideal of the sovereign and autonomous subject, emphasizing instead a “thick” conception of the self, always “encumbered” with its past, its future, and its surroundings. Both were inscribed in a reaction against the psychologizing tendencies in philosophy at the end of the 19th century, which—consistent with what Taylor identifies as the “Hobbes-Locke-Condillac” paradigm in language theory—had a mechanistic and associationist view of the mind. 34 Scheler and Bergson advance a phenomenology of human agency that, as I said before, gives a central place to intuition at the expense of reason—that is the core of Scheler’s critique of formalism, and of Bergson’s fight against intellectualism. Such an emphasis is similar, as we will see below, to what Taylor sometimes calls “affective awareness.”35 Moreover, they do so—similarly to Taylor—at the expense of both reason and a “flat” version of emotions. Finally, the three of them display a highly acute sensitivity to the role of language in the constitution of our individual and collective lives.

All these similarities notwithstanding, the preservation of personal uniqueness, in their

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34 Taylor opposes the “Hobbes-Locke-Condillac” paradigm to what he calls the “Hamann-Herder-Humboldt” view on language, which he develops and defends. The former, Taylor argues, has a “reified conception of the mind” (Charles Taylor, The Language Animal (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 107 (hereafter referred to as “LA”)), since it conceives human subjectivity in a naturalist light, as a reality independent from the linguistic dimension. Consequently, this view considers language as merely “designative”: it only names and classifies what “exists there” already. In contrast, the latter is a “constitutive” view of language, since it acknowledges that the human mind—and human affairs more broadly—are realities that come into existence as they are articulated through language. In Taylor’s words, in this view, “language make[s] possible new purposes, new levels of behavior, new meanings” (LA, 4), and thus indicates new epistemological and ontological dimensions (see LA, 45-47). The main arguments of the contrast are developed in detail in “Designative and Constitutive Views” (LA, 3-50). For an excellent portrait of the “psychologism debate” at the end of the 19th century, see Martin Kusch, Psychology: A Case Study in the Sociology of Philosophical Knowledge (New York: Routledge, 1995).

sense, is in great tension with Taylor’s project of identity-formation in and through language. For that reason, their personalism is importantly different from Taylor’s conception of authenticity. I will be in a better position to address this contrast by the end of the dissertation—and so, I will come back to it in chapter 5. For now, I will focus on the related Taylorian notions of, first, human beings as linguistic animals; and, second, individual identity, the articulation of which results from a life lived “authentically.” I will explain why Bergson would reject the former, while Scheler would reject regarding the latter.

As is well known, for Taylor, authenticity depends on our capacity for speech.\(^36\) To be authentic—to become oneself—one must submit our emotions and “intuitions of worth” to a continuous exercise of self-reflection, in which we articulate our identity and our ethical evaluations. In this exercise, “language is essential […] because it articulates insight or makes insight possible.”\(^37\) That is why, in Taylor’s words, “interpretation plays no secondary, optional role, but is essential to human existence.”\(^38\)

On the contrary, for Bergson, language is the necessary means through which we cannot but disarticulate true insight into the continuous flux of our inner life. He would agree with Taylor that language is de facto the medium in which our dealings with reality occur—Bergson is indeed highly aware of the extent to which we are shaped by, exist in, and act through, language. But he would disagree with him that it is “also de jure […] the medium in which all our

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\(^37\) Charles Taylor, HAL, 71.

\(^38\) HAL, 76.
emotions, articulate and inarticulate, are experienced.”

This springs from a deep skepticism about language: for Bergson, our uniqueness is often more challenged than supported by our linguistic, expressivist, and dialogical resources.

More precisely, for Taylor, “to say that language is constitutive of emotion is to say that experiencing an emotion essentially involves seeing that certain descriptions apply.”

According to him, concepts serve as signposts which illuminate and orient our quest for identity, for what characterizes each one of us particularly. For Bergson, in contrast, language, contains at its core “an element of generality” (i.e., the sign) that makes it little suited to render reliably the always changing and heterogeneous contents of our inner self (HIT, 53). Moreover, for Bergson, this tendency towards generality is fierce and unstoppable; signs have such a force, he says, “that in virtue of a sort of immanent energy, [they] tend to become more and more general” (HIT, 53).

For Taylor, without language there is no identity, and without an identity, we lack a framework to inform our choices and build our agency. The exercise of agency properly informed by our identity constitutes, in turn, the basis for Taylor’s ethics of authenticity and his defense of multiculturalism. Contrary to Taylor, for Bergson, language leads to inauthenticity, insofar as it crudely portrays through signs and symbols what originally resists all conceptualization. Therefore, he would have dismissed, in principle, the full-fledged pursuit of a project of self-interpretation, such as the one defended by Taylor, aiming instead at a truer grasp.

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39 HAL, 74.

40 HAL, 71. Admittedly, description is not the only way in which we innovate and rearticulate reality through language, as the latter helps us to express or grasp new meanings. There are three ways in which that can happen: enactment (e.g., gestures, rituals), portrayal through symbols (works of art), and description through concepts. In other words, for Taylor, conceptual articulation does not exhaust the linguistic dimension. However, as he explains, “[t]he superiority of the descriptive lies in its enabling clearly defined assertions; and along with this, and not possible without it, is the ability to operate on the meta-level, to make assertions about or first-order claims, and the language in which they are couched. Of course, sonatas, poems, or novels can refer to other works, and part of their effect often comes from these quotations, but this is not the same thing as making assertions about these other works” (LA, 251).
through intuition, of what he calls the “vital impulse.”

Taylor invites us to work continuously on “the map of our motivations.”\(^{41}\) This map, admittedly, will never be complete, but does constitute the only appropriate response that we—as self-interpreting animals, endowed with the gift of language, and thus with a “deep” inner life\(^{42}\)—can offer to the question that is posed to us by our experience of pre-articulate emotion—namely, the question about what is worthy, what matters, what is innermost, and most authentic.\(^{43}\)

For Bergson, however, the metaphor of mapping, delineating, outlining, or articulating is thoroughly misleading. If we truly intend to explore, as he says, the “depths of our personality,” the mere aspiration of “drawing a map” that “articulates” our motivations and evaluations—that is, the goal of eventually depicting our identity more fully through images—is useless. It entails having wrong expectations about what descriptions can achieve, because they will always remain symbols of our inner lives. In other words, identity—even one that, in Taylorian fashion, aims ironically at remaining non-identical to itself—will always depend on tools that impede true access to ourselves. That is because, in Bergson’s words, it assumes that “it is possible, to follow the process of psychic activity […] like the march of an army on a map” (TFW, 180).

Therefore, in Bergson’s view, something like the Taylorian quest for “the right description,” cannot be but an ill-fated enterprise.\(^{44}\) For Bergson, Taylor’s injunction that we should “striv[e] for conceptual innovation,” since that “will allow us to illuminate some matter, say an area of human experience which would otherwise remain dark and confused,”\(^{45}\) is only a

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\(^{41}\) See HLA, 23.

\(^{42}\) See HLA, 23, 42.

\(^{43}\) See HAL, 68.

\(^{44}\) For Taylor’s notion of “the right description,” or what he calls “intrinsic rightness,” see LA, 26, 47.

\(^{45}\) HLA, 41.
hopeless fight against the ever-increasing force of “mere symbols” that draw us away from what makes us human—namely, the particular “rhythm” of our inner duration. In this view, the Taylorian project irremediably force us to fit our inner self, always in flux, into external rigid categories. In Bergson’s emphatic words, “the word does not indicate anything beyond what is trivial and impersonal in a psychic state.” Taylor says that we, as language animals, “are stuck with language, as it were.” Bergson could not have agreed more: he regretted that our conceptual props inevitably end up thwarting the movement that characterizes our inner life.

The moral and political relevance of the contrast between Taylor’s and Bergson’s respective approaches to language and the self becomes clear when we analyze their respective implications for identity and agency. As I said before, for Taylor, without language, there is no identity, and without an identity, he claims, “we would break down as persons, [we would] be incapable of being persons in the full sense.” The reason why identity is morally so central for Taylor is that, in his view, human agency—in other words, freedom and responsibility—goes hand in hand with it. Our identity is the “horizon or foundation out of which we reflect and evaluate as persons;” it is “the sense of where one stands in relation to those standards [of worth].” Further, “[t]o lose this horizon, or not to have found it, is indeed a terrifying experience of disaggregation and loss. This is why we can speak of an “identity-crisis” when we

46 HIT, 47.
47 HAL, 72.
48 Of course, for Taylor, the only alternative to his “constitutive” view of language, is the aforementioned “designative” view, according to which we “stick stubbornly to certain terms and try to understand reality by classifying it in these terms (are these propositions synthetic or analytic, is this a psychological question or a philosophical question, is this view monist or dualist?)” (HLA, 41).
49 HAL, 35.
50 HAL, 35.
51 HAL, 105.
have lost our grip on who we are.”\textsuperscript{52} Finally—and here is the connection with action in Taylor—our identity is the only framework that can properly inform personal choice and constitute personal agency, because “a self decides and acts out of certain fundamental evaluations.”\textsuperscript{53}

Bergson’s deep mistrust of language is embedded in a theory of the self that holds that the latter exists originally, not in language but in time, and therefore he invites us to replace any such project of articulation and conceptual innovation, with one of building a truer relation to our past and a more flexible relation to our future. In Bergson memory and habit acquire important moral and political dimensions, at the expense of language and identity. Memory, as I will examine in this dissertation, is intimately related to the preservation of the inner diversity that characterizes individuality—a kind of diversity, moreover, that is impossible to translate into concepts or, put differently, a multiplicity that is non-discursive. Habit, in turn, is a key element in Bergson’s comprehensive rejection of the ideal of the “sovereign self,” and in his formulation of a notion of freedom based, not on reason and categorical imperatives, but on action and hesitation.

The preceding considerations, however, should not let us overlook the extent to which a project like Taylor’s would harmonize with a project founded on Bergsonian insights. Taylor’s quest for identity as a never-ending project, the creative possibilities that radical self-reflection makes possible, as well as the field of personal responsibility that they entail, all put him very close to the kind of criticism that Bergson famously mounted against what he called “intellectualism.” \textsuperscript{54} Still, precisely because of these coincidences in terms of concerns,

\textsuperscript{52} HAL, 35.

\textsuperscript{53} HAL, 35.

\textsuperscript{54} See the following essays by Bergson: “Philosophical Intuition,” “Introduction to Metaphysics,” and “On the pragmatism of William James. Truth and Reality” in CE, 87-106, 133-169, and 177-186, respectively.
adversaries and methodologies, it is important to explore the different perspectives opened by a project that is, in some respects, compatible with Taylor’s, and with communitarianism more generally.\(^5\) I will explore those differences especially with regards to Bergson’s conception of the inner diversity of the self; his phenomenology of human action; his conception of moral obligation; and finally, his considerations on authority.

Finally, understanding the skepticism about language present in the works of Bergson more than a century ago alerts us to dangers that are presumably shared by two leading approaches in democratic theory: deliberative democracy, on the one hand, and democratic rhetoric, on the other. The former, with its emphasis on reason, and the latter, with its emphasis on emotion, are normally considered antithetical. However, in both cases, the role of language in civic education is central, either because it is the structure within which deliberation happens, or because it is the material with which political persuasion is shaped.\(^5\)

If the coincidences between Taylor’s and Bergson’s respective projects are easy to identify, these are even more conspicuous with respect to Max Scheler. The most apparent one, in my opinion, resides in the ontological presuppositions contained in Taylor’s theory of strong evaluations—something which is normally known as “moral realism.” According to Taylor worth is perceived through feelings and emotions (as we said, what he calls “pre-articulate intuitions” or “affective awareness” of “what matters”). Similarly, Scheler contends that we

\(^5\) Bergson has been recently interpreted both as being consistent with a liberal-democratic theory of politics (see Alexandre Lefebvre, *Human Rights as a Way of Life: On Bergson’s Political Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013)), and with more romantic, communitarian, or essentialist approaches to politics (positively, by Nadia Yala Kisukidi, *Bergson ou l’humanité créatrice*, and negatively by Donna V. Jones, *The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy*).

perceive value through our emotional apparatus, which—as we will see—he conceives as a hierarchy of value-feelings. Thus, in both cases, worth and value, respectively, have a separate ontological status (they are “out there” for us to perceive them), while, at the same time, they are always attached to a personal self who, per Taylor, articulates worth, and per Scheler, perceives values.

Moreover, Taylor’s idea of a self whose depth depends on the possibility of making qualitative distinctions, or—put differently—of establishing a hierarchy of desires, is strikingly similar in many respects to Scheler’s theory of the self, and the inner hierarchy of values and emotions that he postulates as part of his “non-formal ethics of value.”

Finally—unlike Bergson—the perception of value in Scheler is intertwined with our linguistic capacities. Our inner life is ineffable to a great extent, but language can indeed “bring the most hidden of all phenomena to givenness,” and guide us in “the direction of the phenomenon […] by way of images” (F, 385). In other words, as we will see throughout the dissertation, for Scheler—as for Taylor—language is an important resource to scrutinize our inner life and to develop moral knowledge: words can certainly guide us in our moral quests. However, for Scheler, perception of value is developed and exercised—compared to Taylor—in a much less dialogical way.57 In fact, for him—coming closer again to Bergson—introspection is the main methodological resource in moral formation.58

Still, while better disposed than Bergson toward language as a moral guide, Scheler

57 Cfr. Michael D. Barber, Guardian of Dialogue, chaps. 5 and 6, who underlines the dialogical implications of Scheler’s sociology of knowledge and compares them to Habermas’ theory of communicative action.

would also have rejected Taylor’s notions of identity and identification as adequate safeguards of personal uniqueness. In contrast to Taylor’s understanding of authenticity and agency as the articulation of an identity, one of the main corollaries to Scheler’s theory of the person is the view that the latter cannot be identified with anything in particular. Thus, he emphatically distinguishes the person from what he calls the “ego of inner perception”: the former is ineffable, while the latter is, as I mentioned before, “only an object among objects” (F, 375).

For Scheler—unlike Taylor’s Heideggerian idea that language is the proper environment of the self (“the house of being”59)—the person, as we will see, exists only, so to speak, in the acts performed (F, 389, 537). Therefore, the ego’s “identity exists only insofar as identity is an essential characteristic of the object” (F, 375). In other words, looking for an identity, and providing a description of ourselves—even if it is tentative or provisional—is to objectify, to some extent, the agent at the center of the experience.60

One may rejoin here that Taylor’s thoughts on this point are not that different anyway, since identity-formation is a never-completed task, and the goal he proposes is precisely to articulate a plurality of emotions, desires, and motivations. However, notice that Scheler would not be satisfied even with such an open-ended formulation. Arguing against skeptics of the Humean type, who claim that there is no self besides the bundle of sensations and perceptions that each of us is, Scheler says that the givenness of the self of individual experience through intuition is an incontestable phenomenon, which however—and this is the relevant part for us—“does not coincide with any special content of experience, with the sum of this givenness, or with


relations and orders among such contents” (F, 377).

Thus, not even after incorporating the complexity and plurality of the self, will Scheler accept a notion of the person whose explicit task is the quest after identity and identification. On this respect, he says:

Because of all the possible and factually always more or less contingent series of experiences, every individual ego is based on a special kind of experience, accessible only to immediate intuition, and because this kind of experience can still be given to the act of inner intuition itself and can come to the fore in, for example, literary biography, the individual self can, it is true, be given in intuition by way of its factual experiences; but it can never be reduced to the interconnections of these experiences or those of intuition. (F, 377, translation slightly modified)

Again, it is true that Taylor would not think either that the self can be reduced to any one of its evaluations, emotions, or desires. Still, the disagreement between them is not merely a quibble because for Scheler authenticity cannot ever be spelled out in terms of identity. Therefore, both views end up establishing different expectations regarding what it should “feel” to become a person, and to exercise agency more fully. Each one of them poses different demands on language, and its role in the process of moral education. They will understand differently the kind of anxieties and concerns that press those interested in getting a fuller “sense of the self,” and they will guide agency in a different set of directions: the injunction with Scheler will not be to “articulate standards,” and then determine where one stands regarding those standards, as Taylor says; but rather, to pursue the kind of intuition that gives us immediate experience of the self, with no mediation of any object whatsoever.

In sum, compared to Taylor, his perspective marks a shift of emphasis from a project based on the “articulation of identity” through language, to one based on the “perception of value” through intuition. This, in turn, suggests different diagnoses and different solutions regarding the problems that beset our collective life. To put it in Taylorian terms, Scheler’s perspective changes in significant ways the conditions that make an environment “hospitable”
for the adequate development of individuality, the proper exercise of human agency, and the presence of authority. In that way, Scheler’s corresponding objections to identity and identification can serve to better assess the pitfalls and virtues of the identity politics approach—one with which, again, he certainly shares various moral and sociological sensibilities.⁶¹

**Overview of chapters**

Chapter 1 offers an introduction to Bergson and Scheler’s respective notions of individuality and inner diversity. Half a century after J.S. Mill wrote *On Liberty*, Bergson and Scheler also affirmed the importance of individuality and its significance for human development. In addressing that topic, Mill worried that people tend to undervalue or ignore individuality; in contrast, Bergson and Scheler worry rather that it is very easily misconceived. Individuality deserves special consideration, not (or at least, not primarily) on account of the risk of it becoming stifled under governmental despotism or under homogenizing social pressures, but rather because, in defending it, we are very prone to pervert it. In the words of Bergson, “[i]ndividuality […] harbors its enemy at home.”

Why is individuality so vulnerable? Why can’t it be safe even at the hands of its sponsors? The answer has to do with how individuality is related to diversity. According to Mill, social diversity is crucial for the exercise of individuality, because it nourishes the intellect and reinvigorates our beliefs. In contrast, for Bergson and Scheler, individuality is fragile because diversity is the principal characteristic of the inner self, and this makes individuality very difficult to grasp. Thus, “defending individuality” becomes less a question of how to protect it against external threats of control, and more a matter of being able to discern it—not throughout

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⁶¹ As I mentioned before, his philosophical anthropology set the stage for many of the communitarian sensitivities as they would develop within the hermeneutic tradition in the late 20th century. See works by Jerome Carroll and Karl-Siegbert Rehberg, cited in note 27 above.
society, but within ourselves. In Bergson, this means primarily relating to our past in a certain way; and in Scheler, discovering the inner hierarchy of value and corresponding feelings that characterizes our emotional life.

This chapter will show the extent to which they anticipate very important themes of postmodern thought—especially the concerns behind hermeneutical approaches to politics, as the contrast with Taylor brings to light—while maintaining some key modernist elements, such as the belief in intuition as a vehicle of knowledge and truth, and in a substantial, even if not “solid,” notion of the self. As I said before, Scheler and Bergson’s shared emphasis on intuition, unmediated perception, and introspection, happens at the expense of the focus on interpretation that would characterize the rhetorical turn of the late 20th century.

Chapter 2 discusses Bergson and Scheler’s respective theories of agency, and explores the connection of their theories to the human relation to the law. Here I expound on their respective criticisms of Kant’s universalistic approach to morality. Bergson contests Kant’s equation of the will with practical reason, and underscores the character of the will as force. Following this understanding of the will, he contests Kant’s conclusion that freedom must be given through reason. Rather, freedom is found in “the relation of the concrete self to the act which it performs,” and therefore it is not necessarily related with what one does, but with how it is done.

Building on Bergson’s theory of action, I show that, from a phenomenological standpoint, both our moral motivation to obey the law and our disposition to break it share a common source. In other words, Bergson helps us realize that temptation is not only what traps us and gets us entangled in crime, but also the key to understanding how we become, as Kant says, “interested in the law.” Such common source is to be found in our character as agents. The failure to integrate these two phenomena—namely, morality and temptation—leads to an
“schizophrenic” division of the self, which in turn jeopardizes action. The price of setting morality and temptation apart is our own freedom, or our capacity to act.

Scheler, for his part, rejects the Kantian notion of autonomy, that is, the notion of giving the law to oneself, for being overly formalistic. In his opinion, the categorical imperative as a solution to the problem of how to combine morality and freedom—or as Rousseau says, how to “follow the law and remain as free as before”—wrongly assumes, first, that morality can be fully expressed in terms of laws, and, second, that freedom is merely a matter of “obeying oneself.” That obliterates, he believes, that self-government is best achieved not through “self-reference,” but by a proper exploration of the self that is to become autonomous. In other words, freedom as autonomy cannot be only a matter of not obeying others, but of gaining access to one’s self. If freedom concerns primarily the agent as such (and not as rational being), autonomy must involve the agent in a more substantive way, and not only in relation to potential oppressors. It must focus primarily on grasping who the autonomous agent is.

In this chapter, I turn to narrative in order to enrich the theoretical analysis in precisely the phenomenological spirit that animates the authors. I wanted to “go back to the action itself,” and assess how Bergson’s and Scheler's respective principles fare when confronted with moral experience. Thus, I test their hypotheses on human action by examining two “case studies”: on the one hand, the Gallows Man example, which Kant provides in the Critique of Practical Reason, and, on the other, the case of Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment. Through a close reading of the two cases, I conclude that the true ethical problem in both cases is not how to make our will stronger against our perverse inclinations, but to identify the meaning of the specific alternatives that tempt the agents in each case. Furthermore, I propose that these cases show that moral action can be more endangered by a failure to access what is truly
individual, than by a failure to see the humanity that we have in common. I see this chapter as a *mise-en-scène* of the principles that—going back to what we reviewed in the first chapter—teach us how to observe the inner diversity that characterizes true individuality.

Chapter 3 focuses solely on Bergson, and explores the moral and political implications of our relation to the future, or, to put it differently, of the role of uncertainty in human agency. Moral and political theories, insofar as they are based on the fragile life of human beings, usually incorporate a reflection on the role of uncertainty or contingency. The question remains, however, how exactly do we experience ‘uncertainty’? Can uncertainty have different faces, to which we then react in different ways? If so, what is the meaning of such multiplicity for the exercise of agency? Comparing Bergson’s inquiry into the modern belief in chance with Jean-Marie Guyau’s reflections on the love of risk, I examine the moral significance of different ways of relating to uncertainty, and analyze their respective pedagogical purchase regarding the constitution of human freedom.62

When confronted with the unknown future, agents become easily trapped in the vicious and vertiginous circle of impotence and omnipotence. From this perspective, freedom can be seen as the art of avoiding those two extremes. The contrast between Bergson and Guyau illuminates this problem, showing how our relation to uncertainty informs our inner self, our capacity for action, and our sense of obligation.

Chapter 4 focuses exclusively on Scheler. I examine his phenomenology of emotions, with special attention to their social and political dimensions. First, I offer a close reading of Scheler and Adam Smith on sympathy, exploring the differences between both

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62 A largely forgotten figure of the French philosophical, artistic, and pedagogical landscape of the late 19th-century. Even if Guyau remains a considerably obscure figure in the English-speaking world, important studies of his thought have recently appeared. These works show that in his own time, Guyau was meticulously studied by Durkheim, highly regarded by Nietzsche, and considerably influential for a good number of artists and anarchists (among them, most famously, Kropotkin, but also a few of them in Spain, Italy and Latin America).
phenomenological approaches to moral psychology, underscoring the ethico-political concerns that animated the author in each case. In the early twentieth-century, Max Scheler disputed—against Smith and other eighteenth-century philosophers—the salutary character of sympathy, dismissing it as an ultimately perverse foundation for human association. However, unlike later critics of sympathy as a political principle (e.g. Rawls, Arendt), Scheler rejected it for being ill-equipped to salvage, what, in his opinion, should be the proper basis of morality, namely, moral value. I argue that, even if Scheler’s objections against Smith’s project prove to be ultimately mistaken, he had important reasons for calling into question its moral suitability in his own time.

Finally, in chapter 5, I turn to questions about authority, and explore what we can learn from their respective insights on individuality and agency. What can authority be, in light of the personalist anthropology that they both offer? How can authority claims be laid on someone whose character is unfixed and always unique, on a self whose “innermost essence” is ineffable? Can such a being be bound to authority and be at the same time free? In order to find Bergson and Scheler’s answers to these questions, I turn to their views on the relation between modern democracy and Christianity. As I will show, Bergson and Scheler’s reflections on Christianity bring their views on ontology and epistemology, their philosophical anthropology and moral psychology, together with questions of power, obedience, equality, and freedom.

In both Scheler and Bergson I find a model of authority founded on the notion of exemplarity; that is, the kind of authority that lies in a person, whose example seems to have some moral claim on other people. In this chapter, I contrast such a model with Max Weber’s notion of charismatic authority. According to Weber, the charismatic type—contrary to bureaucratic and traditional authority—is not based on either rational commands or time-honored and customary practices, but relies instead on the gift and qualities of individual personalities.
Like Weber, both Bergson and Scheler thought this kind of authority was of primary contemporary importance. However, Weber’s relativism towards values, and his Kantian-inspired skeptical approach in social science, yield a notion of personality that is “minimalistic;” or—as people would normally say today in political theory—“unencumbered.” In contrast, Bergson’s and Scheler’s ideas on personal authority hold the promise of accounting for an encumbered or complex self, without therefore renouncing to the aspiration of individuality and freedom. More specifically, their insights suggest a way in which authority can be consistent with freedom—or perhaps can even contribute to our freedom and to the development of our personality. Such a way is found in exemplarity—the situation in which we follow an example and thus become free.

Several late-20th century authors saw the importance of the Weberian notion of personal, charismatic leadership, but considered, however, that the social and political conditions under which it could flourish where more or less pathological on the whole—e.g., anomie in Talcott Parsons, the deeply corrupt and unjust circumstances of post-colonialism in Immanuel Wallerstein and David Apter, or alternatively, the necessary inconveniences of any transition toward political maturity, as Seymour Martin Lipset regards the case of George Washington. Unlike these thinkers, Bergson and Scheler still considered it possible in the early 20th century to talk positively about exemplary figures and their authority; they were not yet totally dissuaded by fears about ideology and mass mobilization, which certainly became preeminent after World War II. In view of the contemporary relevance of both left- and right-wing populism in Latin America, Europe and the US, these reflections might prove useful.

Finally, Bergson and Scheler connected their views on exemplarity with a fierce denunciation of bourgeois capitalism, and incorporated, for its articulation, many Christian—and

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These two elements make it even more appropriate to bring Weber to the table, who, as is well known, connected Protestantism with the emergence and initial development of capitalism. The contrast with Weber situates Scheler and Bergson as important interlocutors in the early 20th-century debates about the political role of religion. As it will become clear, they both held high hopes that Christianity could contribute with significant resources to the fragile post-World War I international political scene.65

64 I will address this final point in Appendix A. For now, the appendix only covers Bergson on this point, without discussing Scheler’s views on capitalism, and the latter’s relation to Christianity and democracy. However, I hope to develop that section more fully in the revised version of this dissertation.

65 The study of their work is of further relevance in the present context, where the Christian legacy of the liberal tradition (not only in Charles Taylor himself, and others like Hans Joas, but also, from a more historical perspective, for instance, with Larry Siedentop, Samuel Moyn, and Jan-Werner Müller), is being acknowledged and discussed, either with contempt or delight. Their thought constitutes one more instance confirming the deeply religious character of democratic sensibilities at the turn of the century, and therefore, provides some insight regarding the concerns and commitments behind a theologico-political worldview that is presumably still with us.
Chapter 1. Individuality and Diversity in Bergson and Scheler

In his essay *On Liberty*, published in 1859, John Stuart Mill articulated a notion of individuality that is still sound today. In spite of 150 years of Marxist, communitarian, and postmodern criticisms, Mill’s defense of individual freedom and personal development gives voice to many concerns that remain alive in our current ethico-political debates. For him, as for many among us, the “free development of individuality is one of the leading essentials of well-being.”¹ Mill worried that people tended to overlook this fact, and that they would therefore undervalue individuality, allowing for an increasing control of society over its members.²

Half a century later, Henri Bergson and Max Scheler would affirm the importance of individuality as well. For both, individuality was necessary for the realization of the full potential of human beings. However, their main worry about individuality was not anymore, as in Mill, that people would undervalue it. Fifty years after *On Liberty* such danger had somehow receded. The problem had become instead, that individuality can be very easily misconceived. For Scheler and Bergson, it deserves special consideration, not (or at least, not primarily) on account of the risk of it becoming stifled under governmental despotism or under homogenizing social pressures, but rather because, in defending it, we are very prone to pervert it. In the words of Bergson, “individuality […] harbors its enemy at home” (*CE*, 13).³

What is the character of individuality that makes it so vulnerable? Why can’t it be safe even at the hands of its sponsors? The answer for both Bergson and Scheler has to do with how

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³ He says this though in the context of a discussion about biological reproduction. He explains that the need of an individual organism to “perpetuat[e] itself in time condemns it never to be complete in space.” As the individual organism reproduces itself, it “harbors its enemy at home” (*CE*, 13).
individuality and diversity are related to each other. For Mill, in 1859, diversity in society was important because it helped to preserve individuality. “The demand that all other people shall resemble ourselves, grows by what it feeds on. If resistance waits till life is reduced nearly to one uniform type, all deviations from that type will come to be considered impious, immoral, even monstrous and contrary to nature.” In Mill’s view, social diversity nourishes the intellect and reinvigorates our beliefs: it has a preeminent pedagogical character. Thus, he says, “mankind speedily become unable to conceive diversity, when they have been for some time unaccustomed to see it.”

For Bergson and Scheler, however, the problem with individuality is not so much that “mankind speedily becomes unable to conceive it,” but that they have a hard time even perceiving it. In other words, individuality is fragile not only due to the menaces posed to it by external forces that disrupt the environment of diversity in which it can develop, as Mill pointed out; it is fragile also because diversity, being the principal internal characteristic of the individual self, is very easily overlooked—and this, despite a socially diverse atmosphere, or maybe sometimes even as a result of it. Therefore, “defending individuality” becomes less a question of how to protect it against external pressures toward conformism and control, and more a matter of learning how to discern it, not necessarily throughout society, but within the individual self.

Individuality, in this sense, requires, first and foremost, that we enhance our cognitive apparatus, in order to better identify inner diversity. Scheler and Bergson’s respective works, as I read them, are efforts to put us in a position to observe inner multiplicity, and to live or

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6 Although this would not imply that a socially homogenous atmosphere is a sufficient or even necessary condition to make inner diversity distinct.
experience individuality accordingly. This entails a strong link between epistemology and morality: as we will see, perception conditions our moral horizon, just as moral action conditions our perception.

In this chapter, I will address the three following questions: first, what is the kind of inner diversity that our authors are interested in, and what makes their account different from other interpretations of the inner life that portray it also as having multiple parts? Second, why did they think that such way of conceiving diversity is so fragile or elusive, and therefore easy to overlook? Third, how is the perception of such kind of diversity is related to the exercise of individuality? For now, I will stress the coincidences between both authors more than indicate their disagreements; however, as it will become clear throughout the dissertation, their respective philosophical projects were considerably different.7

While Bergson and Scheler agree that individuality is grounded on internal diversity, they have important disagreements, part of which—as I outlined in the introduction—can be brought to an interesting focus through the different roles they expect language to play in the exercise of individuality. As we saw, they differ in the extent to which they think individuality’s elusiveness can be effectively addressed through words, signs, and other kinds of expression. Consequently, each view yields different implications regarding the socio-political character of language and rhetoric, which we will explore along the way.

“Dissociationist” psychology

Bergson and Scheler’s insistence on inner multiplicity should be distinguished from another account of the multiplicity of the self, against which they articulated some of their main insights—namely, the empiricist account of the self in associationist psychology. David Hume, one of the main exponents of this view, held that “[t]he capacity of the mind is not infinite; consequently no idea of extension or duration consists of an infinite number of parts or inferior ideas, but of a finite number, and these simple and indivisible.” In contrast to this, for both Scheler and Bergson, experience is not originally divided. Rather, it is a stream or a flux, which is certainly divisible, but that happens only later—by means of, for instance, language—and sometimes at a cost.

The heterogeneity of our inner life is not, in their view, an assemblage of discrete parts associated with one another, but a result of the process of dissociation of experience. Relying on empirical research in the field of child psychology, Scheler claims that, at first, experiences do not belong to individual persons. On the contrary, he claims, emotions, memories, expectations, etc., start belonging to each one of us in particular only through a “gradual formation of ever more stable vortices” in our stream of experience (NS, 246). Children, as they grow up, he says, “raise [their] mental head, as it were, above [the] stream flooding over it” (NS, 247) and only then become able to isolate particular ideas and feelings, identifying them as their own. This

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8 David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1992), p. 39. Of course, there are as many versions of the associationist view as there are exponents of it—take, for instance, Mill and Hume. These differ on their accounts of human personality, development, and freedom. For that reason, it is not surprising that Bergson and Scheler are not at odds with all associationist philosophers on every point. For instance, both of them, like Mill—all the differences notwithstanding—conceive individuality as indeterminate (Mill affirms that “individuality is the same thing with development,” suggesting thereby that the cultivation of individuality is an open-ended process (Mill, *On Liberty*, 64, italics added)). However, in general, both Bergson and Scheler will argue that associationism as such is inevitably flawed, and that experience itself proves its premises to be unacceptable.

happens, typically, as they learn how to speak. Adults can have, in his view, a similar experience when they learn a foreign language. Allegedly, as people become aware of the peculiarities of their own native tongue, they become able to rearrange or re-appropriate certain experiences that only then become utterable (NS, 250).

Such process of dissociating and gradually appropriating perceptions, applies, for Scheler, not only to outer, but also to inner perception. In that sense, he says, not even a solitary life is a solipsistic one, because we use language and other socially-constructed frameworks to identify experiences within ourselves. Inner perception must necessarily be a “selective form of apprehension,” and therefore, he argues, we can hardly be aware of any experience within our stream of consciousness which lacks a name or some other socially valid expression to identify it (NS, 248). Consequently, according to Scheler, the potential social relevance of an experience “virtually overshadows the private life of the individual, and conceals it, as it were, from the possessor himself (NS, 248).” In other words, our social world simplifies and codifies our inner life.

This is, however, something that associationism would miss: assuming that the mind is exhausted by that of what we are conscious, and interpreting consciousness as a conglomerate of pieces, it fails to notice that we regularly select from the whole of our consciousness, as it were, only what we have a name for. Associationism cannot see thus that our inner life must be richer than we are able to perceive.10

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10 See also Giuliana Mancuso, “L’antipsicologismo del giovane Scheler (1899-1906),” in Max Scheler: Esistenza della persona e radicalizzazione della fenomenologia, ed. Guido Cusinato (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2007), pp. 241-256. The criticism against psychologism is just a small part of a broader new phenomenological approach in the philosophy of the mind and the cognitive sciences that began to take form in the 19th century, and which had as its foundation the notion of “intentionality.” For a comprehensive and readable review of these debates, including some references to Scheler’s contributions to them, see Dermot Moran, “Intentionality: Some Lessons from the History of the Problem from Brentano to the Present,” International Journal of Philosophical Studies 21, no. 3 (2013): 317–358.
Bergson defends the same idea. “Association is not the primary fact: dissociation is what we begin with” (MM, 215). For him, associationism begs the question of why things become associated in the first place: the “independent image is a late and artificial product of the mind. In fact, we perceive the resemblance before we perceive the individuals which resemble each other; and in an aggregate of contiguous parts, we perceive the whole before the parts” (MM, 214). So, like Scheler, he begins with dissociation, and understands perception as a process of selection guided by our intellect. The latter, in turn, is best understood not as a “receptacle of representations” or as a “holder of sensations,” but as a filter (MM, 19-21). For Bergson, our intellect has mainly a practical role, and not a speculative one. “That which is commonly called a fact is not reality as it appears to immediate intuition, but an adaptation of the real to the interests of practice and to the exigencies of social life” (MM, 239). Its work is to prepare the field of action in accordance with practical interests, either material or affective. In other words, we are capable, he says, of attending only what concerns us practically.

Both authors agree that the discovery of lawfulness and regularities in nature depends primarily on practical necessities. This does not mean that lawfulness in nature is illusory, but that the selection of these natural laws and not others responds mainly to pragmatic needs. Thus, Bergson says, our intellect is like a photographic camera, which takes “partial views” of

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11 For a positive assessment of Bergson’s theory of cognition and perception in light of contemporary scientific debates, see John Mullarkey, Bergson and Philosophy (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), chapter 2.

12 Notice that this does not necessarily mean that we are cognitively doomed to be egoists. Bergson distinguishes what he calls “racial attention” from our “personal” or “voluntary attention” (ME, 95, 178). The former (not the latter) is, in his view, directed towards practical concerns. That does mean that we cannot show personal consideration towards things that do not have to do with us personally: our “racial attention” is the framework in which a thing such as generosity becomes possible. Bergson is rather making an epistemological assertion about what we can and cannot normally cognize. Still, see that in TS he takes this conclusion further and affirms that “intelligence would counsel egoism first” (TS, 115). This means indeed that, in Bergson, we find the proposition that the intellect provides a framework in which we are relatively focused on ourselves and our immediate surroundings. That is the background for the argument in his last book that open society is possible only through an intuitive insight into humanity, and not through reason. I will come back to these themes in chapter 5.
experience to facilitate our action. “It is philosophers who are mistaken when they import into the
domain of speculation a method of thinking which is made for action” (CE, 155). Intellectual
“clarity and distinctness” are, what he calls, “interruptions” or “cuts” of the original given. The
intellect, therefore, has a clear idea only of what is discontinuous and motionless. Likewise,
Scheler holds that “both the mechanical view of nature and its counterpart, association
psychology, select [from all existing things and relations] only those […] that can have
significance as points of departure for conduct to control nature […]” (F, 218-19, note 45).

In sum, according to our authors, a mechanistic view of the mind achieves, at best, a
clumsy reconstruction of our mental life. This Frankenstein, made out of bits and pieces of
sensation, cannot ever possibly come to life (CE, 31). Moreover, as it is easy to see, according to
their perspective, associationism is condemned to perpetuate prejudice and stereotypes in our
knowledge of others and of our own selves. Missing the original dimension of our conscience, it
takes for granted what are only contingent divisions of the self—divisions that answer to values
and categories relative to specific societies or contexts. True individuality though, for Scheler
and Bergson, must instead have its roots in something real, alive, and more “original” in
experience. So, what constitutes then, for our authors, this original source in which individuality
can be directly intuited?

For Bergson, movement and change constitute true reality. He argues, for instance, that
the movement of my hand from A to B does not pertain to the same degree of reality as the

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13 See Bergson, CE, 155; and HIT, 30-34. The idea of “interruption” could sound a bit bizarre for the reader who is
unacquainted with Bergson’s ideas, so it might be worth clarifying. It is best illustrated by his conception of what
the mathematical study of matter consists in. Mathematical approaches to reality are similar to pictures taken of
certain aspects of matter. However, matter is not fixed. He maintained that there is no ultimate unit or particle of
matter. Thus, mathematical constructs are not immanent in matter, even if matter does “possess everything
necessary to adapt itself to our formulae” (CE, 219). This mutual connection reveals, for Bergson, the pragmatic
character of intellect. It tends to fabrication and control, and “it is characterized by the unlimited power of
decomposing according to any law and of recomposing into any system” (CE, 157).
infinity of points that satisfy the equation of the trajectory that my hand has traversed. The latter is the curve that my intellect models; the former is more real. The same happens in cases where movement is not immediately obvious. Take, for instance, the painting on a canvas. He argues that the painting as a whole is more real than the mosaics into which my eye decomposes the painting (CE, 91). The intellect can analyze a painting, but it will always leave unexplained the mobility that is essential to it. How is mobility “incorporated” in the painting? He explains:

I have here a piece of paper on which I have drawn a few lines. What are these lines? Somehow, they are the movement of the hand that traced those lines, but already halted, immobilized. Movement constitutes true reality. What is this piece of paper? It is the activity of the worker that turned the chunks of wood into paper, but already solidified, concretized, immobilized. Those chunks of wood, what are they? They are the work of the sun, that is, a vibrating movement executed during many years by the sun, the work of the sun that made the tree grow, the cotton plant, and so on….“ (HIT, 278-9)

Mobility, says Bergson, as the fundamental dimension of reality, is both more and less than the aggregation of points encompassed in a trajectory. It is more because it gives rise to those points in the first place; but it is also less, since the aggregation of points requires further intellectual elaboration beyond “simple” mobility, given originally in experience (CE, 91).14 Thus mobility is simple and original.

Such difference in ontological levels between movement and its “static” renditions is evinced, in his view, by the contrast between, on the one hand, the simplicity and unity of the function of an organ—say, they eye—and the complexity of its mechanism, on the other (CE, 88-90). The complexity of the organ of vision, he claims, does not have the same degree of reality than the unified and simple act of vision. Again, mobility, like lived experienced, has, in Bergson’s view, the highest degree of reality because it is most original. This means that it is a

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14 In that sense, mathematics is never an abstraction from reality, but on the contrary, a reconstruction of the more original phenomenon that makes it possible. Similarly, grammatical analysis always brings additional elements to something as simple as the act of communication (by “simple,” I mean here that no analysis of the phenomenon is necessary to be able to practice it).
fact that cannot be explained, but only accounted for and described.

Analogously, Scheler rejects any reduction of the real to what is given through the senses. The real is always richer than the sensuously given, he says, and therefore any mechanistic outlook on experience is essentially deflationary: “It approaches everything on the false assumption that whatever happens to be simplest and least valuable must also have the character of ontological priority and causal antecedence” (NS, 182). To escape such cognitive reductionism, he proposes to leave behind the opposition between subject and object.

A subject will always be an object among objects, he says—even if a privileged one, as in Kant’s view.¹⁵ A subject will always be a thing. He relies instead on a set of distinctions that single out lived experience. The most important one is that between act and content. An act—an act of thinking, loving, walking—cannot be given through sense perception (either inner or outer), and cannot be objectified. It belongs to a completely different ontological level (F, 374-5). When we see someone walking, we can objectify any given step, or her leg taking that step, or the distance that the leg has traversed, but the act of walking—that is, the act as it is lived by the walker—cannot be objectified. Even more, Scheler distinguishes between the lived experience of the walker, and the outer perception she has of herself walking (when she sees her own feet taking steps in a consecutive way) (F, 398ff). Notice that Scheler’s emphasis on acts is theoretically analogous to Bergson’s interest in movement: both are realities that associationism, or any mechanistic take on perception, cannot account for.¹⁶

¹⁵ For a more detailed examination of this criticism, see Philip Blosser, “Kant and Phenomenology,” Philosophy Today 30, no. 2 (1986): 168.

¹⁶ One key difference with Bergson, however, is that for Scheler acts are by no means the sole “data of consciousness,” to put it in the former’s terms. According to Scheler, we can have immediate intuition of “essences” that do not take part of the mobile character of an act. See below, the section titled “Scheler and the ability to discriminate.” See also, Michele Averchi, “Le immagini della percezione sensibile in Scheler e Bergson,” 275-294.
The failure of associationism to distinguish between “degrees of reality” explains Bergson’s aforementioned claim that associationism cannot but beg the question of why our mind associates images.\textsuperscript{17} Take, for instance, the principle of resemblance:\textsuperscript{18} we associate something with another thing because we find it similar. However, as we said, the real question for Bergson is, why do we find something similar to something else? Or in other words, how do we pick the traits according to which we will consider the relevant similarities and the relevant differences? The answer has to do with the different ascriptions of reality that we assign to different things.

Scheler agrees on this point as well. To illustrate it, he invites the reader to consider why, even if we can “easily reproduce in ourselves the joys and sorrows of characters in fiction, or the persons in a play,” we do not go so far as “tak[ing] their part as if they were real” (\textit{NS}, 98).\textsuperscript{19} His answer is that even if our passions respond to relations of similarity, they will not respond to \textit{any} kind of similarity: we are able to understand the emotional situation of a character of fiction, but we can only experience what he calls “true sympathy” for someone real.\textsuperscript{20} The difference between the sufferings and the joys of fictional characters and those of real people is something which associationism cannot account for. In sum, a mechanistic view of the mind fails to see the ultimate grounds of the acts of association because it does not have any independent ontological criterion with which to understand why we regard something as similar.

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\textsuperscript{17} See p. 31-32 above.  

\textsuperscript{18} To recall, association works through three basic principles: resemblance, contiguity and causality.  

\textsuperscript{19} Only the teenager reader does that, Scheler says, but that is, again, because she is not mature enough yet.  

\textsuperscript{20} In chapter 3, I will explore Scheler’s distinction between “true sympathy” and “emotional contagion” or “empathy.”
In a similar vein, both present a strong opposition to the Cartesian distinction between body and soul. Such dichotomy taints the possibility of perceiving the essence of acts, in Scheler’s vocabulary, and the heterogeneity of movement, in Bergson’s words. The reason is that it obliterates the only “field” in which they can be intuited—namely, the area between matter and spirit—leaving us with no option except sensualism or dogmatism.

So far, we have seen that both Bergson and Scheler criticize associationism for considering experience as an assemblage of bits, instead of an original flux that only afterwards becomes dissociated. This, they argue, answers to practical purposes and it overlooks the different degrees of reality in what is given to us. Furthermore, we saw that they are interested in a kind of givenness that happens in movement and in acts, respectively. The question we must now turn to is: what is given to us in movement or in acts? What is that which can be perceived, other than the sensuous? And if it is not through the senses, how do we perceive it? Moreover, how is all this connected with individuality and diversity?

**In search of the elusive personality**

Let’s take up Scheler first. To put it shortly, for him, what we perceive in acts is a person. How so? This question, says Scheler, will never be satisfactorily answered from the point of view of a doctrine according to which “a factor in cognition must be either a ‘sensible content’ or something ‘thought’” (*F*, 63). Against the empiricists, he claims that we never perceive a person merely as a body: “I do not merely see the other person’s eyes, for example; I also see that ‘he is looking at me’ and even that ‘he is looking at me as though he wished to avoid my seeing that he is looking at me’” (*NS*, 261). Against Kant, he argues that even less do we

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21 This applies for both associationism and Kantian epistemology, and it is actually said in the context of a criticism to the latter.
perceive a person as an idea, as an “homo noumenon”—i.e., [...] man as a ‘thing in itself’” (F, 373).

Persons are perceived in acts: if I see someone laughing, the laughter “is not first given to me as symbols of a body in motion” (“ISK”, 80-1), which is later to be interpreted as a sign of some attitude or state of mind. Rather, Scheler says, in laughter I immediately see the joy or the sarcasm that the person is acting. The eyes or the mouth are only parts of the content that corresponds, in turn, to the act of vision or of laughter, respectively.

Similarly, a person does not correspond to any concept. For Scheler, we need to distinguish the “I” that we use as “a placeholder for expressing the idea of a person, for instance, when I say that ‘I go for a walk’” (F, 390), from the “I” of the objectified psychic ego that we study in psychology, or that we perceive in our own selves when we examine our feelings and our conduct. The “I” in the first sense, Scheler explains, cannot ever be reduced to an object, nor be said to correspond to any particular “bit” of matter. “Just as a person can “go for a walk,” so also he can “perceive” his ego [...]. However, this psychic ego that the person perceives can no more perceive, than it can go for a walk or act” (F, 390). Along the same lines, he says that no knowledge of the nature of love or of the nature of judgment will get us any closer to the knowledge of how person A loves, or how person A judges person B.

Both in inner and outer perception, “a self is always given, indeed a “totality” of a self, as the background against which this or that content stands out in relief” (“ISK”, 37). The perception of the self does not happen, he says, by hypothesis or by inference, and again, even less by a metaphysical assumption of a substance (F, 391-2). Rather, “[t]he only and exclusive
kind of givenness of the person is the execution of his acts […]” (F, 387).22

Still, it would be misleading to identify a person with any particular act. As I said, an act is not an object, but the person is, so to speak, two levels away from objectivity. The perception of different acts, Scheler thinks, leads necessarily to a question whose answer, however, remains impossible to articulate: “Which unitary executor “belongs” to the essence of an execution of acts that are so different in their kinds, forms and directions?” (F, 381).

Notice Scheler’s rhetorical strategies. Trying to escape a fixed definition, Scheler avoids the verb “to be”: rather, the person—the unitary executor—“belongs” to the execution of acts. Moreover, he approaches the notion of the person by way of a question, which, in turn, presents the problem as a contrast between difference and unity, or between complexity and simplicity. Only through these contrasts, we can finally put ourselves in a position to ask about individuality, and to appreciate its correspondent diversity: “And it is precisely here—and not ‘earlier’ within the order of problems involved—that the problem of personality confronts us” (F, 381).23

The elusiveness of personality and of individuality is present in Bergson’s thought as well. As he puts it:

Is my own person, at a given moment, one or manifold? If I declare it one, inner voices arise and protest—those of the sensations, feelings, ideas, among which my individuality is distributed. But if I make it distinctly manifold, my consciousness rebels quite as strongly; it affirms that my sensations, my feelings, my thoughts are abstractions which I effect on myself, and that each of my states implies all the others (CE, 257-58).

It is not easy to catch sight of our own person. It requires training. Furthermore, says


23 Cfr. Bergson’s similar idea about how the contrast between the simplicity of the movement, and the complexity of mechanism indicates different degrees of reality. See pp. 35-36 above.
Bergson, we are constantly deceived about the real and immediate character of experience by the metaphors we use to refer to it. For example, I say that today I feel happier than yesterday, which leads me to think that I have more happiness now than before. But, according to him, that is misleading. His point is not only that pain and pleasure cannot be calculated with any degree of accuracy, but rather that, properly speaking, I cannot even say, for instance, that I love my mother more than I love my father, or that when I was a teenager I was less annoyed by a song that now irritates me very much (again, even if I, obviously, do not specify how much). Those, Bergson says, are at most useful metaphors to talk about what are really different ways of loving, and different reactions to a particular song.

This applies not only to inner perception and affective emotions, but to experience in general, including impressions of the senses as well. Thus, he says, “a more intense heat is really another kind of heat” (TFW, 47), and “rose-scent” is only “that part of the scent of the rose which is public property and thereby belongs to space” (TFW, 162). In other words, intensity is a quantitative metaphor to talk about quality, but strictly speaking, it cannot be measured.24

For him, both science and common sense go equally wrong in this respect. They tend to conceive movement only as a difference in distance; as a change from point A to point B. There is, he admits, no way of expressing movement and action except in this way. But that inevitably obliterates the fact that “nobody loves as somebody else, or not even a single person loves in the same way twice” (TFW, 16), and therefore falsifies human experience. Even more strongly, experience becomes human only insofar as it follows a particular rhythm, which is both

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24 However, this does not mean that there cannot exist regularities or “laws” regarding our psychic life. He assumes not only from the assumption that they can identified, but also with the explicit recommendation that they should be investigated. See Bergson, “Phantasms of the living”, in ME, 99.
irreversible and inescapable.\textsuperscript{25}

Again, it is not easy to attune ourselves to this duration, and to perceive the “unsuspected details” with which “sensation is pregnant” (MM, 270). However, the rare moments when we are able to accomplish such “attuning” bear the unmistakable mark of making us present in our action: they involve our whole person. “Then and not earlier,” as Scheler puts it, we can gain access to individuality.

To recapitulate up to here, we have seen that, even if both Bergson and Scheler take inner diversity to be a necessary condition for the exercise of individuality, they both reject the way in which this diversity is conceived by empiricist approaches.\textsuperscript{26} Their criticism of associationism is not only that, according to them, contemporary psychological empirical research refutes it, but—more metaphysically speaking—that perception is not our only “access to reality.” Actually, they argue, by focusing exclusively on sensuous perception, associationism obliterates the “real citadel” of inner diversity.\textsuperscript{27} The gray area between matter and spirit gives us access to different degrees or levels of reality, and points in the only

\textsuperscript{25} See Bergson, \textit{CE}, 339, and \textit{MM}, 254. Put differently, for Bergson, we could say that the ultimate fact of experience is its \textit{irreversibility} and the \textit{particular velocity} with which everything happens. That, for Bergson, makes time more original than space. (We can travel in space, but we cannot travel in time, and that marks an absolute limit for us). Notice as well that despite the inevitability or necessity that characterizes time and the particular velocity it “imposes” on us, it is also paradigmatically the dimension of the unfixed and the ever-changing. This contrast, again, between what is so unyielding and, at the same time, so fluctuating, calls our attention to a degree of reality that would otherwise escape us. And that is the reality that makes experience properly human.

\textsuperscript{26} And indeed, Scheler says: “It is Bergson’s special merit to have shown how we are all inclined to import a quasi-spatial multiplicity into the mental field, despite the fact that the two things are utterly dissimilar.” (\textit{NS}, 257, translation modified). For more about Bergson on the substitution of space for time in the natural sciences and in philosophy, see next chapter, pp. 78ff.

direction in which we can experience individuality properly.

In what follows, I will give a more detailed account of how each author conceives the inner diversity of the self. Now the differences between Scheler and Bergson will become apparent. Those contrasts will invite us to reflect on the degree to which language can foster or hinder the exercise of individuality, and furthermore, on the extent to which language can become a vehicle for true sociability.

**Scheler and the ability to discriminate**

For Scheler, the possibility of experiencing inner diversity lies primarily in what he calls “perception of value” (*Wertnehmung*).\(^{28}\) For Scheler, values are neither thought of, nor judged, nor chosen: they are rather *perceived* through feelings.\(^{29}\) More specifically, he proposes a hierarchy of values—from the material to the spiritual—and a corresponding stratification of our emotional life, according to which, at every level, different types of feelings are “attuned” to different spheres of value. In other words, at each one of these levels, we find different types of feelings that are, so to speak, the “receptor organs” with which we perceive value.\(^{30}\) For Scheler, *individuality becomes possible only through the proper identification of the different*

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\(^{28}\) *Wertnehmung* is a term coined by Scheler, which combines value (*Wert*) with perception (*Wahrnehmung*).

\(^{29}\) However, they are different from sensations. As I mentioned before, for Scheler, against Kant, cognition is not exhausted by sensation and understanding. Values are data of intuition, which are yet not sensible in character. Again, that is why he calls them “material a priori” (see *F*, 45-80). See also Hans Joas, “The Value-feeling and its Object (Max Scheler),” in *The Genesis of Values* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 84-102.

\(^{30}\) As we will see in more detail in chapter 4, for Scheler, values are cognized or perceived, as opposed to something related thought of or judged. However, this does entail a relativist or a utilitarian position. On the contrary, for Scheler, the hierarchy of value that we discover through feeling is objective, and hence the importance of enhancing our cognitive-emotional apparatus. For assessments of Scheler’s sociology of knowledge, in connection with his philosophical anthropology, see Spiros Gangas, “Values, Knowledge and Solidarity: Neglected Convergences Between Émile Durkheim and Max Scheler,” *Human Studies* 34, no. 4 (2011): 353–71, and Karl-Siegbert Rehberg, “Philosophical Anthropology from the End of World War I to the 1940s and in a Current Perspective.” See also the detailed analysis by Imtiaz Moosa, “Are Values Independent Entities? Scheler’s Discussion of the Relation Between Values and Persons,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 24, no. 3 (1993).
ranks of value. Moreover, this “ability to discriminate,” as I will call it here,\(^{31}\) is crucial for one further purpose: for Scheler, as we will see below and also in chapter 3, true sociability—that is, the possibility of having things in common—also depends on it.

Let’s begin with a brief overview of Scheler’s theory of the hierarchy of values and feelings. In this hierarchy three different elements operate at each level: values, the feeling-function with which we perceive the value, and the feeling-state that results from the perception of that value.\(^{32}\) At the lower bottom we find the values ranging of the agreeable to the disagreeable, which are perceived through the “function” of sensible feeling. The respective “feeling-states” are pleasure and pain \((F, 105)\).

We may encounter diversity across people in what triggers different feeling-states (some people like negative incentives at the workplace, while some like positive ones better), and what is more, we might also encounter people who choose what they find disagreeable—some people deliberately choose to suffer pain, for instance, the masochist. The key thing to keep in mind, says Scheler, is that even the masochist must find pain unpleasant, otherwise he would not be a masochist anymore. More generally, the idea is that even if different people find agreeable or disagreeable different events or stimuli, “the difference between the values of agreeable and disagreeable as such is an absolute difference, clearly given prior to any cognition of things” \((F, 105)\), and therefore independent from observation and induction \((F, 105)\).

With this ambitious scheme, Scheler wants to provide, against empiricism, a criterion to

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\(^{31}\) I owe this formulation to Rodrigo Chacón.

\(^{32}\) See Table 1 at the end of this chapter. The German terms can be found there. I will use the term “feeling” and “emotion” indistinctly, although as it will become clear in what follows, as well as in chapter 4, these feelings have a different ontological status from the feelings of the Enlightenment tradition, both in its rationalist and its sentimentalist variants.
distinguish goodness from pleasure, which is capable of taking into account empirical diversity across cultures and ages. For Scheler, both the good and the pleasant exist in their own right, but at two different levels of value. That is why *to will* or *to choose* must be distinguished from *preferring*. The masochist *chooses the disagreeable*, but he must assume by definition that the agreeable is preferable.\(^{33}\)

The following sphere of value is the vital sphere. It constitutes, according to him, an “entirely original modality,” which contains the values of the *noble* and the *vulgar*, “the good in the pregnant sense of *excellent* as opposed to *bad* rather than *evil*” (\(F, 107\)). Some examples of feelings-states associated with these are *health* and *illness*, the feelings of *aging* and *oncoming death*, or of *weakness* and *strength*.\(^{34}\) According to Scheler, hedonists, utilitarians, and even Kant, reduce vital values to the lower ones of the agreeable and the useful. But that is a mistake, he thinks, because pleasure and pain (which pertain to the first and lowest sphere) can vary independently of what is good and bad from the point of view of the following vital sphere, and thus we can experience strength or health, even in pain, or weakness and illness, even in pleasure.\(^{35}\)

\(^{33}\) Notice that the phenomenon of masochism cannot really be understood by sensationalism, nor by the utilitarian point of view which is correlative to it. If the ultimate criterion of goodness is pleasure, the utilitarian must say that the masochist is not really such *from his own standpoint* (because he derives pleasure from pain, so pain is really pleasure to him). From the sensationalist perspective, the masochist is seen as such only by a society which does not share his values or preferences.

\(^{34}\) Others are courage, anxiety, revenge, fear, sympathy, and dizziness.

\(^{35}\) In an interesting observation, Scheler says that “only a person who fails to recognize the unity and autonomy of vital feelings […] and views them as mere consequences of sensible feelings, can be astonished that […] severe lung diseases and severe mental disorders can be accompanied by sensible pleasure, and that the presence or absence and the degree of sensible pleasure and displeasure do not correspond exactly to the magnitude of damages and advancements in the life of the entire organism” (\(F, 357\)-\(8\)). The personal relevance of this observation is clear: it is well-known that Scheler used to smoke at some point up to 70 cigarettes per day, and was well aware of the self-destructive potential of certain pleasures. But more broadly, Scheler is concerned not to explain away this the “vital area” within our psycho-somatic disposition, reducing it to a merely sensuous dimension. Overlooking the power of the vital, has serious ethico-political consequences as well. As we will see in chapter 3, Scheler associates the mental pathologies of “emotional infection” and “emotional identification” to this “vital zone,” and establishes link between them and the phenomena of fascism and charismatic authority.
Vital feelings, in turn, cannot be merely deduced from a higher sphere—that of psychic values—turning them thus into mere psychosomatic reactions. If we did so, we would not be able to make sense, for instance, of the difference between *appetite*—a vital feeling—and *hunger*—a psychic feeling. The latter involves the self more broadly, and has individual and even collective implications of higher significance.\(^{36}\) Similarly, without the difference between vital and psychic values, we would not be able to distinguish between the *impulse to vomit* and *disgust*, the latter of which, again, has important philosophical and political implications.\(^{37}\)

Finally, we have the sphere of spiritual values and feelings. These are roughly comprehended in three main categories: the values of the *beautiful* and the *ugly*; of *right* and *wrong*; and the values, as he puts it, of the *pure cognition of truth*. The correlative feeling-states are *bliss* and *despair* (as opposed to the vital *being cheerful* or *being anxious*). What characterizes these feelings, says Scheler, is that they are not dependent on an objectified self, or on an objectified state of affairs—for instance, my character as a student, as a daughter, or as woman. Rather, he says, they take possession of the whole of our being, so to speak (\(F, 342-3\)).

Correspondingly, he argues that “being glad or sad about something,” is not the same as experiencing a “deep feeling of joy or sorrow,” and that those two should, in turn, be distinguished from “being blissful” or “being in despair.” Scheler thinks that it is incorrect to say that we are “in despair about something” or “blissful about something”: “The use of these phrases is immediately felt to be an exaggeration. It can even be said that if this “something” is


given or if it is subject to explanation, we are certainly not yet blissful or in despair (F, 343).

Bliss and despair are spiritual feelings. They can “vary independently” while holding other things constant (F, 108), and they only result from our personal history as a whole. At the lower bottom, on the contrary, feelings of pain and pleasure can be precisely localized, and therefore they can be more easily controlled and manufactured.

The unity and originality of spiritual feelings is further revealed, according to Scheler, in that the lower values ought to be sacrificed to them (F, 107). Without distinguishing vital from spiritual values, he explains, it would be impossible for instance to discriminate between suicide and martyrdom. For Scheler, suicide is “genuine murder,” while martyrdom “occurs when life, with all its goods, is given away for [a] higher good...” (F, 316). Such a capacity to discriminate, prefer, and eventually sacrifice lesser values for higher values—the readiness of moral tenor [Gesinnung] to do so—is what makes a person good (F, 111ff).

To recapitulate what we have said so far in this section: for Scheler, there is a hierarchy of values, to which there is a corresponding rank of feelings. These feelings are “receptors of value”: without them we become blind to value and, more importantly, to value-differences. In his view, a close examination of our emotional life yields conclusive evidence of these strata in our emotional life. The evidence he uses to support his argument is the independent variation in terms of extension, localization, susceptibility of control, and duration of the different feelings that can be found at each one of the levels of our mental life. In Scheler, unlike in Bergson, we do have some access to such evidence through language, since words and definitions provide a

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38 See also EL, 141-42.
means to explore our inner life and our inner diversity, and to communicate it.\textsuperscript{39}

Through the verbal distinctions that words make available to us, we can make sense of the difference, for instance, between “genuine repentance about something done yesterday” (a truly spiritual value), and “feeling its unfavorable effects with an accompanying displeasure” (a merely agreeable one) (\textit{F}, 195). These two emotional experiences should be distinguished in turn from “merely using my past deed to indulge my penchant for self-torment,” or “wallowing with secret delight in the sweetness of my sins,” both of which correspond to psychic values related to guilt and delight, respectively (\textit{F}, 195). All four, insists Scheler, are not merely differences in assessment or interpretation of the same feeling-state. They are different facts, which, if ignored, would simply cancel the possibility of knowing different types of value, and with it, the possibility of true individuality.\textsuperscript{40}

As can be appreciated, for Scheler, value should not be reduced either to need, pleasure, interest, utility, or for that matter duty. To value something \textit{because} we need it, or \textit{because} we derive pleasure from it, or we have an interest on it, regard it useful, or consider it to be our duty, begs the question of what makes something \textit{valuable}. In this respect, his scheme becomes an “anti-reductionist” platform from where to criticize consequentialism, eudaemonism, hedonism, as well as any ethics based on imperatives. For our purposes, the main problem of moral reductionism is that it distorts our notion of individuality, and by extension, of

\textsuperscript{39} See Michael D. Barber, \textit{Guardian of Dialogue}, esp. chaps. 4 and 6 on dialogue, rationality and intersubjectivity.

\textsuperscript{40} Scheler’s distinctions constitute a useful light under which to revisit some of the arguments in debates about the political significance of repentance and forgiveness (that is, within discussions about transitional and criminal justice, reparations, and collective memory). See, for instance, Panu Minkkinen, “Ressentiment as Suffering: On Transitional Justice and the Impossibility of Forgiveness,” \textit{Law and Literature} 19, no. 3 (2007): 513–32, who uses Nietzsche, Scheler, and Améry’s reflections on resentment to interpret the latter as a continuation of the original suffering of the victim, and Rinat Kitai-Sangero and Itay Lipschits, “The Place of Repentance in Retributive Sentencing,” \textit{International Journal of Punishment and Sentencing} 7, no. 4 (2011): 107, who use Scheler (among other philosophers, writers, and legal theorists) to argue that repentance is not a legal institution, but explore the grounds for which it needs to be given recognition in the frame of sentencing.
Scheler identifies a paradigmatic instantiation of such kind of distortions in what he calls “the idols of self-knowledge.” It has become common currency, he says in 1912, to assume that knowledge of one’s own self is evident (or in any case, more evident than knowledge about others). Such self-certainty, he says, has evolved into a legitimate human attitude, and it constitutes one of the greatest obstacles to man’s insight into his true depths. “This theory, stemming from Descartes…is one of the foundations of that false kind of confident self-certainty which has grown up in the course of the development of our culture” (ISK”, 3). To assume that knowledge of one’s own self is evident in this sense entails, says Scheler, overlooking the deep and hierarchical structure of the soul. Some of its regions are more accessible than others, and therefore it is much easier to access relatively superficial layers of the souls of others, than really deep ones of mine.

A further and related distortion is the assumption that the mental is somehow “private” or “non-transferable” in a sense that the material is not: while you can certainly see my body, you cannot read my thoughts, and you cannot feel my feelings. This is normally referred to as “the problem of other minds.” The plausibility of this assumption lies on the undeniable fact that while I would need the ring of Gyges if I wanted to hide my body from you, it is you who would need a sophisticated X-ray-like technology, some kind of telepathic capacities, or at least to work for the NSA (or whatever intelligence services of the country you are in), if you wanted to read my thoughts. However—Scheler would rejoin—if, instead of taking a deflated view of the self, we set off from the perspective of a hierarchy of values and feelings, with the different

41 The question of how we relate to others without foregoing individuality will be explored in chapter 4, where I examine Scheler’s conception of sympathy

registers of our mental life that it uncovers, we might end up concluding that we ourselves also need some training to read our own thoughts. Likewise, if we acknowledge that perception is a process of selection by which we dissociate an original whole, we can see that, even facing one another, you might perfectly well miss some features or movements of my body, in case your practical interests and your memory do not direct your attention to them.43

He adds that, at any rate, the absolutely private lies in our physical sensations: you certainly cannot feel the physical pain of my broken leg, or the contractions of someone else while giving birth. However—and this takes us to the point about community and sociability—if the difference between the physical and the mental is to have any meaning, Scheler argues, then the mental must be the communicable per excellence:

Anyone who holds that mental events are only accessible to one person at a time will never be able to explain the exact meaning of phrases like: “All ranks were fired with the same enthusiasm,” “The populace was seized with a common joy, a common grief, a common delight,” and so on. Custom, language, myth, religion, the world of the tale and the saga—how can they be understood on the assumption that mental life is essentially private? (NS, 258)

Sensualism and materialism run the risk of underestimating the collective dimension of our mental lives—what is sometimes called the “symbolic” dimension of societies. However, he says, this dimension is truly shared, truly common: it is not “imaginary” in the sense of existing merely “in the head” of each one of its members. Again, in Scheler, language can help us, to some extent, to get at the relevant distinctions. A coin, for instance, taken merely as currency, is a symbol of value and has no possibility of conveying any meaning at all. Nothing, he says, is given in a mere sign. However, he claims, there is true symbolic value, for example, in something like a “regimental flag, in which honor and dignity are symbolically concentrated” (F,

43 See the famous experiment by Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons, reported in their book The Invisible Gorilla (New York: Crown, 2010), where they demonstrate how people who are focused on one particular task can become blind to objects or other stimuli that would normally draw their attention.
104). For him, a flag can possess a “phenomenal value” that has nothing to do with its mere material value as a piece of cloth. Similarly, a word can have a mere transaction role, or alternatively—if uttered in a particular circumstance, in a particular way, and to a particular person—it can be a repository of value. 44

Both the “idols of self-knowledge” and the so-called “problem of other minds” reveal the difficulties that we face as we relate to our own individual selves and to others. A mechanistic or deflated view of the soul reads diversity “at one level” only—namely, among different people. However, if diversity is conceived not only “horizontally” across society, but also “vertically” within one same person, we find interesting ways in which individuality and community are connected. This can help us to identifying the real grounds (and not just instrumental or contractual) grounds in which we can have things in common. 45

For Scheler, the hierarchy of values and the corresponding regions of the soul, together with its complex understanding of the relationship between body and mind, can accommodate inner diversity in the service of individuality, without for that reason giving up on the possibility of community. For instance, sociability need not be a puzzle anymore if we start off from the Schelerian assumption that experiences do not originally “belong” to a self, but that they rather become gradually “appropriated” by it.

44 As I mentioned in the introduction, for Scheler, language can “bring the most hidden of all phenomena to givenness,” and guide us in “the direction of the phenomenon […] by way of images” (F, 385).

45 See Matthias Schloßberger, “The Varieties of Togetherness: Scheler on Collective Affective Intentionality,” in The Phenomenological Approach to Social Reality: History, Concepts, Problems, edited by Alessandro Salice and Hans Bernhard Schmid (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016), 173-95, for an examination of Scheler’s social ontology in connection with his theory of the varieties of sympathy, which is examined in chapter 4 below; Thomas Szanto and Dermot Moran, Phenomenology of Sociality: Discovering the We (New York: Routledge, 2015), especially the contributions by Ingrid Vendrell Ferrán on affective intentionality in early phenomenology, and Part IV of the book, with contributions by Emanuele Caminada, Thomas Szanto, and Nicolas De Warren, on collective intentionality in Husserl, Scheler, and Sartre, respectively; and Michael D. Barber, Guardian of Dialogue, chap. 4, who argues that Scheler’s attempt to uphold an objective order of being and value results, at the political and cultural level, in the ethical mandate to engage in intercultural dialogue (127);
Likewise, assuming a continuity between our material and our spiritual parts gives us more resources to draw from in order to understand the different ways we can be bound together. We don’t have to be explicitly shaking hands or taking an oath of citizenship out loud in order to partake in something. In other words, in the formation of society there are more options than the Lockean alternative between explicit consent, on the one hand, and tacit consent through the individual enjoyment of benefits, on the other.46 Likewise, we do not need to consciously, or even hypothetically, agree on a set of principles in order to partake in some kind of community. Other connections exist besides the Rawlsian overlapping consensus. However—and this is the important point—community in this sense is possible, Scheler thinks, only if we first acknowledge the kind of inner diversity that he has called our attention to.

Now, does the idea that true individuality and true community are compatible imply, in Scheler’s view, that there is no place for moral incommensurability, let alone for legitimate factual conflict? Not quite. To conclude this section, I would like to offer a brief comment on this point, which we will explore more fully however in later chapters. The phenomenological examination of the sphere of spiritual values yields, according to Scheler, two important conclusions: first, that the highest kind of values—that is, spiritual values—always refer to persons and not to objects, rules, or even virtues as such. This means that his ethical approach intends to orient action not by an appeal to consequences or rules alone, nor even by commending virtuous action as such. Rather, it will always consider ethical action in the particular context of a person.47

46 See Adriana Ortega Ortiz, "La autonomía progresiva de los adolescentes y el consentimiento sexual" (MS, analyzes case of pederasty and consent, that is currently under review in the Mexican Supreme Court).

47 The connection with what is called now “moral particularism” is evident. I will examine Scheler’s notion of individual conscience in chapters 2 and 4, and of exemplarity in chapter 5. On how Scheler’s sociology of knowledge is related to his particularism in ethics see Kenneth W. Stikkers, “Introduction,” in Scheler, PSK, 1-30; and Karl Acham, “The Sociology of Knowledge and Diagnosis of Time with Max Scheler and Karl Mannheim,” in
Second, that there is a plurality of “types of persons,” which cannot be reduced to one single exemplar. So, even if he accepts an objective hierarchy of values, he also endorses the idea of moral incommensurability between different people. “On the basis of this phenomenological state of affairs,” he says, “it is not contingently, but essentially impossible for one finite person to represent simultaneously an exemplar of the saint, the genius, and the hero” (F, 590, translation slightly modified). There is no human way of judging between exemplars, and therefore the best way of life cannot be determined once and for all. The problem has a solution only from a divine standpoint. In that sense, we cannot get rid of moral conflict, and given that nobody is ever capable of embracing the totality of value, our individual moral character is, in certain sense, always imperfect. That is what he calls “the essential tragic character of all finite personal being” (F, 590).

Compare this to Mill’s idea about how to decide between higher and lower pleasures.48 According to him, only someone who has tried and enjoyed them all can adjudicate between pleasures. Whether ironically intended or not, Mill’s solution would seem implausible from Scheler’s standpoint: there is no human judge who could possibly experience and understand all pleasures, in order to adjudicate between the phenomenologically given plurality of higher values. The problem is not so much between lower and higher pleasures, but between an irreducible plurality of higher ones. For Scheler, “only the hero fully values the hero; only the genius fully values the genius” (F, 591).49 Consequently, our possibilities of communication are limited.

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49 I italicized “fully” since Scheler does not want to go as far as saying that others cannot understand or value at all people with whom they do not share certain characteristics. For Scheler, we can know things without experiencing them (this topic will be explored more fully in chapter 4). Only the former, says Scheler, is a requirement for understanding (comprehension of the other’s sense) and valuing (comprehension of the other’s value-sense) the
also limited. A judgment is always meant to communicate something in particular: consequently, Scheler thinks, a person as such cannot be judged, not even through the most refined verbal distinctions.\textsuperscript{50}

So far, the examination of Scheler’s theory of the inner diversity of the self, based on a hierarchy of values and emotions, suggests that the ontological primacy of the person has different ethico-political implications. By urging us to distinguish sharply between different phenomena such as disgust, hunger, consent, repentance, sacrifice, happiness, etc., Scheler invites us to reconsider the conclusions of important debates in political theory.\textsuperscript{51} Moreover, as we will see in more detail in the following chapters, the unique character of the person is nothing less than what makes, in Scheler’s view, freedom and morality possible. For him, unlike for Kant, these are reached not through the obedience to universal laws that we give to ourselves, but mainly through our capacity of listening to the voice of our conscience, which will always speak to us as individual persons, and never as part of a collectivity.\textsuperscript{52}

\textit{Bergson’s labor theory of value}

As we saw before, for Bergson, the primary datum of experience is movement and change; hence the centrality of the notion of duration and time for an adequate comprehension of individuality. However, Bergson warns us, what is primarily given can be, at the same time,

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{50} This is the main contrast I indicated before between Scheler and Taylor (see pp. 18-19 above).

\textsuperscript{51} See notes 36, 37, 40, 46 above. Chapter 3 of this dissertation is an effort in this direction, where I offer an ethico-political reading of Scheler’s conception of sympathy.

\textsuperscript{52} However, it is important to keep in mind that the voice of conscience is not, according to Scheler, the only resource we have in our efforts toward moral formation. Rules can be an aide and, as we will see in chapter 5, personal authority or exemplarity plays a key role as well, thereby complicating Scheler’s picture of our moral education, and mitigating potential charges of individualism or solipsism on this score.
\end{footnotesize}
most difficult to see. Therefore, given that duration makes individuality elusive and obscure, some rare or abnormal phenomena can serve as heuristic resources to give us a clearer idea of what the exercise of individuality is about. With that in mind, let us review Bergson’s interpretation of the famous phenomenon known as *déjà vu*, and the lessons he derives from it.

By 1908, when Bergson entered this debate, there were already quite a few theories trying to explain the phenomenon. Most of them suggested a confused or incomplete recall of a real memory, based on the grounds of some brain failure. Even if it does not generate much scientific interest anymore, contemporary approaches to incidents of *déjà vu* go along the same lines. The essential point is that it constitutes a momentary lapse or illusion, which can be explained physically, chemically or even psychosomatically.

The experience of *déjà vu* (or, as was called in Bergson’s time, “false recognition”) is feeling that we are living again something that we have already lived before. As Bergson describes it, it is not only that to have some distinct and unmistakable familiarity with specific characteristics of a situation—an image, a sound, or a smell—nor even with certain circumstance in general, but feeling that one lives again some past experience in the exact same way, without, however, being able to predict what is going to happen next.

Ironically, Bergson notes, according to reports of people who have experienced it, this “going through the exact same circumstance” does not issue in a feeling of familiarity, quite the

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53 He treats this subject in the essay titled “Memory of the present and false recognition,” in ME, 134-85.

54 See Peter Krapp, *Déjà vu: Aberrations of Cultural Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 15-17. I thank Jaime del Palacio for calling my attention to this work.

55 An interesting case was Pierre Janet, who, even when interpreting it as a misperception, attributed the phenomenon of *déjà vu* more metaphysical meaning than the rest. He thought that these episodes constituted “a denial of the present.” “In pathological cases, defensive stress reduction takes the form of a “refuge from temporality, and in fatigued but sane people it appears as a recreative putting on hold of time for a while—usually the while of distraction and entertainment” (Krapp, *Déjà vu*, 16-7). And indeed, Bergson acknowledges that Janet’s studies raise more delicate questions (see Bergson, ME, 137-40).
opposite. It does not give us the confidence that comes normally from being acquainted with our surroundings but, instead, it results in the feeling of being a stranger, even to oneself. Such a “feeling of depersonalization” comes in part, says Bergson, from the fact that one is, simultaneously, “outside” and “inside” of a situation. On the one hand, one seems to be watching a succession of events that one already knows, with a feeling of inevitability to it (like a spectator watching a play of which he knows the story), while, on the other, being part of the action, one feels unable to know how it is going to end (ME, 136, 168-9). Again, this whole sense of disorientation and confusion is generally taken to be a result of some kind of brain lapse.

However, according to Bergson, this approach is wrong. The experience of *déjà vu*, he says, is no false recognition, no illusion, or mistake.\(^{56}\) Rather, in his view, it is the way we would normally experience reality, if it were not for the fact that our intellect, as we have already said, focuses on action and practical interests. Now, Bergson asks, what would be more *useless* than to remember the present? After all, we are living it, so there is no need to remember it. However, if the pragmatic orientation of the intellect is suspended, he thinks, something like “remembering the present” should be possible since, Bergson thinks, *the past never disappears*. Rather, it is preserved in its entirety, and the business of the brain is not to remember, but to forget.

This is a strange but very interesting theory, so it is worth explaining it in detail. According to his theory of memory, in a certain sense, it is impossible to draw any precise line between past and present, between the function of recollection and the function of perception, or between memory and consciousness. Everything forms part of the totality of the given, and

\(^{56}\) This even if he admits he had never experienced one (ME, 182).
the criterion of distinction between past and present is whether it is useful for action or not.\textsuperscript{57}

What we call \textit{the past} forms just one part of that totality, and its main distinction from \textit{the present} is that it is relatively useless. Or, put differently, “to remember” is the name we have for the ability to cognize the past, and “to forget” is, strictly speaking, just not to be able to perceive it anymore. In this theory, the brain’s mnemonic function is not to “store” memories, but rather to \textit{select} perceptions from the totality of the given. Thus, in Bergson, as it were, the past is always being created, it can never be destroyed, and it is always being transformed.

What he calls “the cinematographic illusion” makes us think that the past disappears, like the images of a film disappear from the screen. It is the illusion that we \textit{first} perceive, and \textit{only then} recall what we have perceived (\textit{ME}, 160). Instead, he proposes, the past \textit{duplicates} the present incessantly (\textit{ME}, 165). The difference between past and present is that one is actual and can be acted upon, while the other is virtual. The virtual is just as real as the actual, \textit{but it belongs to a different level of existence}. “Every moment of our life presents two aspects, it is actual and virtual, perception on the one side and memory on another. Each moment of life is split up as and when it is posited. Or rather, it consists in this very splitting…” (\textit{ME}, 165).\textsuperscript{58}

Thus, a \textit{déjà vu} happens, according to this interpretation, when we become conscious of the constant duplication of our existence, and therefore the present appears simultaneously as a

\textsuperscript{57} He says that any particular recollection “passes to and fro from consciousness to unconsciousness, and the transition from one to another is so continuous, the limit between the two states so little marked, that we have no right to suppose a radical difference of nature between them” (\textit{ME}, 157). In other words, the images of memory and perception cannot pertain to one of those exclusively. However, from another perspective, these two faculties point in the direction of two different dimensions. See note 104 below.

\textsuperscript{58} He says, further: “The memory will duplicate the perception at every moment, to arise with it, to be developed at the same time, and to survive it precisely because it is \textit{of quite a different order}” (\textit{ME}, 164, italics added). So, in a certain sense, recollection and perception cannot be distinguished but they point in different directions: the present, which is what he calls “actual,” and the past, which is what he calls “virtual.” The classic study about Bergson’s conception of the actual and the virtual is Gilles Deleuze, \textit{Bergsonism} (New York: Zone Books, 1991). See also, Keith Ansell-Pearson, \textit{Philosophy and the Adventure of the Virtual: Bergson and the Time of Life} (New York: Routledge, 2002), chaps. 6 and 7.
perception and as a memory (ME, 166).

Now, the reason why Bergson’s theory about *déjà vu* is relevant for us here, is that by showing that the present can be remembered, this phenomenon can help us to make sense of a complementary proposition—one which constitutes one of the most important ideas in Bergson’s thought, as I read him: that we can act on the past. As I want to argue, for Bergson, the exercise of individuality depends on learning how to relate ourselves to the inner diversity that our own past encloses.⁵⁹

To recapitulate: first, the phenomenon of *déjà vu* illustrates the way in which the past is really there, and it warns us that it can and does exercise an intense influence on the present. Second, having realized the selective character of our intellect, we become aware that we can actively modify the ways in which the past influences us. Of course, the influence of the past on the present is something that no sensualist would deny. The difference is that Bergson suggests that we can actually act upon this influence. For Bergson, the *Critique of Pure Reason* had relegated the human mind to a corner where “like a schoolboy in disgrace, it [could not] turn its head around to see reality as it is” (CM, 49-50). His claim is that phenomena like the *déjà vu* show a way out of such unnecessary self-mortification. For one thing, it indicates that there are different kinds of cognition, other than sensible intuition and the intellect. ⁶⁰ Furthermore, putting at our disposal “the past in its form and the present in its matter” (ME, 167), incidents of *déjà vu* point to different ways of appropriating or exploring our own past, because they

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⁵⁹ That we can act on the past does not mean that the past can act on us as the present does. Trying to explain what memory is, and acknowledging that it can only be done metaphorically, he proposes his famous analogy of the mirror: “A memory seems to be to a perception what the image reflected in the mirror is to the object in front of it. The object can be touched as well as seen; acts on us as well as we on it; is pregnant with possible actions; it is actual. The image is virtual, and though it resembles the object, it is incapable of doing what the object does” (ME, 165, translation slightly modified).

⁶⁰ The same point is made by Scheler against Kant. See pp. 34-35, and 41-42.
suggest that we can act on it. Consider the following diagram:

Bergson illustrated the coexistence of the past and the present through his famous “cone metaphor.” The idea is that we stand at the apex of this inverted cone, which represents the constant accumulation of the past. At each one of its levels we find the totality of the past, but at different degrees of contraction or expansion. More specifically, it displays different levels of consciousness, at which we experience different ways of relating to our past.

For Bergson, in my view, the only possible access to individuality is gained by “digging tunnels” into this cone, exploring the multiple ways in which we can traverse its different levels. In other words, with him we learn that the past is of those who mix their labor with it, and the more you “appropriate” your past, the more you put yourself in a position to exercise individuality. This is what I have called Bergson’s “alternative labor theory of value.”

What does such “labor” consists in, more precisely? How does it result in the “value” of individuality? The first question can be further clarified through his account of “intellectual effort.” Intellectual effort is, according to Bergson, something present in a whole range of phenomena, from mechanical memorizing to invention or creation. In a sort of reprise of Plato’s theme in the _Meno_, Bergson examines the nature of the mind by reflecting on our

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61 Cfr. Hume on this point, who says that all things equal, we observe “superior effects of the same distance in futurity above that in the past. This difference with respect to the will—he explains—is easily accounted for. _As none of our actions can alter the past_, ‘tis is not strange it shou’d never determine the will” (_Treatise of Human Nature_, 430, italics added). In my reading, for Bergson, we can alter the past, even if—as we saw from the citation in note 59 above—it cannot act on us as the present can.

62 See Deleuze, _Bergsonism_, 59-61.

63 This account is offered in the essay titled, “Intellectual effort,” in _ME_, 186-230.
learning processes. In the *Meno*, those processes throw light into the transcendent wanderings of the soul because, it is proposed, all learning amounts to *remembering* the truths with which a soul had contact before transmigrating into a human body. For Bergson, in turn, the intellectual effort involved in the learning processes, by which we memorize and create, reveals our mental depths.\(^6^4\)

In Bergson’s view, intellectual effort always involves an oscillation between different levels of consciousness, which range from the concrete plane of the image to the abstract level of what he calls a “scheme.” It offers evidence against the associationist claim that memory can be explained as the play of concrete images, all operating *at a single level*. From the reproductive process by which we learn a poem by heart, to the creative process of writing one, passing through chess-playing, dance-learning, technical invention, scientific research, and artistic creation, Bergson finds that mnemonic techniques never work through mere contiguity of concrete and discrete images. Instead, he thinks, these techniques show that, for instance, in order to memorize a text, one must “devise its internal organization,” finding “substantial formulas” which are then condensed into “suggestive words,” which, in turn, will eventually “converge into single points” indicating the “abstract directions” that our memory should follow, in order to eventually find a concrete image—that is, a word, a sound, a smell (*ME*, 194-5).

He claims that all memorizing that requires an effort, however minimal, proceeds in a similar fashion. This dynamic scheme “does not contain images themselves so much as the indication of what we must do to reconstruct them” (*ME*, 196). “[W]hen we make an effort to

\(^6^4\) Leonard Lawlor, in fact, has argued that we witness here a Bergsonian reversal of Platonism. “For Plato, there is a fall into matter that makes us forget our original contact with the ideas; for Bergson, matter puts forgetfulness in us” (Leonard Lawlor, “The Ontology of Memory: Bergson’s Reversal of Platonism,” *Époche: A Journal for the History of Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (2003), p. 97).
recollect, it seems that we are concentrating on a higher plane in order to descend progressively towards the images we want to evoke” (*ME*, 201). In this case, he explains, the movement of the mind “is vertical and that it makes us pass from one plane to another” (*ME*, 201-2).

He identifies the same process in the mental procedure of chess-players engaged in some especially difficult challenge, for instance, playing blindfold or playing several matches simultaneously. Bergson reviews several first-hand reports, according to which the players do not to have the images of the chess-board in mind “as if projected on a screen,” neither do they behold the pieces distinctly, one by one. Instead, they claim to conceive them in terms of forces and movements. “A bishop is not a piece of wood of more or less fantastic shape: it is an ‘oblique force.’ The castle is a certain power of ‘going in a straight line.’ The knight, a piece ‘which is almost equal to three pawns and which moves according to a quite special law,’ and so on” (*ME*, 198). And the game, he adds, is not conceived in terms of mental images of the board or the different pieces, but as a “relation between allied or hostile powers” (*ME*, 198). This relation is not grasped visually, but, according to the testimony of one player, “as a musician grasps a chord” (*ME*, 198).

A mind working only with images could but recommence its past or arrange the congealed elements of the past, like pieces of mosaic, in another order. But for a flexible mind, capable of utilizing its past experience by bending back along the lines of the present, there must be, besides the image, an idea of a different kind, always capable of being realized into images, but always distinct from them. The scheme is nothing else. (*ME*, 228, translation slightly modified)

The scheme, Bergson says, “is tentatively what the image is decisively”: it contains virtually what the image actualizes. The feeling of effort is the “labor” that allows the passage

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65 Bergson is quoting directly from reports of chess players, where they explain how they understand or experience the game.

66 Thus, he explains, the efficiency of any given mnemonic technique will reside in the extent to which it can provide the most parsimonious and economical instructions to get across different mental planes.
through different planes of consciousness, from the scheme to the concrete image. Therefore, Bergson explains, the feeling of effort is not evinced by any image in particular, but by “an expectation of images” (*ME*, 214). It is, in other words, the intellectual attitude that prepares the advent, so to speak, of more concrete ideas.

Notice, then, that the effort to memorizing—the “labor” involved in memory—implies a peculiar contrast between effort and expectation, activity and passivity, engagement and patience involved in these operations, as he portrays them. From Bergson’s theory of “intellectual effort” we learn that these contrasts characterize as well the relation to our own past. The way I read him, for Bergson, learning how to navigate the tensions involved in them is the kind of “labor” that produces “value”—the value of individuality. How exactly is our relation to our past connected to individuality?

Bergson claims that the same operation by which we recollect and memorize, is the operation by which create and invent. Between mere reproduction and full creation there is a spectrum. The difference between a more reproductive and a more creative effort resides in how we move from one level to another. Cases of artistic creation, technical invention, or scientific discovery work exactly like the examples previously reviewed, with the difference that, unlike the cases of mere reproduction or execution, here the scheme *changes* as we oscillate between more concrete images and more abstract directions. As we try to convert impulses into ideas in successive attempts, the scheme is transformed, and thereby we are able to explore and create new things.

Now—and this is the key-point—for Bergson, individuality is self-creation, “the creation of self by self, the growing of the personality by an effort which draws much from little, something from nothing, and adds unceasingly to whatever wealth the world contains”
(ME, 31). If creation, as we just saw, is the end-point of a spectrum that opens up with mere reproduction, and displays all the possibilities of memory, individuality as self-creation must be intimately related with memory and with the way we relate to our past.

Putting together Bergson’s theory of memory—which relates the latter to creation, via intellectual effort—and his conception of individuality, we see that individuality, as self-creation, is achieved by toiling with our memories at different “levels of condensation.” In the most proximate and condensed levels, our relation with the past is more straightforward; but as we enter into the more expanded areas, things become open-ended and unsettled. Again, the past is not some remote territory, a field beyond reach, impervious to our action. On the contrary, it never vanishes, and only by mixing our labor with it, by appropriating it, we can exercise our individuality.

But notice again the irony here. The feeling of effort—that is, an attitude in which we take ourselves to be primarily active and even “busy”—turns out to be, at the same time, an

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67 This quotation comes from Bergson’s essay, “Life and consciousness,” in ME, 3-36.

68 The coincidence in Scheler and Bergson on this point is almost perfect. See Scheler’s “Repentance and Rebirth,” in OEM, (40-41), where he says that “since, however, the total efficacy of an event is, in the texture of life, bound up with its full significance and final value, every event of our past remains indeterminate in significance and incomplete in value until it has yielded all its potential effects […] Before our life comes to an end the whole of the past, at least with respect to its significance, never ceases to present us with the problem of what we are going to make of it.” See the resonances between both authors displayed in Vladimir Jankélévitch’s (Bergson scholar) treatment on the subject of repentance and forgiveness (Vladimir Jankélévitch, Le Pardon (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1967)), and in Graham J. McAleer, “New Spartans: Jankélévitch, Scheler, and Tolkien on vanity,” in Vladimir Jankélévitch and the Question of Forgiveness, ed. Alan Udoff (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013), 129-42.

69 I find a consonant approach in Lawlor, when he observes that “[though] the memories have passed out of the present, they have not, as we have seen Bergson also claims, passed out of time; insofar as they constitute our character, they continue to affect the present.” (Leonard Lawlor, “What Immanence? What Transcendence? The Prioritization of Intuition Over Language in Bergson,” Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology 35, no. 1 (2004), 32), or when he says that “if there is alterity in […] experience, it is going to be dependent on my own interior life, on my memory, on my sense.” (Leonard Lawlor, The Challenge of Bergsonism: Phenomenology, Ontology, Ethics (New York: Continuum, 2003), 75). “Sense,” Lawlor explains, must be understood here in a technical way, as precisely the “dynamic schema” which we have been discussing. See also a similar idea in Muldoon, when he explains that “[i]n duration the personal past influences the personal present, not as static state of affairs, but as dynamic process…” This means, he expounds, that “each moment possesses its own ‘life-story’” (Mark Muldoon, Tricks of Time: Bergson, Merleau-Ponty and Ricoeur in Search of Time, Self and Meaning (Pittsburgh, Pa: Duquesne University Press, 2006), 82).
attitude in which we “passively” expect and endure. As our memory does not trade with ready-made images, but is engaged in a dynamic process in which they eventually appear, our intellectual effort is the attitude that “prepares the advent” of the concrete. This bewildering mix of a “work-ethic” focused on effort, which is nonetheless characterized by expectation, endurance and even patience, contains the key to Bergsonian individuality.

Furthermore, notice that his emphasis on the feeling of effort is no accident given his ontological and epistemological presuppositions. Such a feeling is the inner sensation corresponding to what is more immediately given, namely, movement. Through the feeling of effort, we intuit ourselves as movement and change—or, in other words, we intuit ourselves as agents, an idea that I will explore fully in the following chapter.

In sum, for Bergson, the effortful operation of memory evinces the ultimate facts of our existence. That is why Bergson says that “the existence of the scheme is a fact” (ME, 228), and that the gradual and dynamic operation between the scheme and the idea, “is the very operation of life” (ME, 230). In my opinion, this means that, if we look closely, the feeling of effort subtly discloses our “way of being.” Just as “[t]he effort of recall consists in converting a schematic idea, whose elements interpenetrate, into an imaged idea, the parts of which are juxtaposed” (ME, 203), we, in our everyday life, are constantly moving between the inner, heterogeneous dimension of our inner selves of which we have spoken before, and the outer, homogeneous dimension, in which we capture and organize things according to stable categories. Again, individuality as self-creation is based on our capacity to play this rhythm gracefully.70

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70 On this point, it is interesting to note that both Matter and Memory and “Intellectual Effort” are early texts in Bergson’s career, a period when allegedly he did not draw so a sharp distinction between intelligence and intuition as he would do in later works. In this respect, Lawlor observes that “[i]ntelligence refers here to a specific mental
What is the role of language in this movement from a deeper dimension of consciousness to a more superficial, and back? Expression and communication are possible only through the symbols and rules of language, which provide homogeneity and stability. Therefore, for Bergson, as I said in the introduction, sociability is only possible at the “superficial” level where we orient ourselves through stable categories. As he puts it: “[o]ur tendency to form a clear picture of this externality of things and the homogeneity of their medium is the same as the impulse which leads us to live in common and to speak” (TFW, 138). In other words, our interactions with others take us “out of our inner selves,” “forcing” us to play by the rules of the symbols and signs of the spatial and social dimension.

Now, for Bergson, in virtue of language’s capacity to codify reality in expression and communication, it has also the power of modeling perception. Like for Scheler, for Bergson, as soon as we have a name for something, we are ready to “look for it” in reality. As I said in the introduction, for Bergson, this has, for the most part, damaging consequences (it simplifies the diversity of our inner life, and fosters prejudice about others, because it allows us to see only what we have learned to expect). I will say more about this shortly.

However, at some point, Bergson acknowledges that, for the same reason, language can also expand perception. As he says, the vision of the great painters has become the vision of all men: the ways they depict landscapes or human gestures, have later on become cues for what we seek in nature and in ourselves. Similarly, the great poets have uncovered shades of emotion and thought which would have remained invisible otherwise (CM, 112). Is this just a concession or is it a contradiction, given his deep suspicions about language? In my opinion, it is a contradiction—one whose implications I want to explore more directly towards the end of this effort, which coincides with Bergson’s philosophical method of intuition.” (“The Ontology of Memory: Bergson’s Reversal of Platonism,” 91).
dissertation, since it involves, not merely any particular topic within his philosophy, but, more broadly, his character as a philosopher. He was as an orator (and a very popular one), a writer (and a Nobel prize laureate in literature), and as a public intellectual (who had an important diplomatic role after WWI), who at the same time, as we have seen, was deeply skeptical about the possibilities of language.

For him, language is never a legitimate articulation of that inner reality. On the contrary, language is a “disarticulation of the real,” and even in poetry “the word turns against the idea,” and “the letter kills the spirit” (CE, 127). This goes for philosophy as well: its great disadvantage against mathematics or even the natural sciences, is that while language liberates the intellect, it traps and encapsulates what philosophy should care about. The result, he says, is that very often the philosopher forgets this, “and proceeds like geographer, who, in order to discriminate between different regions of the globe and indicate the physical connections between them, relies on the frontiers traced in maps” (TS, 173-74, translation modified).

Furthermore, and in contrast with Scheler, the liberation of the intellect poses dangers not only for individuality, but also for our social life. The intellect is good at dealing with the inert. However, when dealing with life, of either the body or the mind, “it proceeds with the rigor, the stiffness and the brutality of an instrument not designed for such use. The history of hygiene or of pedagogy teaches us much in this matter” (CE, 165). I will explore some implications of Bergson’s thought on this point in the following chapters; but, for now, let me conclude by underscoring two things.

First, for Bergson, as we saw, the exercise of individuality is a toilsome enterprise, with only rare and extraordinary moments of success: “[w]e must, by a strong recoil of our personality on itself, gather up our past which is slipping away, in order to thrust it, compact
and undivided, into a present which it will create by entering. Rare indeed are the moments when we are self-possessed to this extent: it is then that our actions are truly free” (TFW, 173).

We will carefully review Bergson’s notion of freedom in the next chapter, but let’s just say for now, that freedom for Bergson is such “entrance” in the present. Therefore, individuality and freedom are deeply intertwined. They both depend—to use again the labor metaphor—on the extent to which we toil in our pasts, feeling an effort with which we “recoil on ourselves,” to finally enter into the present, we thereby create.

It follows from this, I think, that “freedom of expression” and “freedom of association” as ideals harbor as many dangers as they offer paths for liberty. By this, I do not mean, of course, that the practices of expression and association as such endanger freedom, or even less that one should support restrictions in expression and association. Rather, my point is that freedom of expression and association should not be turned into symbols of freedom, because we cannot rely on the existence of such practices in order to guarantee the exercise of individuality.

Second, it is important to notice that even if, for Bergson, the moments of freedom are rare and toilsome, that does not mean that he thinks that they are the exclusive privilege of some particular way of life. It is not necessary to live a life of leisure, or alternatively, a life of suffering, in order to have access to them. Rather, individuality as self-creation, Bergson says, potentially allows all of us to partake in the joys that are commonly reserved for the few ones who do have the privilege of being able to create or invent new things in the fields of the arts and the sciences (i.a., CM, 89).
Conclusion

For both Scheler and Bergson, the exercise of individuality depends on the capacity to perceive inner multiplicity. They theorize, though, this inner diversity in different ways. Scheler speaks of coextensive hierarchies of values and feelings that go from the most sensuous to the most spiritual, while Bergson refers to the different planes of consciousness, according to varying degrees of condensation of our past. Despite these differences, there is an important overlap in two respects. First, in terms of method, they both rely, phenomenologically, on the intuition of what is immediately given: values, in the case of Scheler; movement and change, in the case of Bergson. This implies a common rejection of sensualism and rationalism, on the basis that they both reduce perception to sensuous perception.71

Second, there is a parallelism in the way they both theorize the character of the “immediately given”: on the one hand, Scheler’s conception of the person, and his opposition of act vs. content; on the other, Bergson’s conception of time, and his emphasis on movement and change. The moment we objectify the person and time, we fall into the traps of personal identity (Scheler), and of language (Bergson). The exercise of individuality depends on avoiding those traps without, for that reason, denying the reality of the personal self. This last point is what distinguishes them from empiricist conceptions of inner multiplicity.

Finally, as I had already anticipated in the introduction, connecting their respective theories on individuality and inner diversity to their respective approaches to language, I find both coincidences and discrepancies in the way in which language fosters and hinders the exercise of individuality in each case. As we saw, for Bergson, language is and will always

71 As I said earlier, both Scheler and Bergson identify in Kant the same mistake made by the empiricists of considering only two sources of cognition: the senses and the intellect (see pp. 37 and 56 above). Bergson and Scheler’s critiques of Kantianism will be the focus of the next chapter.
remain a social phenomenon, a bait calling us in the direction of the solidification of true life and the disarticulation of the real. For him, we need to go back to what is given immediately in perception. The exercise of individuality relies on merging together what language, our needs, and more generally our tendency to live outside of ourselves, has put apart.

In Scheler, on the contrary, we find more confidence in language, and in the kind of orientation it can provide. For him, again, language does have some power to articulate the real, even if perception of value does not necessarily depend on it. It can guide us in introspection through the levels of feelings and values. Of course, Scheler shares Bergson’s reservations regarding the limitations of language in conveying acts themselves. As he puts it, speaking of the Christian dogma of a duty of love and a duty of faith, “certain works or certain outer visible displays of the existence of these acts […], will replace the spiritual acts that alone originally bear these names” (F, 220-1). However, as we saw above, he trusts language insofar as he is ready to distinguish between the value of a symbol, which is indeed only a transaction value, and the symbolic value of a sign, like a flag or a word, which for him, can convey true value in its essence.

Even if, as we saw, their respective qualms against language call into question the power of sociability, neither conceives individuality naïvely. Just as Scheler warns against what he calls the “idols of self-knowledge,” Bergson says that “[e]veryone can noticed that it is more difficult to make progress in the knowledge of oneself than in the knowledge of the external world” (CM, 28). In that sense, their endorsement of the value of individuality, and—as we will see more clearly in the following chapter—the kind of freedom that corresponds to it, does not entail an unequivocal defense of a way of life that is normally associated with the convergence of those two notions—namely, the liberal convergence between individuality and freedom. Consequently,
neither the existence of social diversity as such, the clear demarcation between the public and the private, or even freedom of expression *per se*, can serve to guarantee the kind of diversity that, according to them, characterizes true individuality. Rather, as we saw, their primary concern revolves around the creation of the conditions in which we can *perceive* diversity *within* ourselves.

Having explored the authors’ respective ideas about individuality, as well as their ontological and cognitive presuppositions, in the next chapter I will explore their implications for their respective conceptions of freedom.
Table 1. Scheler’s hierarchy of values and feelings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hierarchy of Values: a priori and non-formal</th>
<th>Emotional Life: feelings as receptors of value</th>
<th>Variation according to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual values [die geistigen Werte]: the “beautiful” and the “ugly”; “right” and “wrong”; “knowledge of truth”</td>
<td>Spiritual joy / Spiritual sorrow</td>
<td>Less characterized by extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>More difficult to localize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>More endurance</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>More difficult to control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vital values [die vitalen Werte]: the “noble” and the “vulgar”; the “excellent” and the “bad”; “well-being” and “ill-being”</td>
<td>Health / Illness Strength / Weakness Life / Oncoming death</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of the agreeable and the disagreeable [die Wertreihe des Angenehmen und Unangenehmen]</td>
<td>Pleasure / Pain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extended
Easier to localize
Little endurance
Easier to control
Chapter 2. Experiments in free-choice: Bergson and Scheler on agency and freedom

The previous chapter examined Scheler’s and Bergson’s respective notions on individuality. This chapter, in turn, explores their conceptions of agency and freedom. The authors’ shared emphasis on the uniqueness and ineffability of self, indicates already that, from their perspective, it is impossible to find a solution to the problem of freedom by intellectual and rational means alone. Therefore, in phenomenological fashion, I propose to approach the matter by examining “things as they appear to the agent herself,” in her strife after freedom.

For these purposes, I will examine two paradigmatic “case studies” of how freedom and agency are related to each other: on the one hand, the Gallows Man example, which Kant provides in the Critique of Practical Reason; and, on the other, the case of Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment. The former is an emblematic illustration of Kant’s conception of how freedom and moral action come together in the famous “fact of reason”: the so-called “awareness of the ought” or the “awareness of duty.” Moreover, using Kant’s example has the important advantage that some of the most important implications of Bergson’s and Scheler’s respective accounts of agency and freedom are best appreciated when set against Kant’s ethical theory. Their phenomenological approach resists in each case, albeit in different ways, Kant’s distinction between noumena and phenomena, and thereby, his universalistic standpoint.

The choice of Raskolnikov’s case as a counterexample to the Gallows Man provides, as we will see, a sharp but unexpected and illuminating contrast. Contrary to the standard interpretation of Raskolnikov’s dilemma as a question of whether or not to engage in murder, I will propose, with Bergson, that freedom is less about what he chose to do, and more about how
he did it; and with Scheler, that his freedom depended less on “giving the law to himself;” and more on getting to know himself better.

**Introducing the cases: the clue to the discovery of freedom**

Kant held that morality reveals us freedom as a fact. That is the so-called “fact of reason.”¹ “For, had not the moral law already been distinctly thought in our reason, we should never consider ourselves justified in assuming such a thing as freedom […]. But were there no freedom, the moral law would not be encountered at all in ourselves.”² As this passage shows, according to Kant, morality has epistemological priority over freedom: we know the moral law first, and thereupon we know ourselves to be free (“we ought, therefore we can”: as soon as we know our duty, we know that the it can determine our will, or that we can be motivated to act according to it). However, freedom has ontological priority over freedom; it makes it possible because it is our capacity to reject our empirically determined interests, that is, inclination, in favor of a moral course of action. In Kant’s famous words, morality is the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom, even though freedom is the *ratio essendi* of morality.

To illustrate his theory on this point, Kant presents the example of a man who is demanded by his prince, on pain of immediate execution, to give false testimony against an honorable person whom the prince would like to get rid of. This man, like everybody else, is


empirically determined by his multiple desires and instincts. Such multiplicity of inclinations orient his action in very different and often conflicting directions. For example, Kant explains, if, say, a gallows were erected in front of the house where this man could find the opportunity of gratifying his lust, making him certain that he would be hanged on it immediately afterward, he would be able to restrain his lustful inclinations in order to save his life.³ This capacity for self-control, however, has nothing to do with true morality in Kant’s sense, because it still answers to empirical and contingent motives—namely, saving his own life.

Yet, Kant goes on, when our man is presented with the prince’s mortal threat, he is capable of overcoming what determines him empirically, because as soon as he becomes aware of his duty, he discovers freedom. Let’s take a closer look at Kant’s well-known description of the episode.

But ask him whether, if his prince demanded, on pain of the same immediate execution, that he give false testimony against an honorable man whom the prince would like to destroy under a plausible pretext, he would consider possible to overcome his love of life, however great it may be. He would perhaps not venture to assert whether he would do it or not, but he must admit without hesitation that it would be possible for him. He judges, therefore, that he can do something because he is aware that he ought to do it and cognizes freedom within him, which, without the moral law, would have remained unknown to him.⁴

With this example, Kant vividly illustrates the moment of awareness of the ought, the famous fact of reason which obliges us and, at the same time, makes us discover freedom. Freedom is thus “forced upon us”: we ought, therefore we can, and thus—as the example

³ Ibid., 5:30.
⁴ Ibid., 5:30. My italics. The original in German, reads like this: “Fragt ihn aber, ob, wenn sein Fürst ihm unter Androhung derselben unverzögerten Todesstrafe zumutete, ein falsches Zeugnis wider einen ehrlichen Mann, den er gerne unter scheinbaren Vorwänden verderben möchte, abzulegen, ob er da, so groß auch seine Liebe zum Leben sein mag, sie wohl zu überwinden für möglich halte? Ob er es tun würde oder nicht, wird er vielleicht sich nicht getrauen zu versichern; daß es ihm aber möglich sei, muß er ohne Bedenken einräumen. Er urteilt also, daß er so etwas kann, darum weil er sich bewußt ist, daß er es soll, und erkennt in sich die Freiheit, die ihm sonst ohne das moralische Gesetz unbekannt geblieben wäre.” Immanuel Kant, Kritik der praktischen vernunft, ed.: Karl Vorländer (Leipzig: Verlag von Felix Meiner, 1906), 30: 20-30.
shows—freely, we do. I want to propose here a different reading of Kant’s mini story. According to my reading, the Gallows Man case suggests that, contrary to Kant, “inclination” plays a constitutive role in the moral formation of the self and the corresponding discovery of freedom.

However, by “inclination” I do not mean exactly what Kant understood by this term—that impersonal bundle of desire and instinct that characterizes human beings as phenomena, and which is just negatively defined as the opposite of reason. Rather, by inclination, I mean a force that addresses the Gallows Man personally, that is, as an agent and not merely as part of the phenomenal world. It is a force that is tailored, so to speak, to his individual self and appeals to his capacity for action, and not just to him as a sentient creature. What I will try to show is that, from a phenomenological perspective—that is, according to the way things appear to the Gallows Man as reported by Kant himself—it is not duty which reveals freedom to him, but rather the experience of temptation. To put it in Kantian terms, what this case shows, in my view, is that temptation is the ratio cognoscendi of freedom.

Now, in Raskolnikov’s case inclination is more readily visible. Raskolnikov—a young college student of the introverted and eccentric type, feeble but fairly smart—plans and executes the murder of Alêna Ivánovna, the old moneylender in town. He truly dislikes her, and indeed, for all we know, she is an extremely disagreeable person: exploitative to people in need, and cruel even to her own sister. Much has been discussed about Raskolnikov’s motives. Combining hatred, compassion, and pride, they go from social and humanitarian purposes (social justice and redistribution); to existential and nihilist motives (moral anarchy and the creation of moral values); religious ones (suffering as a possible path to redemption); and, finally, psychological ones (the revolt against the love and sacrifice of his mother, whom he arguably assimilates to the
pawnbroker; or a mixture of both self-hate and a sense of heroism).  

I do not wish right now to assess which motives are more relevant to understand Raskolnikov’s actions, nor to deny the importance of considering different potential motives and how they relate to each other. I will not “dissect” inclination into a set of discrete and differentiated passions or feelings. Instead, similarly to the approach I propose for the Gallows Man case, I want to focus on Raskolnikov’s experience of his capacity for action. The way I read it, Dostoevsky tells us a story of a young man who realizes that he could something which is morally problematic—it occurs to him that he could kill the moneylender—and then his problem consists in that he must come to terms with that open possibility: is he really capable of doing what he has in mind, or is it just some fantasy, something absurd?  

Raskolnikov’s experience of his capacity for action constitutes what I will call, paraphrasing Kant’s famous awareness of the ought, his awareness of the could. The open possibility of killing, is experienced by Raskolnikov, as we will see, always frantically and with violence. From a Kantian perspective, one might say that such experience is not comparable to the awareness of the ought since it is a drive, an instinct, or a desire—and worse enough, one to kill and destroy—and certainly not a fact of reason. However, as I said before, inclination in the Kantian sense is too impersonal, too broad and formal as a concept to capture the specific character of the drive as experienced by Raskolnikov. From a Bergsonian conception of action—that is, as I will expound in a moment, considering human action in its original dimension as movement—inclination is better understood not as a set of discrete causes that result in this or

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that action, but as a force that implicates the whole self, and which the latter must, so to speak, address back in its own terms. This force is, again, as we will see, is the phenomenon of temptation.

Similarly to the case of the Gallows Man, temptation lets Raskolnikov feel his agency, giving him as well the opportunity of discovering freedom—an opportunity which, however, unlike the former, he would not take. Still, as I will try to show, that is not because he decided to commit murder instead of letting the moneylender live; but, rather, because of how he performed what he chose to do. Let us turn next to an examination of Bergson’s theory of action: it will give us the necessary interpretative framework to review in detail, right after, the facts of our cases. Then, in the final section of this chapter, I will move on to Scheler and explore, with his help, the relation between freedom and morality that Kant and Dostoevsky’s respective narrations lay bare.

**Data for a theory of freedom: Bergson’s “phenomenology of hesitation”**

As we saw in the first chapter, for Bergson, the primary datum of consciousness is movement—the flux that characterizes both our inner, psychic life, as well as external reality. “Reality is mobility,” he says, and “[t]here do not exist things made, but only thinks in the making, not states that remain fixed but only states in process of change” (CM, 158-9). He rejects the metaphysical distinction between noumena and phenomena, between being and appearances, and articulates instead a philosophical method based on a “reversal” that prioritizes the dynamic over the static.

The goal of this method is to grasp duration, and “to install [the mind] in the mobile reality, adopt[ing] its ceaselessly changing direction; in short, [to] grasp [reality] intuitively” (CM, 160). Thus, we approach objects “from within,” and access the duration that is proper to
them. Intuition as a philosophical method, he argues, is our only way to overcome the shortcomings of both “flat” empiricism and “shallow” rationalism. As he says: “if metaphysics is possible, it can only be an effort to re-ascent the slope natural to the work of thought, to place oneself immediately, through a dilation of the mind, in the thing one is studying, in short to go from reality to concepts and not from concepts to reality” (CM, 154-55).

According to these ideas, human action must be considered primarily as movement unfolding in time. Bergson’s contribution to the long-established debate about free will takes off from this premise and, the way I read it, poses two objections to the terms in which the debate is normally conducted. First, following Bergson, the meaning of freedom cannot be properly understood in terms of the will. As we will see, from a Bergsonian perspective, the notion of the will distorts the experience of freedom as it is originally given to our consciousness. Instead, agency as force is a more adequate metaphor to capture its true character.

Second, and related to the previous point, in Bergson’s view, even though freedom concerns our capacity to choose, it must be approached independently from the definition of alternatives available, and from the content of those alternatives. It has more to do with the capacity of choosing, properly speaking, than with the menu of options ahead of us. Or, as I said before, it is more a question of how we choose, than of what we choose. Let’s start with the second point.

Our capacity to choose has been described in several ways. It has been conceived “thinly,” simply as the absence of necessity in our actions. What this negative conception of free

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6 For the full development of the argument, see CM, 145-47, 164-69.

7 The claim that the will as a philosophical notion should be given up cannot be found as such in Bergson’s first book Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience, where he treats this subject more systematically. However, in my view, it follows from the reflections he offers there. Consequently, I think, the English translation of the book’s title as Time and Free Will is partly misleading.
will must prove is that our actions are not determined, that our will is indeed some sort of uncaused cause. Historically, this position has encountered numerous difficulties; among them, that the world as we know it is full of regularities, suggesting therefore that there is no such thing as an uncaused cause. Furthermore, if the alternative to necessity is randomness, then it does not look especially promising if one intends to characterize freedom as something meaningful. 8

“Thicker” or more substantive conceptions of our capacity to choose try to avoid such pitfalls by giving a positive determination of freedom. For instance, some philosophers have tried to show the way in which certain choices, independently of their place in one or various causal chains, amount to an assent to truth or morality; or, more dialectically, how they lead us to self-realization, allowing us to discover a higher or an authentic self; or finally, in an existentialist fashion, how they create our personal identity, which in turn is supposed to be made up solely of our individual elections. 9

From a Bergsonian perspective, all these conceptions—different as they are—place undue emphasis on the alternatives. Either by saying that the will is free only when it is not determined to pick any of the alternatives available, or that only certain alternatives satisfy the condition of freedom of the will, these conceptions “intellectualize freedom.” They do so, according to Bergson, because they overlook the immediate experience of freedom, and prioritize instead the different paths available to it, as in a diagram. They look at freedom “from the outside,” instead of “from the inside.”

The “outside perspective” on freedom, says Bergson, is characterized by a very familiar

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8 That is Hume’s objection to conceiving freedom as the opposite of necessity in human action. See his Treatise of Human Nature, 410ff.

epistemological trap: we tend to think that possibilities precede reality. So, for instance, we picture that before the event there were two possibilities ahead of Raskolnikov: to kill the moneylender or not to do it. Likewise, we imagine that as the prince threatens him, the Gallows Man has two roads ahead of him: accuse the man and save his own life, or save the man and condemn himself. To put it in Leibnizian language, we imagine that the actual world is one among many possible ones.

Bergson, however, claims this is an illusion. Of course, he does not mean to say that it was necessary for us to act in such or such a way—he is a famous defender of freedom, and criticizes deterministic positions in this respect. Rather, he thinks that possibilities are retroactive. Alternative possibilities exist, but they do so only after the fact: they presuppose the actual.

The idea seems complicated, but it is actually fairly simple: counterfactuals exist only as an alternative to “actual facts,” things that already happened. As Bergson puts it, possibilities are not “contained in reality” beforehand, like “a phantom awaiting its hour” (CM, 82),\(^\text{10}\) as if in line for some “transfusion of blood or life” (CM, 82). On the contrary, he says, they only begin to exist as reality actualizes. Thus, possibility adds something to reality: “it is the combined effect of reality once it has appeared and of a condition which throws it back in time” (CM, 82-3)\(^\text{11}\)

Bergson invites us to consider the following diagram:

\(^{10}\) The quotations come from the essay titled, “The possible and the real,” CM, 73-86.

\(^{11}\) The problem, then, with the idea that “we live in the best possible world” is not only—as Voltaire pointed out—that we become blind to the evils that surround us, but that we claim to see more than what we actually do. “One might as well—he says—claim that the man in flesh and blood comes from the materialization of his image seen in the mirror, because in that real man is everything found in this virtual image with, in addition, the solidity which makes it possible to touch it” (CM, 83).
It is meant to be a symbolical representation of voluntary activity, where an agent who has traversed a series MO of conscious states, finally finds himself at point O, where two directions OX and OY, are equally open. Bergson’s claim is that this symbolical operation is misleading because it does not capture “the deed in the doing but the deed already done” (*TFW*, 180). Such representation does not have to happen literally in paper, nor formally through sophisticated methods of rational choice. In fact, it happens always when we analyze action. Still, in Bergson’s view, this approach betrays the experience of action as we encounter it. If, instead, we stick to things as they appear to us and investigate freedom “from the inside,” this, says Bergson, “must be sought in a certain shade or quality of the action itself and not in the relation of this act to what it is not or to what it might have been” (*TFW*, 182-3).

Let’s go back to the first point: how is the will, as a philosophical notion, undermined by these reflections? As I said before, the defenders of the existence of free will are normally quite invested in showing that the will is an uncaused cause; hence the centrality of the notion of cause for any account of morality. Now, according to Bergson, there is an ambiguity or confusion regarding the concept of causality. On the one hand, causality means, to use Hume’s words, “regular attendance.” This just means that when we notice that certain things regularly occur

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12 Bergson’s objection against the use of diagrams and model is not rebutted by a more “sophisticated” approach that would apply statistical analysis in order to determine different probabilities to each path. Instead of making it more nuanced, weighting the different options available could actually make it worse, because it assumes that the present moment can be accurately depicted (or at least approximated) by adding and weighting past “similar decisions” by this person, or “similar people.” However, that is precisely what Bergson criticizes, since it “eliminates” time and replaces it with “snapshots” of activity.
together, the idea of cause is suggested to us. This happens only through stable and almost perfect regularity, and therefore goes hand in hand with the idea of necessity. However, Bergson says, there is another meaning of causality, which we cannot derive from the phenomenon of regular attendance: force. We can only get it, he claims, from our own inner experience of agency.\textsuperscript{13} We experience action, capability, effort, purpose, success and failure, and those experiences, according to him, are the source of our idea of cause as force.

Causality understood as regularity applies perfectly well, he argues, to the physical world. To attest how well it works, we need only look at all the things it allows us to create and develop in the natural world. Technology bears witness to the extent to which physics gets it right when it works with that meaning of causality. Now, this notion of causality, goes his argument, involves a very peculiar trade-off between space and time. The point is easily illustrated through the idea of \textit{number}. Numbers, he says, are a sort of compromise made possible because, as he likes to say, we interpret time in terms of space. We represent time in a line, putting side by side in space separable bits that once succeeded each other. Thus, succession is replaced by simultaneity (\textit{TFW}, 75-88).

Such “compromise” is “given up” in favor of space, completely dismissing duration, whenever we start weighing bodies or calculating forces and velocities. Again, this is admissible in physics because we can know and explain many things about the material world through it. However, for the same reason, says Bergson, we must tip the scales in favor of time if we are to

\textsuperscript{13} Notice that Hume expresses a similar idea regarding the origin of our notion of power and force: “It may be pretended, that the resistance with which we meet with our bodies, obliging us frequently to exert our force, and call up all our power, this gives us the idea of force and power. It is this nisus, or strong endeavour, of which we are conscious, that is the original impression from which this idea is copied.” (David Hume, \textit{Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding}, ed. P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 67).
say something meaningful about the inner self.\textsuperscript{14}

Compare this to both Hume and Kant’s respective approaches to the question of whether we can use nature to model our understanding of human action. In this respect, Hume says: “I do not ascribe to the will that unintelligible necessity, which is supppos’d to lie in matter. But I ascribe to matter, that intelligible quality, call it necessity or not, which the most rigorous orthodoxy does or must allow to belong to the will.”\textsuperscript{15} Kant, for his part, suggests a rule of judgment according to which we can evaluate concrete actions, which he famously calls the “typic of the moral law”: “ask yourself whether, if the action you propose were to take place by a law of the nature of which you were yourself a part, you could indeed regard it as possible through your will.”\textsuperscript{16}

Unlike both Hume and Kant, Bergson argues that nature cannot be used as a prototype for discussing questions regarding action, freedom, and morality. As we use matter to model the dimension of the spirit, we are forced into a compromise between two radically different dimensions—the outside and the inside, matter and the psyche, space, and time—which inevitably reifies human action. The will is, as it were, the symbol of that reifying compromise, just as, in physics, the numbers illustrate the compromise between space and time. Put differently, the philosophical notion of the will is a conceptual shortcut to talk about what is otherwise in constant flux, namely, human agency.

When, in retrospection, we pose alternative possibilities to action, and assume some version or another of a choosing will, we reify agency. We proceed analogously to the physicist

\textsuperscript{14} Although, see his observations of the way in which, ideally, metaphysics and science should converge and collaborate. CM, 162.

\textsuperscript{15} David Hume, \textit{Treatise of Human Nature}, 410.

\textsuperscript{16} Kant, \textit{Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals}, 5:69.
when he uses numbers and measures time. Such is the method used by the psychologist as well, when he tries to detach any given psychological state from “the whole of personality”, in order to study it as a more or less independent entity:

He begins by disregarding the person’s special coloration, which can be expressed only in common and known terms. He then strives to isolate, in the person thus already simplified, this or that aspect which lends itself to an interesting study. If, for example, it is a question of inclination, he will leave out of account the inexpressible shading which colors it and which brings it about that my inclination is not yours; he will then fix his attention on the movement by which our personality tends towards a certain object; he will isolate this attitude, and it is this special aspect of the person, this point of view on the mobility of the inner life, this “schema” of the concrete inclination which he will set up as an independent fact” (CM, 143, translation slightly modified).

Bergson criticizes these abstractions; still, he acknowledges that we might not be able to stop making use of them. As he says, concepts are indispensable to metaphysics, since only through them can it build a bridge between itself and other fields of knowledge—psychology, ethics, and politics, among them (CM, 141, 154). However—and, as we saw in chapter 1, this is a fundamental lesson that we have extracted from Bergson’s approach—we must not forget that the will is only a symbol. Mathematical variables are symbols that can be defined using an equation in which we express them as function of other variables.¹⁷

Similarly, the will is the symbol that represents human action, transformed into a variable that is, in turn, expressed as a function of either a certain conception of human nature, or of the moral law, the law of history, etc. But freedom, says Bergson, cannot be captured by these methods involving systems, equations, symbols, or diagrams. We use them inadvertently in retrospective thinking, and common sense fosters this type of thinking. But metaphysics—the science that alone can study freedom—must do otherwise, because it is “the science which claims to dispense with symbols” (CM, 136).

For Bergson, freedom requires that we feel ourselves as forces, because only thus do we observe our inner duration, our inner life displayed in time. That is why the key to its discovery should be an analogous force, instead of laws or universalizing principles—even if he does acknowledge some role to reason in moral action. In my reading of Bergson, such force is precisely the phenomenon of temptation: a force that matches the force of our agency. The opening line of his last book, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, reads as follows: “The remembrance of forbidden fruit is the earliest thing in the memory of each of us, as it is in that of mankind” (*TS*, 9). And a few pages later, he adds:

> Never, in our hours of temptation, should we sacrifice to the mere need for logical consistency our interest, our passion, our vanity. Because in a reasonable being reason does indeed intervene as a regulator to assure this consistency between obligatory rules or maxims, philosophy has been led to look upon it as a principle of obligation. We might as well believe that the fly-wheel drives the machinery (*TS*, 23).

Temptation might not explain why we “take an interest in the law,” but it can show indeed how that happens: through the *movements* by which we channel that force one way or another, reaching into our pasts through memory to be wholly present at the moment of action, and being able to act assertively at the right moment.\(^\text{18}\)

In the face of the limits of reason to reach into the immediate data of our consciousness, and of the limits of language to capture experience in words, those movements become our primary source to investigate freedom. Therefore, as we will see, from a Bergsonian standpoint, adequate theory of moral action should be properly informed by a careful “phenomenology of hesitation,” that is, a phenomenology of the oscillations that precede, or better still, that constitute action. Different accounts of the experience of vacillation and reluctance correspond to different accounts of moral action, and therefore the meaning of blame and righteousness, of

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\(^{18}\) See above chapter 1, pp. 64-65.
guilt and innocence, hinges on an accurate phenomenology of qualm, misgiving, and indecision.

Now, to be sure, Kant was ready to acknowledge that there are limits to the reasons that we can adduce for why we take an interest in the law. The *Groundwork* ends precisely with the following, perplexing, words: “And thus we indeed do not comprehend the practical unconditioned necessity of the moral imperative, but we do comprehend its incomprehensibility, which is all that can be fairly required of a philosophy that strives in principles up to the boundary of human reason.” In that sense, Kant—not unlike Bergson—indicated the gap between action and idea, and did not pretend to bridge it by way of the intellect.

However, what Kant was not so ready to admit is that in order to understand the way in which we “gain access” to the experience of duty, we must turn to the experience of temptation. The following might be merely anecdotal, given that the *Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History* is only a short essay and not one of the author’s canonical works. Still, I think it tells us something. In this short text, Kant tells the story of what he calls “the first experiment in free-choice.” “No matter how trivial the harm it did may have been—says Kant—[the experiment] was nevertheless enough to open man’s eyes. He discovered in himself an ability to choose his own way of life without being tied to any single one like the other animals.”

What Kant is talking about is the story of the Garden of Eden, and what is remarkable

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20 And to that extent, Bergson remains Kantian. However, notice also that, against Kant, for Bergson, the intellect (i.e., reason) is the source of hesitation in agency. He says that for an animal with no reason (that is, endowed only with instinct), reality is movement, but with absolutely no hesitation at any point in life. See *TFW*, 177-79, and chapter 3, p. 123.

For a reading of Kant focused on fully exploring the limits of reason in his account, see Martin Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), which in some way, constitutes one of the points of departure of this dissertation. For a contrast with Bergson, see Keith Ansell-Pearson, “The élan vital as an image of thought: Bergson and Kant on finality,” *Philosophy and the Adventure of the Virtual: Bergson and the Time of Life* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 115-139.

about his version of the tale is that there is no reference at all to God’s initial prohibition against eating the apple, nor the slightest allusion to the idea of temptation. Instead of being tempted, man (there is no explicit reference to Eve in the text) uses his powers of comparison and realizes he could eat the apple: he initially did not have a natural inclination to eat apples; however, he sees that other animals eat apples; he is similar to these animals in important respects; therefore he concludes that, even if his natural instinct does not lead him to eat apples, he could eat the apple; so he goes ahead and does it.

Of course, one of the reasons that explains why Kant tells the story this way might be his contempt for the doctrine of the original sin, or the fact that, in order to have temptation, morality has to be assumed, and at that point, according to the story, man has not yet discovered it. Still, what is interesting is precisely that Kant picked the paradigmatic story about temptation to give an account of the discovery of both freedom and morality.

As we know, Kant does acknowledge that we can perceive moral worth with more clarity when the latter conflicts with inclination, so that, the stronger the inclination, the clearer we hear the voice of conscience. However, for Bergson, freedom is not about the intensity of inclination. We need to pay heed to its quality as a force. Even moral obligation, he says, is “a force of unvarying direction, which is to the soul what force of gravity is to the body” (TS, 229). This force is “the concentrated extract, the quintessence of innumerable specific habits of obedience” (TS, 13). It is not any specific principle or rule, and “if it could speak (whereas it prefers to act), it would say: You must because you must” (TS, 13). Only this can “match our hours of temptation” (TS, 14). Thus, the latter does not play merely a passive side in moral formation, but

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22 This point was reminded to me by Prof. Patrick Riley.

23 This point was indicated to me by Prof. Christine Korsgaard.

24 For more on moral obligation as a force of gravity of the soul, see chapter 3, p. 137.
Still, the question remains: how do we explain the passage from the experience of temptation to the appeal of duty? How do we explain the transition from being aware that you could do something, to the state when you realize that you ought to do it? That is what I intend to examine with a close look at Kant’s and Dostoevsky’s stories—again, not through theory, but trying to go back to the things as they appeared to the agents themselves. At first sight, the passage from one conscious state to another might be difficult to grasp, remaining thus a sort of mystery. However, as we go over the facts of the cases in detail, it is important to keep in mind that, from Bergson’s perspective, our multiple conscious states “permeate and melt into one another, and each is to be tinged with the colouring of [the] other” (TFW, 164). Therefore, in principle, the transition from one state to another should come as no surprise.

Examining the difficulties that result from trying to “explain mobility through immobility,” the flux of movement through static points over a line, Bergson says: “we say that movement is made up of points, but that it comprises in addition the obscure, mysterious passing from one position to the next. As though the obscurity did not come wholly from the fact that we have assumed immobility to be clearer than mobility, the halt to precede movement!” (CM, 153, italics added). Likewise, he says, there is nothing mysterious about intuition—our faculty to grasp movement and duration directly, as immediate data given to our consciousness (CM, 168). For him, freedom—just as duration and movement—is a fact and, as such, it can be discovered,

25 William James admits as much when he criticizes the opinion of those who argue that human action is unintelligible under the assumption of liberty, on the grounds that it supposes our lives to be a sea of pure randomness. This chaotic picture where “[t]he mother may strangle her first-born child, the miser may cast his long-treasured gold into the sea, the sculptor may break in pieces his lately-finished statue,” James says, results from not being able to distinguish “between the possibles which really tempt a man and those which tempt him not at all.” However, he rejoins, any theorization of the problem of freedom, should “[deal] with the former possibles exclusively.” In other words, morality and freedom become a problem only when temptation has set in, and not before. William James, The Principles of Psychology, Vol. 2 (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1950), 577.
but not explained; it should be taken note of, but left undefined.\textsuperscript{26} Here, again, language fails us.

Schopenhauer said of Goethe that in his book \textit{Data for a Theory of Color} he had not undertaken to provide a complete theory or a “real explanation of the nature of color,” but that he had “really postulated it as a phenomenon, [teaching] only how it comes into existence, not what it is.”\textsuperscript{27} The same can be said of Bergson in the field of human action and freedom: he provided rich material for a theory of freedom, without ever attempting an explanation of it. He told us not what human action is, but how it appears. With this framework in mind—inner duration, agency as force, action as movement—let us go back now, and review our cases in more detail.

\textit{Facts of the cases}

One of the most noteworthy facts of Raskolnikov’s state of mind before he commits the crime is how, at first, the whole thing seems to him a fantasy, a “dream,” an “idle fancy”, something “definitely unrealizable.”\textsuperscript{28} Dostoevsky reports that “[h]e could not, for example, picture himself ceasing at a given moment to think about it, getting up and—simply going there…” (\textit{CP}, 60). What captures Raskolnikov’s mind most acutely before committing the crime is not whether it is right or wrong to do it—although he does consider that—but whether it \textit{would be possible} for him to do it or not. He oscillates between the idea, on the one hand, that his plan is sound and, on the other, that it is mere “nonsense,” a feverish hallucination, an absurd product of delirium. At first, he seems to be closer to thinking the latter, and only gradually—as by the force of habit, somewhat mechanically—does the whole project start to gain some plausibility in his mind. At

\textsuperscript{26} Bergson says that freedom “is indefinable, just because we are free” (\textit{TFW}, 219).


the outset, says Dostoevsky:

…[Raskolnikov] did not believe in the reality of his imaginings, and their audacity, which both repelled and fascinated him at the same time, was merely irritating. Now, a month later, he saw them in a different light, and had somehow grown used to regarding the ‘ugly’ dream as a real project, and reproached himself for his own weakness and lack of resolution (CP, 3, italics added).

Further, as events unfold, his “imaginings” not only gain plausibility but even, progressively, start to become inevitable to his own eyes:

His reactions during this last day, which had come upon him so unexpectedly and settled everything at one stroke, were almost completely mechanical, as though someone had taken his hand and pulled him along irresistibly, blindly, with supernatural strength and without objection. It was as if a part of his clothing had been caught in the wheel of a machine and he was being dragged into it (CP, 60).

It is not clear how exactly this transition took place. Dostoevsky only tells us that “[…] a month earlier, and even yesterday, [the project] had been no more than a bad dream, but now…it was revealed as no dream, but in a new, unfamiliar and terrible form…” (CP, 39). He both resists and is compelled toward his project; he feels as estranged from it, as he feels it to be definitive. In Dostoevsky’s words: “[o]ne noticeable peculiarity characterized all the final decisions he arrived at in this affair: the more settled they were, the more hideous and absurd they appeared in his eyes” (CP, 59). Interestingly, at this point, Raskolnikov tries hard to find a valid objection against the execution of his plan (CP, 60). 29 It is as though the novel related how our protagonist plans a murder, just as much as how he tries to prevent it from happening.

Finally, after learning by chance one day that the old woman will be at home by herself the day after, the project acquires, so to speak, a life of its own:

It was only a few steps farther to his lodging. He went in like a man condemned to death. He did not reason about anything, he was quite incapable of reasoning, but he felt with his whole being that his mind and will were no longer free, and that everything was settled, quite finally (CP, 53, italics added).

29 He is unsuccessful in this attempt though; so much so that he concludes at some point that what he did was not a crime.
All this shows that beyond the question of whether the crime is justified or not, and beyond the discussion about specific motives, Raskolnikov is mainly confronted with the famous question of whether his action springs from free will or from necessity. His experience is polarized as it combines the feeling of omnipotence—somebody else’s life is in his hands; he *can decide* whether she continues to live or not—with the experience of having no agency at all, being involved in a series of determined events, of which he was not more than one piece, and where he was “no longer free.”

Most tellingly in this respect, is the moment when it occurs to Raskolnikov for the first time that he could commit the crime. The realization that the life of the moneylender could depend on *his decision*—the awareness of the *could*, as I have called it—is, ironically, perceived by him as surrounded by an air of fatefulness, as if it were part of a higher plan beyond his control. While drinking tea at a little tavern right after meeting the old lady for the first time, the idea of killing her, Dostoevsky says, appears in Raskolnikov’s mind for the first time, not as a consciously devised plan, but “pecking away in his head, like a chicken emerging from the shell” (*CP*, 54).

Moreover, right after, he overhears a conversation at a table nearby between a student and a young officer, who coincidentally were talking about the moneylender, his cruel character, and how she didn’t deserve to live. They even discussed whether it would be just to kill her for the sake of the welfare of those she abused. Raskolnikov is greatly impressed by such a “strange coincidence,” which—according to the narrator—is of great significance in the story: “This casual public-house conversation had an extraordinary influence on the subsequent development of the matter, as if there were indeed something fateful and fore-ordained about it” (*CP*, 57).

As we can appreciate, Raskolnikov’s combines two contrasting elements: on the one
hand, voluntarism, the fortuitousness of a decision without further justification, an idea that is born just as a chicken comes out of the egg, in which agency is almost an instance of arbitrary control; on the other, superstition, fatefulness, and the lack of agency that is proper to it. Dostoevsky says in this respect:

Raskolnikov had recently become superstitious. Traces of this superstition remained in him long afterwards, almost ineradicable. And in after years he was always inclined to see something strange and mysterious in all the happenings of this time, as if special coincidences and influences were at work (CP, 54).

The contrast and the oscillation between voluntarism and superstition indicates Raskolnikov’s incapacity to have a proper ontological sense of his own agency. That constitutes, in my view, the main obstacle for “discovering his freedom.” Such a “lack of attunement” to his own agency is confirmed by his lack of assertiveness in every possible sense. Most graphically, he spends most of the time before the crime occurs being asleep. Indeed, he oversleeps and almost misses the time the moneylender was supposed to be alone in the house (CP, 59).

Furthermore, it is remarkable that as he plans the crime, Raskolnikov’s opinions, actions, and emotions are characterized by an inexorably oscillating pattern, which constantly hinders his capacity for action. For instance, he vacillates between, on the one hand, wanting to avoid all social contact, experiencing an “exasperated dislike for any person who violated, or even seemed desirous of disturbing his privacy” (CP, 9), and, on the other, moments of intense “wish for contact,” and sudden “thirst for society” in his soul (CP, 8-9). Or, alternatively, he goes from a strong impulse to help a young girl in danger on the street, to a complete indifference towards her. Equally revealing in this respect is his proclivity to distraction: in his very way to the crime scene, for instance, he suddenly “becomes very interested” in the construction of fountains and other amenities in public gardens, and in how they add to the beauty of cities. Finally, he not only vacillates mentally, but even “performs” such mental state physically, as he continually
wanders throughout the city, in oscillations without a purpose.

To reiterate, from a phenomenological point of view, the drama that we see unfolding in Raskolnikov’s case is not the dilemma of whether or not to become a murderer, but rather the ambiguity between being active and being passive, being in control or being determined, and the protagonist’s incapacity to situate himself between those two poles. From this perspective, it would be misleading to align passivity and inclination, on the one hand, and reason and activity on the other. Rather, inclination (or better still, temptation, as I have indicated) is what puts the whole thing in motion: temptation—in this case, the temptation to kill the woman, the realization that that is a possibility open to him—provides him with the occasion to “calibrate his agency” between the poles of activity and passivity. From a Bergsonian perspective focused on agency as a force, such process of calibration is what freedom is all about.

Of course, Raskolnikov’s story is not one about the discovery of freedom (let’s ignore for the moment the question about the protagonist’s future redemption through expiation). As we have seen, instead of a calibration process towards freedom, he oscillates viciously between being active and being passive. However, from a Bergsonian perspective, the reason for his unfreedom is not that he ended up choosing the immoral option of killing the woman, as Kantian reading would suggest; nor because he ended up walking the path of self-punishment in turning himself into a murderer, according to a more Nietzschean interpretation. Rather, as we have seen

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30 To be sure, it is relevant that what tempts him is to murder someone, and specifically the moneylender. Again, the object of temptation says important things about the one who is tempted—that is partly why, as I said before, temptation addresses us in particular (and, of course, Raskolnikov’s only way to overcome the pathologies of action that afflict him might be to reflect about his motives). My point is that the way in which the dilemma is posed to him, is not in terms of a reflection about whether murder is right or wrong (and not even whether this particular case of murder is such), but as a puzzle about whether or not he is able to do it.

31 And in that sense, according to my interpretation, the act of murder is not, in Raskolnikov’s case, an instance of action, properly speaking. Rather, it is more like a tangent line that escapes an oscillating patter over a circumference, almost by mistake. On Bergson’s metaphysical interpretation of the tangent line, see Bergson, *HIT*, 281.
in the previous passages, it is because he did everything with morbid hesitation, with no clear sense of his own agency, that is, of his character as a force in movement.

Now, Kant’s example of the Gallows Man has important similarities with Raskolnikov’s case. Notice that the evidence that he offers suggests that something like an awareness of a certain capacity for action comes before the moment of the awareness of the ought—at least chronologically speaking. As we saw, Kant’s chronicle begins with the moment in which the threatened subject realizes that he could do something: the man in question would normally try to preserve his life, but when confronted with the alternative of accusing an innocent person, he realizes that he could refrain from doing it; he realizes that he could forgo his life.

At first, Kant says, the man “would perhaps not venture to assert whether he would do it or not, but he must admit without hesitation that it would be possible for him.”32 Thus, the first categorical experience, so to speak, that confronts the Gallows Man, is not the unequivocal character of the moral law, nor the conviction that he will follow it, but the certainty of his capacity to do so: he must admit without hesitation that it would be possible for him to disobey the prince and save the innocent man. In other words, the absence of hesitation—his lucidity and clarity—refers originally not to duty but to action. The epiphanic moment, at least to begin with, addresses him as agent.

Kant continues his narration as follows: “[the man] judges, therefore, that he can do something because he is aware that he ought to do it and cognizes freedom within him, which, without the moral law, would have remained unknown to him.”33 As it stands, there seems to be an ambiguity in Kant’s report of the facts of the case. We are told that the man became aware

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33 Ibidem. Italics added.
that he could do something, and therefore he judges that he can (in other words, “he could, therefore he can”). However, Kant adds immediately after that this happens because he was aware that he ought to do it (the famous, “he ought, therefore he can”).

Let us imagine for a moment that we are a group of detectives trying to assess the evidence of the case. Which causal connector indicates the true ratio cognoscendi of freedom: the first therefore, or the following because? Which one points to the decisive element that allowed this man to discover his freedom? If we pick the first one, therefore, we shall conclude that it was the awareness of his agency, or again, paraphrasing Kant, the awareness of the could: he first realizes that something would be possible for him, and he judges therefore that he can actualize that possibility. If we pick the second one instead, because, we will go for the awareness of duty: he realizes he ought to do it, so he judges that he can.

There seems to be no straightforward answer, at least from the information Kant makes available. Taking him seriously as a witness of the event (that is, as an acute observer of human nature), it must be admitted that it is legitimate to ask the following question: What is the relation between the initial unhesitating awareness that he could do something, and the later awareness that he ought to do so? On the one hand, the first connector therefore, comes before the connector because, enjoying in this way some chronological presumption of priority. However, on the other hand, as Kant would surely reply—not as a mere witness anymore, but as the author of the Second Critique—chronological priority says nothing about the metaphysical priority enjoyed by the second connector.

Consider the peculiar way in which Kant presents his example. Notice that the prince forces the man to bear false witness under the threat of death. This means that the coercive end of the alternative is “occupied” by the prince, who orders him to accuse an honorable person
because otherwise he would be killed—in other words, the Gallows Man faces the *command* to kill, *not* the prohibition to do so. Therefore, on the other end of the dilemma, the possibility of sacrificing his life appears as *liberating*—as a way of escaping the coercion of the prince. The moral alternative of not bearing false witness appears to our man *as a temptation*, and not as a restriction (which is the way duty or obligation normally looks like). It is an open possibility, something through which he could *actualize his agency* or *exercise his control*. In other words, it is an invitation to act, as Kant says, “without hesitation.”

From the perspective of agency as a force, Kant’s mini-story illustrates, I think, the way in which temptation is not only what traps us and gets us entangled in crime—as with many stories of crime and punishment—but also the clue to understanding how we become, as Kant says, “interested in the law.” As I said before, temptation is a desire or an instinct that concerns us personally, that challenges us as agents, and therefore, it only makes sense if events are seen “from within,” as Bergson suggests. As we answer the call of temptation—either to give into it, or to avoid it—we are transformed and potentially defined in those terms. So, for example, if what tempts you is alcohol, you might become an alcoholic (or a sober, of course, if you fight the temptation successfully). If what tempts you is violence, you might become a murderer, like Raskolnikov. If what tempts you is the alleviation of suffering, you might become a philanthropist. And, finally, if what tempts you is *justice*, you might become, like the Gallows Man, a martyr.34

In the Gallows Man example, a Bergsonian interpretation of the facts of the case would hold fast to Kant’s report that, in the face of the prince’s threat, what our man experienced *first*

was the unhesitating awareness that he could disobey the prince. In other words, the first “categorical” experience of the Gallows Man concerns his agency as force, his “inner” experience of capacity for action, and not his reason. Admittedly, such awareness is rapidly transformed in this case, asserting itself as an *ought*, the famous fact of reason. Still, this shows that, phenomenologically speaking, the *appeal* of duty—the way in which the *ought* addresses us—goes hand in hand with the experience of temptation, namely, the experience of identifying a relevant occasion in which to assert our agency.\(^{35}\)

As we know, that is not Kant’s interpretation of the case. For Kant, the Gallows Man judges that he can save the man *because* he ought to do it. He disregards thus his initial unhesitating awareness. Kant says that the Gallows Man, after realizing that he *could* save the man, “judges, therefore, that he can do something *because* he is aware that he ought to do it and cognizes freedom within him, which, without the moral law, would have remained unknown to him.”\(^{36}\) Recall Bergson’s diagram of retrospective thinking: a bifurcated arrow showing to different paths equally open to the agent. It is as if the first connector, “therefore,” would allow us to follow the progression of the activity, whereas, the following “because” would make us halt, as it were, at the point where the arrow bifurcates, and turn around to see the action retrospectively. When Kant says “because,” he looks at the experience from the outside, it intellectualizes freedom. Thus, from a Bergsonian point of view, Kant misrepresents agency by assuming the *a priori* existence of what counts as free action: he obliterates the reality of movement, the phenomenological priority of duration—in this case, the inner duration of the

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Gallows Man as he acted in reaction to the prince’s threat.\textsuperscript{37}

To be sure, Kant is offering only a vignette, a very short story, and therefore it would be unreasonable to expect, as readers, to be able to trace the trajectory that made the Gallows Man act in such a way at that precise moment. Indeed, from a Bergsonian perspective, only a “real time” biography of the Gallows Man would allow us to do that, since only thus can we get into the personage’s “inner duration” (\textit{TFW}, 184ff). Still, Bergson would say, to the extent that Kant’s description remains true to what happened—and that he does is proved, I think, by the \textit{therefore} that remains in spite of the author’s overwhelming metaphysical framework, which privileges the \textit{because}—it is due to the fact that he, as narrator, in the act of writing, got “into the personage himself,” and coincided with him in a simple and indivisible feeling. For Bergson, only from such coincidence, which seizes the character’s “inner duration,” can a reliable account of the experience emerge (\textit{CM}, 134; \textit{HIT}, 21-3). What is inner duration? In Bergson’s words, it is:

\begin{quote}
the continuous life of a memory which prolongs the past into the present, whether the present distinctly contains the ever-growing image of the past, or whether, by its continual changing of quality, it attests rather the increasingly heavy burden that we drag along behind each one of us, the older we grow (\textit{CM}, 150, translation slightly modified).
\end{quote}

Tracing inner duration is the opposite method to depicting different courses of action. The first corresponds to intuition, the second to analysis. From the point of view of intuition, Bergson says, the idea that two courses of action were possible is “meaningless,” because it is tantamount to “represent[ing] a thing and not a progress” (\textit{TFW}, 181). Like Kant’s \textit{because}, it “displaces the activity of the self somewhere or other” (\textit{TFW}, 177), and falsifies the “dynamic progress in which the self and its motives, like real living beings, are in a constant state of becoming” (\textit{TFW}, 183).

\textsuperscript{37} Although that is not to say that Kant’s explanation entails the preexistence of alternative possibilities in a Leibnizian way.
Freedom, for Bergson, is a reality that can only appear in action, dynamically. It can only be grasped in duration, through intuition. Thus, equating free action with “freedom of choice” puts the focus on the wrong place, stimulating in effect the obsessive pathologies that Raskolnikov is afflicted by: his lack of resolution, his mental and physical oscillations. How so? By reducing agency to reasons, an intellectualized approach to freedom—one focused exclusively on what to choose, without heeding how we do so—runs the risk of getting obsessed with “the different possibilities available,” as Raskolnikov’s vacillations make clear.

Indeed, as we saw, Raskolnikov is a sharp illustration of the way action is frozen or halted when this happens. His wanderings around St. Petersburg are mere “oscillations in space.” They constitute a degraded version of what action should normally look like: a current of events flowing in time. Raskolnikov stumbles at each step: every action gives him trepidation, he wavers and quivers about every single decision he must make. A good example is the scene when he finally decides to confess to Sonya.

He stopped before the door, asking himself, ‘Need I really tell her who killed [the woman]?’? The question was a strange one, because at the very same moment he felt not only that he must tell her, but that he could not put it off even for a short time. He did not yet know why he could not, he only felt it, and the tormenting consciousness of his helplessness before the inevitable almost crushed him (CP, 343).

As I read this passage, the question appears as a “strange one” to Raskolnikov because it pulls activity in two opposite directions, interrupting agency, or as Bergson says, crystallizing it verbally (TFW, 177). “Need I tell her?” wonders Raskolnikov. At the same time, he feels forced to do it. This degree of hesitation represents an “abnormal and morbid” version of human agency, not unlike the case of “the doubter who closes a window, then returns to verify its

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38 An analysis of the importance of space in Dostoevsky’s narrative structures can be found in Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, tr. R.W. Rotsel (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1973). For a slide show illustrating Raskolnikov’s journey to the pawnbroker’s apartment, visit:

closing, then verifies his verification, and so forth” (CM, 47). The original source from where agency emerges—namely, the feeling of capacity, or what Bergson calls, the “feeling of effort”\(^{39}\)—is swollen to the extent of jeopardizing action.\(^{40}\)

Now, is Bergson’s theory then an apology of boldness and fearlessness? I do not think so. Notice that the hesitating man is only the other side of the coin of the man who exalts or glorifies “daring”: if the former loses his freedom amid an infinite iteration of possibilities, the second loses it in mere boldness. That is apparent in Raskolnikov’s case. As he attempts to explain to Sonya why he committed murder, he says:

> I realized then, Sonya, […] that power is given only to the man who dares stoop and take it. There is only one thing needed, only one --to dare! I had a thought then, for the first time in my life, that nobody had ever had before me! Nobody! It was suddenly as clear as daylight to me: how strange that not one single person passing through this nonsensical world has the courage, has ever had the courage, to seize it by the tail and fling it to the devil! I... I wanted to have the courage, and I killed... I only wanted to dare, Sonya, that was the only reason! (CP, 353).

The same man who hesitates and is stuck in constant oscillations, is the one who will justify his crime in terms of courage, cloaking his deed in the virtue associated with the risk of acting.\(^{41}\) Moreover, notice that the punishment Dostoevsky reserves for Raskolnikov is almost perfect—the envy of any champion of proportionality. After committing the crime, even more so than before, he only hesitates, constantly wandering through the city, not knowing whether to disclose his truth to Sonya or not, whether to give himself up to the police or not, whether to confide in his friend Razumikhin and his sister Dunya or not, whether to address the concerns of his mother or not, etc. In other words, just as Hobbes says that there is a natural punishment for drinking in the agony of hangover, the natural punishment for Raskolnikov’s temerity is the loss

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\(^{39}\) For more on this, see above chapter 1, pp. 60-62.

\(^{40}\) Again, keep in mind that, against Kant, for Bergson, the intellect (i.e., reason) is the source of hesitation in agency. See note 20 above.

\(^{41}\) And, indeed, the relation of agency to risk will be the topic of chapter 3 below.
of his agency. In fact, he acknowledges this when he exclaims: “Did I murder the old woman? I killed myself, not that old creature! Then and there I murdered myself at one blow, for ever!” (CP, 354).

Compare this to the Gallows Man. He need not declare, as Raskolnikov did, that “power is given only to the man who dares stop and take it.” He just acted, sure of himself and with no equivocation. However, again, the contrast between the Gallows Man and Raskolnikov in this respect, is not supposed to teach us a lesson on boldness. Rather, as I said before, it calls our attention to the way things are done. We are not supposed to act assertively always. In the previous chapter, we saw that, in Bergson, individuality is build up through a “work ethic” that combines effort and patience. Similarly, here we find a mixed “phenomenology of hesitation” that recommends assertiveness at times, and ambiguity at others, depending on the circumstance.

Following Bergson, freedom is only possible through a proper insight into our own agency as it unfolds in time. And that is precisely what distinguishes our two cases: from a phenomenological approach to freedom, the difference between the Gallows Man and Raskolnikov is not that the former saved a man, and the latter killed a woman. That is, of course, an important difference, but it would not the difference between being free and being unfree. Rather, as Bergson says, freedom is found in “the relation of the concrete self to the act which it performs” (TFW, 219), because it means “becoming one with our action,” or being “wholly present in our actions” (TFW, 172). Whereas we find Raskolnikov always half asleep, distracted, and vacillating, the Gallows Man acts without hesitation.

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42 Cfr. Bergson’s ideas about the art of writing: it has less to do with what we say, and more with how we say it. That does not entail that what we do or say is irrelevant. The choice of words is always very important, but that is not what the art of writing consists in.
**Autonomy reconsidered: Scheler and the voice of conscience**

In contrast to Bergson, Scheler’s notion of freedom is closer to Kant, in the sense that, for him, freedom is related to morality in more “substantive” ways: *what* we choose to do re-enters the picture, and thus, somehow, freedom loses the ineffability that characterized it in Bergson. However, on the other hand, Scheler’s notion of freedom is at odds with Kant’s notion of autonomy, since it is related to morality on *particularistic* grounds. For Scheler, freedom and morality do not depend on the “universalization of the maxim of our actions,” but rather—just as individuality in the previous chapter—on our ability to perceive value-distinctions.

Thus, while for Bergson, as I tried to show, the experience of temptation is the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom, in Scheler, as we will see, freedom is known through our capacity to *capture* and *bring out* the specificity of particular values, feelings, and actions. This, again, as we saw in the previous chapter, can be done to some extent through language, even if—as we also saw in the case of individuality—certain experiences defy expression.

Let us review Scheler’s ideas on autonomy. He argues that autonomy is not a predicate of reason, but of the agent (*F*, 126). Therefore, freedom as autonomy cannot be a matter of obeying the law dictated by reason. However, it cannot be *either* a matter merely of *not* obeying others, or even of obeying oneself only. In fact, it cannot be exclusively a function of *obedience* (or the absence thereof). Rather, it must involve the agent in a more substantive way, and not only in *relation* to potential oppressors. More precisely, since freedom concerns primarily the agent *as such* (and not as rational being), the effort to solve the enigma of autonomy must focus primarily on self-knowledge of the agent *qua* agent.

Put differently, Rousseau’s quest after those principles of justice “by means of which each [...] may nevertheless, obey only himself, and remain as free as before,” seems, from a Schelerian perspective, to be misguided because, in order to “remain free” as Rousseau wants,
the problem is not so much how not to obey others, but how to gain access to one’s self. Now, for Scheler, conscience provides one of the most important vehicles for such an access. In consonance with what we saw in the previous chapter, according to him, the voice of conscience speaks to each one of us in an individualized way. As this voice becomes clearer and sharper, says Scheler, “it must tell each person something different for the same situation” (F, 325). The voice of conscience informs us about the shades of value that we find in our individual self and its internal diversity. Conscience, properly understood, he says, informs us of what is objectively good for each one of us as individuals (F, 325).43 This does not mean that, in Scheler’s views, universal moral truths does not exist, nor that the voice of conscience is always and obviously accessible. Rather, on this point he says:

The true relation between universalism and individualism in values remains preserved only when every individual moral subject submits those value-qualities which he alone can grasp to a special moral cultivation and culture, though of course without neglecting universally valid values (F, 492).

Scheler’s efforts to combine what we now call “moral realism” (the idea that moral truths exist “out there,” independently from our volition and situation) with the so-called “moral particularism” (the idea that moral action must respond to context and other contingent considerations in order to be truly moral) are apparent here. For him, moral values exist, although they do not necessarily yield universal laws, and even less, would these universal laws exhaust morality. Moral action needs the “cooperation”—i.e, the translation and adaptation, what Scheler calls “cultivation”—of these values into the particular situation in which moral agents find themselves. This is part of what we do in the process in which we acquire self-knowledge. However, as we saw in chapter 1—and as Raskolnikov’s case proves so well—self-knowledge is a very difficult thing to achieve and, therefore, the voice of conscience should not be assumed to

43 I will touch upon this topic again in chapter 4. See p. 176 below.

In his view, our reluctance to see the absolutely singular basis of morality—our tendency to think of morality in terms of laws—is fueled by a deterioration of our moral sense regarding our capacity to perceive value. It is, if you like, a problem akin to daltonism: just as the color-blind cannot perceive colors distinctly, law-like ethical thinking cannot perceive value differences. Now, why is this perceptual deficiency so strong?

According to Scheler, such a deficiency is based on the fact that, compared to things we perceive through the senses (a table or a chair, for instance), values are generally more difficult to comprehend and to assess. However, this is not because they are incorporeal or somehow intangible. Rather, in his view, this happens because cognition of moral values is, according to him, immediately connected with our volition. The fact that we can choose, that we are willing agents and certain things depend on us, makes us inclined, he says, “to justify[ing] and excus[ing] our actions by saying that ‘someone else has acted in this way’” (F, 318). Our weakness in standing alone and affirming our values, independently of what other people might feel, leads us in turn, he claims, to expect less disagreement that we should.

Why is that so? The mechanism is psychological, and should not be unfamiliar to anyone who has undergone the experience of high-school: simply put, we want to “belong” to a moral community, thus moral disagreement “makes us nervous,” and therefore it becomes more conspicuous than other kinds of disagreement. The tendency to look for social support in this
respect, Scheler says, is so strong, that “[it] led Kant to the mistake of trying to establish the mere principle of turning a maxim of the will into a universal law as the measure of moral correctness” (*F*, 319).

Of course, this tendency to overestimate moral agreement can lead to different results. The Gallows Man arrived to the categorical imperative, while Raskolnikov, as we will see in a moment, came up with his theory of the two types of men. Some others could, just as well, turn to moral skepticism or to moral anarchism. All these possibilities are logically open, and—going back to the previous section—depending on which one a person finds more tempting, he or she will become an egalitarian, a defender of hierarchy, or a moral anarchist. What all these positions have in common, though, following Scheler’s interpretation, is that they spring from an *inability to tolerate moral singularity*, which is one of the cornerstones of Scheler’s ethics. With that in mind, let us go back and consider, first, Raskolnikov’s case again.

Unlike in the previous section, where I focused, with Bergson, on how our protagonists acted, and not on what they did, I will delve now into Raskolnikov’s motives and the content of his actions. I will examine why, from a Schelerian perspective, Raskolnikov’s failed to act both freely and rightly, and how that differs from a Kantian interpretation of the case, based on the idea of autonomy. Let’s first spell out what a Kantian reading of Raskolnikov’s case would be.

Naturally, killing the woman was wrong. The explanation of why this is so, though, would vary depending on how we interpret Raskolnikov’s motives. If one focuses, for instance—as some psychoanalytical interpretations do—on Raskolnikov’s hatred against his mother, and on the association he establishes between his mother and the moneylender, one can make a case that inclination (in this case, hatred) trumped duty and reason: Raskolnikov resented his mother; he associated the latter with other feminine figures like the moneylender or the
landlady; he eventually killed one of those similar figures.\textsuperscript{45} In other words, unlike the Gallows Man, Raskolnikov was not able to overcome his inclinations, and thus killed (a very similar argument can be built from self-hatred instead, where Raskolnikov identifies, not his mother, but \textit{himself} with the moneylender).\textsuperscript{46}

If, on the other hand, the focus is placed on Raskolnikov’s theory of the two types of men—the theoretical framework under which he explains and justifies his crime, and which we will review shortly—the interpretation of his moral failure is different.\textsuperscript{47} Of course, such a theory can be read simply as a rationalization of what is otherwise a series of egoistic, vainglorious, hateful, and revengeful emotions. But if we take the theory seriously—as I think we should—Raskolnikov’s crime must be understood—still from a Kantian perspective—not simply as the triumph of inclination over reason, but as the misuse of the latter.

Put briefly, Raskolnikov’s theory is as follows. There are the two types of men: the ordinary and the extraordinary. For the former, there is nothing degrading in obedience and abiding by the law. On the contrary, that is “their destiny,” and they in fact fulfill a historical conservative function, which is beneficial both for them and for the world. However, things are completely different for the later type.

Well, for example, the law-givers and regulators of human society, beginning with the most ancient, and going on to Lycurgus, Solon, Mahomet, Napoleon and so on, were

\textsuperscript{45} See the works by W. D. Snodgrass and Edward Wasiolek cited above, in note 5.

\textsuperscript{46} Early in the novel, Raskolnikov has a terrible dream in which a helpless animal is beaten to death. In his dream, he witnesses the event as a little boy, and it is clear that he sympathizes with the victim, and is horrified by the deed. The way the animal is killed is not so different from the way he murders the lady, suggesting a possible identification with her. See Richard R. Rosenthal, “Raskolnikov’s Transgression and the Confusion Between Destructiveness and Creativity,” in \textit{Do I Dare Disturb the Universe? A Memorial to Wilfred R. Bion}, ed. James S Grotstein (United Kingdom: Karnac Books, 1990), 197-235. I thank Jaime del Palacio for this reference. In addition to this, as we saw before, Raskolnikov explicitly identifies with the moneylender, when he admits that he had killed himself through the crime.

without exception transgressors, by the very fact that in making a new law they ipso facto broke an old one, handed down from their fathers and held sacred by society…(CP, 220).

As we know, Raskolnikov wants to persuade himself that he belongs to the second group; the ones who, out of their greatness, create the law and cannot possibly be bound to obedience. He kills the woman in an attempt to prove somehow that he is immune to the law. Of course, some degree of vainglory is at work behind such an attempt, since what he wants to prove is that he is a great man. However, more profoundly—again, taking seriously his explanation of the motives for the crime—the murder was prompted not simply by a disregard of duty and reason, but rather by the belief that the duty and the right of great men are to create new laws and to create new values. In Raskolnikov’s mind, this entails that they cannot possibly be bound by existing prescriptions, say, the prescription that it is wrong to kill.

In both cases—the interpretation that highlights inclination, and the one that focuses on the misconception of reason and duty—Raskolnikov’s actions reveal a clear breach of the Kantian moral law. In killing the moneylender, he not only used the moneylender as means to the end of proving his theory—and more specifically, as a means to the end of proving how he fit in that theory—but, what is more, his own theory explicitly breaches the moral law. The theory of the two types of persons does not fully recognize humanity in the old woman, and more generally, it postulates a division of the human race in two parts, thereby ignoring that all human beings share in rational nature and deserve therefore consideration as ends in themselves. Furthermore, it establishes that great men, by definition, escape and defy the requirement to

48 That reason can misguide us is a possibility accepted by Kant. See Christine Korsgaard, “Kant’s Formula of Humanity,” Kant-Studien 77, no. 2 (1986): 188-189.

49 It is not clear exactly, what would prove that, in killing her, he remained immune to the law. Probably lack of remorse. However, that would need further argumentation, because in Raskolnikov’s considerations, there are always consequentialist considerations, according to which breaking the law is justified only within a broader framework, say, one of a great career, like in the case of Napoleon. So, beyond lack of remorse, a great project that, furthermore, would require the commission of the crime is also needed.
universalize the maxim of their actions.\(^5^0\)

Now, would a Schelerian approach, with its focus on moral singularity, be more congenial to Raskolnikov? Not at all. Indeed, a close reading of the text through a Schelerian lens would show that Raskolnikov’s moral failure, as well as his incapacity to act freely, resulted not from being unable to acknowledge what the moneylender and himself had in common, namely humanity, but from his inability to situate himself in his particular circumstance, experiencing his individuality fully.

Below is Raskolnikov’s explanation of his actions, as he confesses his crime to Sonia:

The point is this: on one occasion, I put this question to myself: what if, for example, Napoleon had found himself in my shoes, with no Toulon, no Egypt, no crossing of Mont Blanc, to give his career a start, but instead of those monumental and glorious things, with simply one ridiculous old woman, who must be killed to get money from her trunk (for that career of his, you understand?)—well, would he have made up his mind to do it if there was no other way? Would he have shrunk from it, because it was so unmonumental and…and so sinful? Well, I tell you I tormented myself over that “problem” for a terribly long time…(\(CP, 350\)).

As we will see more fully in chapter 5, Scheler’s notion of moral singularity leads him to acknowledge the important ethico-political role of exemplarity. As the passage above makes clear, Raskolnikov is using Napoleon as an example, as a guide to orient his actions. However, as I said, Raskolnikov’s considerations are flawed from Scheler’s perspective as well, even if they focus on individuals rather than on absolute laws. Exemplarity, as an element of our moral education, presupposes the ability to infer adequately from one case to another, an art at which Raskolnikov is especially incompetent. He asks himself what would Napoleon do “if he had

\(^5^0\) Following Christine Korsgaard’s interpretation of Kant’s moral law, and summarizing briefly what is a set of very complicated arguments, for Kant, the moral law has two parts: on the one hand, its form, which is given by its universalizability (being universal, the law rests on the identification of an unconditional end—an end in itself); on the other hand, its content, which is given by humanity (humanity, for Kant, is distinguished from animality as “the power to set an end,” a capacity which is only “completed and perfected when our ends are fully determined by reason, [that is] when we respond to moral incentives” (Christine Korsgaard, “Kant’s Formula of Humanity,” 189-190). Putting these together, the moral law yields the argument that every human being (or rather, every rational creature), should be treated not merely as a means, but as an end in itself, capable of self-legislation.
found himself in his shoes.” On the face of it, the question sounds silly: Napoleon would simply never be in Raskolnikov’s situation. However, it is important to understand what exactly is wrong with the comparison.

First, notice that we are often ready to accept moral comparisons where the terms are very dissimilar. For instance, think of the familiar question “What would Jesus do in my situation?,” and more generally, of the powerful thought experiment of “putting ourselves in the shoes of others,” even (or especially) when they are considerably different from us—an idea that has an important moral purchase in our ethico-political tradition, as we will see in chapter 4 devoted to the idea of sympathy and empathetic feelings).

Then, is it that comparisons are appropriate only under certain circumstances, or that certain exemplary figures are more amenable for the kind of moral inference that such thought experiment require? And further, does that reveal a problem with exemplarity as a tool for moral education—being subject as it is, to the arbitrariness and contingency of the figure that is chosen as an exemplar?

As I said, some of these topics will be fully explored in other chapters, but for now I wish to show how Raskolnikov’s self-comparison with Napoleon is not a good example of exemplarity as an exercise in moral singularity. Notice first that Raskolnikov’s “problem” abstracts “Napoleon” from his “career.” Napoleon is who he is, in good part because of his deeds and the situations that sparked them. Going back to Bergson’s criticism of retrospective thinking for laying out certain paths of action before the latter takes place, it is senseless to ask what Napoleon would do “if he did not have Toulon or Egypt” to get his career going, as if his career were something “there,” independent from Toulon or Egypt, and moreover, something “transplantable” to Raskolnikov’s life in such a literal manner.
As we will see more fully in chapter 5, exemplarity as a pedagogical tool in ethics requires us to be able to think by analogy. In other words, the formulation “What would X do?” should not be taken literally, but as meaning something like, “What can I learn from X’s life and deeds, to better address my situation?” When Raskolnikov asks what would Napoleon do if he simply had “one ridiculous old woman, who must be killed to get the money from her trunk (for that career of his, you understand?)” (CP, 350), he ignores the obvious fact that he himself does not have any such a career in front of him, nor is in his way towards one either.\footnote{He does not have a carefully laid-out plan for which the money is necessary (either a personal project, or a political one—even though he is, indeed, a talented young man). He is also unmoved by big projects of humanitarian reform (even though he is especially sensitive to the suffering of people he is interested in, and he is generous with them; he appreciates friendship, even if he is unable to enjoy it).}

More importantly, he also ignores the fact that he does not have the moneylender “in his way” in any relevant sense: she is neither an obstacle, nor an opportunity for him. She is just an excuse. Following the aforementioned psychoanalytical interpretations of the novel, the choice of the moneylender as his victim answers more to certain repressed aspects of Raskolnikov’s personal story—either conflicts with his mother, or self-hatred—than to anything that would concern the moneylender in particular.

Thus, Raskolnikov’s appeal to Napoleon’s is a more a trick to escape from his situation, than a heuristic resource to delve into his own self; a moral caricature rather than a serious exercise of inference from an exemplar to his situation. Such an exercise of inference must be rooted, as we have said, in an exercise of self-knowledge. And that is what Raskolnikov did not manage to do. He needed to examine his motives, and disentangle them—as, of course, Dostoevsky does, giving way to endless debates about the character’s inner life.

Take, for instance, vainglory, which plays an important role in Raskolnikov’s life. According to Scheler, we must parse out this emotion further, distinguishing, for instance,
between “vainglory” and “amour-propre.” Both are less than virtuous, but they present significant differences. The former consists, he says, in “comparing the values given in oneself with those of somebody else—as in “choosing a hero,” whom one wishes to equal,” while the latter is a situation where “[one] is given to himself as ‘valuable’ only when he knows himself to be of ‘more value than another’” (F, 354). Thus, what he calls here “vainglory” allows us to “choose a hero,” avoiding—to some extent at least—the pitfalls of self-deprecation. Amour-propre is more contemptible, as it de-centers the self from its source of value. Again, Scheler uses language as a tool to distinguish between different emotional complexes, whose examination is a requirement for true moral agency, for the exercise of both freedom and morality.

From a Schelerian perspective, Raskolnikov could have legitimately used an example (Napoleon, or other),52 to think through his own situation. Exemplarity must not necessarily entail arbitrariness and voluntarism, as it does in his case. Raskolnikov’s set up of the problem that “tormented himself terribly for a long time,” is misguided, because he “losses himself in the comparison.”53 His use of Napoleon does not result from a rejection of universal laws derived from a “particularistic” position. Rather, he wants Napoleon to keep him company because of his inability to “stand alone” in moral matters, to use Scheler’s term. “Standing alone” entails a degree of self-knowledge that would have allowed Raskolnikov to appreciate both his own individuality, and the individuality of others (in this case, those of the moneylender and of Napoleon himself). Such incapacity, in turn, perverted both his experience of freedom and his moral quest.

52 Although the fact that he chose Napoleon is not accidental (see Laure Murat, The Man Who Thought He Was Napoleon: Toward a Political History of Madness (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

53 For Scheler’s assessment of comparison in moral matters, see chapter 4 below.
Notice further that, in Raskolnikov’s theory, the two groups of men are diametrically opposed, but, still, share the standard that defines them: the presence or the absence, respectively, of valid laws for each one of them. In that sense, Raskolnikov’s “solution” shares important assumptions about morality with Kant’s categorical imperative. The latter is Kant’s reply to the question about the meaning of freedom as autonomy. If one is to give the law to oneself, the only possible answer is the categorical imperative. The presupposition is that morality should be spelled out in terms of laws.

Now, since for Raskolnikov it was an inescapable historical and sociological fact that great men exist—“Lycurgus, Solon, Mahomet, Napoleon and so on.” He was not willing to accept that the law should apply equally to everyone equally. He was not as impressed by Rousseau, the egalitarian, as Kant had been before him. Therefore, the solution to the conundrum of both preserving morality, on the one hand, and admitting the existence of human greatness on the other, was to divide men into two categories, and to say that either laws apply completely, or not at all. Even if the result is different, the respective frameworks that characterize both Kant’s and Raskolnikov’s solutions avoid a serious engagement with moral singularity, and resort instead to thinking about morality exclusively in terms of laws, and about freedom merely as a function of obedience.

What does moral singularity mean? And how is it related to the exercise of freedom, in Scheler? This can be captured best in Scheler’s discussion of the notion of *maturity*, especially through a comparison with Kant’s own. Kant said in his famous essay “What is Enlightenment?” that *immaturity* is the inability to use one’s own understanding without another’s guidance. The motto of the Enlightenment is, as we know, “Have the courage to use your own understanding.” In Kant, maturity is intellectual freedom, and it means to think for ourselves; similarly,
autonomy is practical freedom, and it means to give the law to ourselves.

Now compare this with Scheler’s idea of maturity. He accepts that someone is immature when she takes an alien will for her own, and her own for an alien one. However, his argument goes, a person can still be consider immature if, in differentiating her will in general from the will of others, she does not do so by referring to the content of what is willed, and to the context in which it is willed, that is, to the “interconnections of meaning” that surround her will (F, 472, 478-9, and 494-501). If she can only differentiate her will, Scheler says, “by referring to the expressions and enunciations of the will in different, physically separate, people” (F, 479), she is not mature yet, because then, if the “merely contingent” reference to other people is missing, “the immature human being’s own will and an alien will become indistinguishable” (F, 479).

Put differently, if our only reference is the presence of others (as in “do not obey others,” or “think only for yourself”), and not values themselves, we will remain immature and morally dependent. Therefore, we remain the potential prey of things such as vainglory, peer-pressure, amour-propre, and subjection. However, if we really aim at understanding “without another’s guidance,” as Kant’s demands, the concept of maturity, thinks Scheler, should change accordingly. It should make reference not only to “formal independence” from others (that is, to physical separateness between persons), but at the “web of interconnections of meaning” that give support to our autonomy.54

It follows from this that autonomy, for Scheler, is not fundamentally a matter of self-determination—partly, because, as we saw in chapter 1, the self is not an object that can be determined; but also because that would miss, to paraphrase William James again, the “real

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54 Again, Scheler’s combination of moral realism and moral particularism is apparent here. His notion of maturity tries to construct independence, but always attending to the particular context the agent is in. In other words, it is a non-formal notion of autonomy.
That citadel lies, for Scheler, not in sensation, as James declared, but neither in assessment, judgment, or understanding, as Kant argued. For him, the real alternative to sensible intuition is not intellectual intuition—namely, an intuition that makes what it perceives, according to Kant’s formulation. Instead, he traces a non-sensible, albeit finite, intuition, capable of perceiving the realm of what is both non-formal and still a priori—namely, values and emotions.

Now, let’s go back to the Gallows Man case. The relation between self-knowledge and duty in Scheler suggests a different interpretation of Kant’s mini-story from the ones I examined in the previous section, both from Kant’s and Bergson’s viewpoints, respectively. Kant, as we saw, focused exclusively on the awareness of the ought. For its part, the Bergsonian reading I offered above focused exclusively on the awareness of the could. For Bergson, agency is phenomenologically prior to the “fact of reason,” and this entailed, in turn, that freedom—as something that belongs to the agent—concerns action, movement, and change instead of arguments; the how instead of the what.

Finally, Scheler highlights both agency and duty. Agency (what he calls the “experience of ability”—das Könnenserleben) (F, 237-8/252[D]) and duty are both “immediate facts of experience,” that cannot be reduced to one another. As we will see, freedom and morality require that we experience them together, but always keeping them apart. According to him, Kant’s proposition that the ability to do something must follow, if required by the moral law—“I ought, therefore I can,” as the Gallows Man realized in Kant’s interpretation of the case—is as mistaken as the opposite proposition that duty must be reduced to ability, according to which “might makes right,” and “can entails ought.”

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For Scheler, the latter proposition amounts to unwarranted voluntarism, ignoring the genuine character of the experience of duty; while the former considers, mistakenly, that we do not have independent access whatsoever to our feeling of agency. Both ideas, he thinks, make the notion of virtue incoherent. If \textit{ought} entails \textit{can}, he says, “then “virtue” would merely be a disposition to our duty. Virtue would not be an autonomous ethical category” (\textit{F}, 238). On the other hand, he claims, “if there were no immediate ought-experience of something, but only a reproduction of an experience of ability […] virtue and aptitude would indivisibly merge. Virtue, however, is not aptitude for anything but willing and doing something that is given and experienced as ideally obligatory” (\textit{F}, 238).

Similarly to Bergson’s focus on agency, what Scheler calls “ability” does not rest on any intellectual analysis of what one should be able to do, given past experiences and future expectations. It does not depend on remembering that we can do something—that is, that we are trained and skilled enough to do it—together with the expectation that we will have the opportunity to repeat the act (\textit{F}, 232). Rather, the experience of ability rests, he says, on an “immediate consciousness” that I can do things, even in completely new situations. It is not a copy or a reproduction of something done in the past, but a consciousness of a certain power which, in fact—he claims—often makes possible that we learn how to do certain things. In other words, it often antedates the empirical acquisition of the ability to do something in the first place.

Finally, notice again, that in Scheler, the equal originality of both agency and duty is demonstrated by language. The meaningfulness of the concept of \textit{virtue} proves it: for Scheler, the term “virtue” constitutes a signpost that the two experiences are possible and equally

\footnote{Notice that this is not that different from what Bergson says about obligation. As we will see more fully in chapter 3, for Bergson, obligation cannot be ultimately theorized. Obligation is an “ultimate” or “original” facts, the same as agency. However, it is true that Scheler’s approach is different insofar as he allows for a more fully articulated account of virtue. This points, again, towards their differences regarding the role of language.}
original—otherwise, he thinks, it would be superfluous.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I explored Bergson’s and Scheler’s respective notions of freedom through the analysis of two “case studies”: that of the Gallows Man, narrated by Kant, and that of Raskolnikov, narrated by Dostoevsky. Explored through the respective lenses of Bergson’s and Scheler’s theories, these two “experiments in free-choice” (to use Kant’s felicitous phrase) present intriguing similarities, which illuminate not only the nature of freedom, but the relation between human agency and morality.

As we saw, Bergson’s and Scheler’s respective accounts of freedom and moral action emerge from a direct engagement with Kant’s ethical theory. As we know, one of the latter’s main goals is to eliminate ambiguity in the principles that guide our action. For Kant, only reason and its categorical imperative can furnish appropriate tools to that effect. Bergson, on the contrary, sees action primarily as movement, corresponding to the vital impulse of our inner life. In his view, looking at human agency through the lens of reason only solidifies it and distorts it. He is interested in the “shade or quality” that characterizes action, rather than in its definition through the alternative actions to which it could be opposed.

This shade or quality, I have argued, can be thought of in terms of the way in which vacillation and resolution play out in action. Both excessive vacillation and relentless daring (two sides of the same coin, as in the case of Raskolnikov) betray an intellectualized sense of agency, one that is “out of tune” with the fluidity that alone makes freedom possible. The Gallows Man example, on the contrary, is an instance of resolution that, in itself, illustrates freedom. It must be clear, however, that the aim is not to equate freedom with boldness and audacity: action is movement, and thus oscillation and vacillation always form part of it. As
Bergson says, freedom is not absolute, “it admits of degrees” (*TFW*, 166).

Therefore, a better rendition of freedom can be achieved through a “phenomenology of hesitation”—one that accounts not only of *what* we decide, but of *how* we come to choose this or that course of action.\(^{57}\) Freedom, from this perspective, is not the victory of reason over inclination—the triumph of our active dimension over our passive one, as Kant proposed; but rather, the capacity to reintegrate the more passive and the more active phases of our agency in an adequate balance: one that, among other things, would allow the agent to act without hesitation when needed, and to be cautious otherwise.

Furthermore, temptation—or, as we said, an inclination that is personally addressed to us—becomes the key to the discovery of freedom as it triggers off our oscillating agency. Even more, temptation has a special moral import, since it appeals to our agency in a similar way as the appeal of duty does. As we saw, Kant himself admitted that reason is not enough to account for the feeling of respect that draws us towards duty, but did not get so far as to acknowledge temptation as a morally relevant experience. On the contrary, he tellingly recast the story of the Garden of Eden to keep temptation out of the picture.

Scheler, on his part, rejects the Kantian notion of autonomy as very formalistic. Kant’s formalism—that the will should be determined only through the categorical imperative—corresponds, as we saw, to the Rousseauian way of formulating the question. To say that the problem is to figure out how to interact with others, while obeying only oneself, and therefore “remaining as free as before,” assumes that freedom is a matter *merely* of obeying oneself. That, however, obliterates that self-government is best achieved not *only* through self-reference, so to

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\(^{57}\) For an example of Bergson’s use of the word “*hésitation*,” see *HIT*, 239: “The act by which one makes a decision after hesitation, after deliberation, can be explained by that which antedates it […] but not before, which means that events that precede give an explanation about what follows, but are never enough to determine it…” See also *TFW*, 177.
speak, but instead through a proper exploration of the self, who is to become autonomous.

Autonomy, therefore, as Scheler says, cannot be predicated of reason, but only of the person, and accordingly, morality cannot be put in terms of laws, but only dictated by the singular voice of conscience. Being capable of moral motivation, means for him, therefore, being capable of listening to that voice.

From a Kantian perspective, this conception of conscience is troubling for two reasons. First, it appears as arbitrary as it admits of endless variation. However, as we saw, such variation is, for Scheler a mark of moral richness. It speaks of the human capacity to experience duty, ability, and virtue to a full extent. It attests our capacity, as well, for a thorough perception of value-distinctions.

Second, the Schelerian conception of moral singularity and the individual voice of conscience might suggest to Kantian ears the idea that the good is self-evident on a non-rational basis, welcoming therefore all sorts of moral, religious and political fundamentalism. However, that relies, I think, on a misinterpretation. Conscience is an “organ” that needs training in order to be able to deliver its nuanced message. Therefore, a proper sentimental education is necessary to listen to the voice of conscience in all its complexity.\textsuperscript{58} Especially since, as we saw as well in chapter 1, self-knowledge is, for Scheler, far from self-evident. I will explore this point further in chapters 4 and 5.

Now, despite the similarities between both authors, there is an important point in which they differ. As we saw, for Scheler, duty constitutes an independent and original insight, which is also liable to theorization. His objection is rather against \textit{formalism} in ethics, where universal values and norms are the \textit{only} valid currency in moral trade. Bergson, on the contrary, thinks that

\textsuperscript{58} For more on this point, see chapter 4, p. 176.
every step towards conceptualization, categorization, or generalization—let alone the formulation of a law—implies already that we leave behind the original source of morality, namely, the fluid current of inner life. As we enter the rocky stream of social conventions, morality loses some of its original force. Thus, for him, a theory of obligation that seeks to justify it—insofar as any justification will depend on concepts and categories—is condemned to a permanent incapacity to capture “the force of the law.”

This opposition, to be sure, is one more instance of the contrast that I have exploring in this dissertation between Scheler and Bergson—namely, their divergent views regarding the ethico-political role of language. Laws and conventions can only be expressed through language, and any effort of generalization requires the use of concepts. Thus, it comes as no surprise that a Bergsonian perspective would be relatively more reluctant about the moral purchase of laws, conventions, and concepts by themselves to guide our moral education.

For instance, when Raskolnikov confesses to Sonya, her admonitions mean nothing to him. She insists that he must “accept suffering and achieve atonement through it…” (CP, 355). But for Raskolnikov, these are mere words, “ready-made concepts,” as Bergson would say, which can fit whatever you put in them because they are made beforehand—they do not spring out of his situation, and cannot speak to him directly (HIT, 287-8). Thus, the only reaction he is capable of at the moment, is to call Sonya “a child,” and to accuse her of “not understanding” what his crime was all about (CP, 355).

However, when Raskolnikov experiences Sonya’s love and example throughout his period in Siberia, seeing her day by day for many years, how she takes care of him and of other inmates and their families, he is finally able, not to understand, but to live the meaning of those

59 Again, I will examine further Bergson’s views on obligation in chapter 3.
words. The period in jail—those years in which he “pays for his crime”—are worth it, from a Bergsonian point of view, not as they finally bring about “repentance” in Raskolnikov’s heart, but because they allow him—thanks to Sonya’s example—to be wide awake, conscious of the emotions of his inner life, finally curing him from the frantic oscillations that impaired him for action.

The limits of concepts and categories are also present in Scheler. As we saw in chapter 1, the person as such, in his view, cannot be judged. Raskolnikov killed, but he is more than any one of his acts: more than a murderer, more than a penitent. Similarly, the Gallows Man: he is both more than a libertine, and more than a martyr. However, Scheler calls our attention as well to the significance of concepts as moral signposts: the term virtue, for instance, “alerts” us to the possibility of certain attitudes that go beyond dutiful ones. And in that sense, it is important to recall that even Bergson—as we saw in chapter 1—says that the painter and the poet give us new resources to look, with fresh eyes, at the outer and the inner life, respectively.

Just as the painter and the poet can teach us how to look at things differently, the legislator and the jurist can shape our subjectivity through positive law and its implementation. Even if, at the limit, a person cannot be judged and freedom cannot be defined, the letter of the law and the categories established by our institutions should aim at approaching that limit, developing the necessary resources to identify the nuances and gradations in action. They must be able to capture the “shades of color” that constitute it. That is because they determine the set of “possibles” that we constantly face, some of which will tempt us, and some of which will not. Hence the importance of such task.
Chapter 3. Bergson and the Morality of Uncertainty

As we saw in the previous chapter, Bergson’s conception of freedom relies upon an acceptance of—or to put it in Hegelian terms, a reconciliation with—the hesitant character of our agency. Freedom and morality, in his view, are not categorical: they admit of degrees and can only exist against a background of continuous oscillations. Another way of putting this is to say that action happens always against a background of uncertainty: the Bergsonian insistence on time and duration highlights the moral relevance of contingency in action.

Of course, such emphasis is nothing new. Moral and political theories, insofar as they take into account the finitude and fragility of human life, incorporate or otherwise assume a reflection on the role of contingency in individual and collective pursuits. Even if often the goal is to curtail its effects, uncertainty always informs them in some way or another—whether in Plato’s effort to arrange the political community and the life of the soul according to immutable and eternal ideas; in Hobbes’ project to eliminate insecurity within the Leviathan; in Kant’s rejection of any source of variability at the foundation of morals; or finally, in Rawls’ proscription of luck in the overlapping consensus of justice.

According to Martha Nussbaum, however, any theory disposed to accommodate uncertainty will most surely have the virtue of acknowledging, as Aristotle did, two important truths: first, the centrality of action as an object of moral and political reflection, regardless of its always vulnerable character; second, that fragility and finitude not only threaten sociability and

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1 A version of this chapter appeared in the Journal for French and Francophone Philosophy 24, no. 2 (2016), 41-61. I thank Mark W. Westmoreland for his help in the edition of the text.
virtue, but constitute their very conditions of possibility as well. Perfection, universality, and the eternal thus lie beyond both the practical aims of ethics, and the normative aims of politics.²

Once we acknowledge the moral and political significance of uncertainty, making visible its close relation to action and sociability, the question remains, however, how exactly do we understand or experience the “fact of uncertainty”? Does it simply mean that when we act there is no certainty regarding the future? In other words, is its meaning just a negative one: that we are not omniscient and omnipotent gods? Or, alternatively, is it something more substantial (a “positive name,” as Hobbes would say),³ susceptible to multiple translations? Can uncertainty show us different faces, to which we would then react in different ways? If so, what is the meaning of such various possibilities for the exercise of agency?

Bergson’s reflections on time are best known for dealing with memory. As we saw in chapter 1, he articulates a defense of freedom based on an examination of our relation to our own past, and how it affects our capacity to act in the present. However, the ways in which the prospect of the future and the fact of uncertainty affect our character as agents (and thus our capacity to be free) have been less assiduously explored.⁴ I want to undertake such a task here. As I hope to be able to show, Bergson’s reflections on uncertainty, together with his insights on the phenomenology of human action, suggest a critical approach to the role of speculation and risk-management in contemporary societies, which is different to—although not necessarily incompatible with—other critical perspectives, such as those coming from communitarians and post-structuralists.

⁴ Although see, for instance, the work by Frédéric Keck, which I have found particularly useful (see infra section “The belief in chance and superstition”).
While communitarians have given us reasons to be suspicious of how chance, risk, and uncertainty taint our institutions and our collective practices from the point of view of justice, Bergson’s treatment—and in this he is close to post-structuralism—brings out instead the ways in which our relation to uncertainty shapes our identity and our agency. Still, in contrast with the post-structuralist outlook, he is less concerned with developing resistance strategies in the face of power, and alternatively, invites us to consider the ways in which we can adapt, adjust, and make our agency more flexible in the face of unforeseen and changing circumstances.

For these purposes, I will turn, not to his early work on time and freedom, but instead to the study of the modern belief in chance that he offers in his last book, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, published originally in 1932, against nothing less than an immediate background of increasing political uncertainty in Europe and elsewhere. Bergson presents in *The Two Sources* his elucidation of the modern “belief in chance” as part of a debate about the differences between the so-called “primitive” and “civilized” mentalities—or, put differently, between the enchanted world of magic and the disenchanted world of science. For our purposes, one of the main arguments advanced in the book is that there is only one human nature underlying both kinds of mentalities, and therefore—the radical opposition between the two notwithstanding—that they are best interpreted as responding to similar anthropological conditions.5

One of the key anthropological conditions common to both mentalities is their respective susceptibility to what I have called here the “fact of uncertainty.” In other words, both the primitive and the civilized mentalities must develop strategies to cope with the series of challenges that the unknown future poses to action. The relevance of such strategies resides in

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5 That is one of Bergson’s main contentions against the anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl. Most probably in relation with this claim, Bergson normally uses scare quotes for the terms “primitive” and “civilized.” Having said this, I will not use scare quotes for these terms in the rest of the article.
that they constitute important pedagogical mechanisms in the exercise of human agency. This
strongly suggests, in turn, that—besides memory and our relation to the past—our relation to the
future has, from a Bergsonian perspective, a very important role to play in our moral formation
as free agents.⁶

Yet, since Bergson’s own treatment in The Two Sources will not fully bring to light the
point that I intend to investigate, I will resort to the French philosopher and poet Jean-Marie
Guyau, and his reflections on what he calls “the love of risk.” His work is especially pertinent,
because, as we will see, Guyau’s “love of risk” constitutes yet another way of dealing with the
unexpected, which, on the one hand, amplifies agency—making it sharper and more assertive—
and on the other, by the same token, ends up threatening it as well. Thus, the spectrum that opens
up between Bergson’s “belief in chance” and Guyau’s “love of risk” adequately illustrates the
moral stakes that human agency has in its relation to uncertainty.

Moreover, Guyau and Bergson were intellectually and biographically connected. Bergson, only four years younger than Guyau, was a student at the Lycée Condorcet, while the
latter served there as a professor in 1876. In 1885, Guyau published a couple of articles offering
a theory of time, which were later posthumously edited by the French philosopher Alfred
Fouillée (his stepfather) with Bergson’s help. Bergson himself published a review of the book in
1891.⁷ Guyau lived a short, and yet intellectually vigorous and passionate, life. He was a
precocious and very prolific author—his first substantial investigation on utilitarianism (more

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⁶ Bergson’s book partakes of the important 19th and 20th century debate in philosophy, sociology, and anthropology
about civilization and culture, which tried to understand the place of science and religion in modern societies, as
compared to primitive ones. For overviews of this debates and its implications, see Marvin Harris, The Rise of
Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2001); Fredrik Barth,
ed., One Discipline, Four Ways: British, German, French, and American Anthropology (Chicago: University of
Chicago Press, 2005); and Jennifer M. Hecht, The End of the Soul: Scientific Modernity, Atheism, and Anthropology

(Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1988), 19–36, and Jordi Riba, La Moral Anomique de Jean-Marie Guyau (Paris: Harmattan,
1999), 21–32.
than 1000 pages long) was written at age 20, and before dying at the age of 33, he published various books on aesthetics, morality, sociology, and education, in addition to poetry and some illustrated manuals of morals. He is normally appreciated for his intellectual optimism and moral enthusiasm, although one scholar intriguingly observes that “his earnestness led him to a serene, resigned, and smiling sadness.”

Even if Guyau remains a considerably obscure figure, especially outside of the French-speaking world, important studies of his thought have appeared as of late. These works show that in his own time, Guyau was meticulously studied by Durkheim, highly regarded by Nietzsche, and considerably influential for a good number of anarchists and artists. While the extent of Guyau’s influence on Bergson has been adequately assessed, and their affinities on the topics of time and obligation already explored, their respective treatments of risk and chance have not, to my knowledge, been contrasted yet.

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8 Regarding the latter (very curious) material see, for example, Jean-Marie Guyau, *L’année Enfantine de Lecture Courante* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1907), accessed February 18, 2017, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.%24b266809.


The half-personal face of chance and its pedagogical value

For a being endowed only with instinct, uncertainty does not exist. “An animal,” says Bergson, “is sure of itself. In its case nothing intervenes between aim and act” (TS, 139). However, for a being that, besides instinct, possesses intelligence, a gap is soon opened between projects and outcomes, which discloses in turn the sole ground in which expectation, desire, fear, and hope can ever possibly grow. We call this gap “uncertainty.” Thus, even if, on the one hand, we tend to think that intelligence reduces uncertainty through foresight, planning, and regulation, it is on the other hand true that without intelligence the problem of control would not even arise in the first place. Therefore, we are forced to admit, Bergson thinks, that intellectual activity is originally not what facilitates action by its command over nature, but what compromises it by introducing hesitation into it, as we saw in chapter 2.\(^{14}\)

Intelligence itself will solve part of the problem, but there will always be left some margin of uncertainty, against which it remains powerless. In order to circumvent paralysis, nature endows the intelligent being with what Bergson calls “virtual instinct.” This instinct will allow human beings, the intelligent species par excellence, to resist the discouragement in action that follows from the limits of rational insight into the future (TS, 152). But, what is this virtual instinct? And how does it provide the necessary impulse for movement?

According to Bergson, our capacity for fabulation performs precisely such instinctive function.\(^{15}\) Fabulation (la fonction fabulatrice), or our “myth-making faculty” as it has been usually translated into English, is our capacity to create certain “phantasmic images” (images

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\(^{14}\) See Bergson, TFW, 177–79. See chapter 2, note 40.

\(^{15}\) As can be noted, Bergson’s method is teleological: by asking what could the function of our myth-making faculty possibly be, he is attributing an “intention” to nature. I will not examine this aspect of Bergson’s methodological apparatus on this point more thoroughly now. Suffice it to say here, for the sake of exonerating him of crude teleologism, that he declares to be using the notion of “intention of nature” as a metaphor (see TS, 110). On this topic, see Étienne Gilson, From Aristotle to Darwin and Back Again: A Journey in Final Causality, Species, and Evolution (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 90–104.
phantasmatiques) (TS, 110), which constitute a defensive reaction of nature “against the representation, by intelligence, of a depressing margin of the unexpected between the initiative taken and the effect desired.”

Fabulation, Bergson claims, is manifest in the so-called primitive societies, where the appeal to mystic causes is a regular practice. So, for example, if a beloved friend was killed in an accident, the primitive man will posit a mystic cause to explain the tragic event. Contesting Lucien Lévy-Bruhl’s interpretation of the phenomenon, Bergson says that the primitive man does not recur to mystic causes to explain every possible happening in the world, but rather only those which have a particular human significance. He concludes therefore that what the supernatural cause explains is never the physical effect, but its meaning.

For Bergson, the primitive man, without denying the operation of proximate causes, believes additionally that there is a “momentous fact” that remains to be explained: say, the death of a man. Bergson claims that there is nothing illogical, prelogical, or impervious to experience in such belief (TS, 145). The event (say, again, the death of a man) surely pertains to a different ontological order, and therefore it is only appropriate to look not just for any reason to explain it, but for an intention behind it.

Now, most importantly, in Bergson’s view, evidence shows that the so-called civilized mentality is actually very close in this respect to the primitive one. While the former sees mystic causes operating everywhere, the latter sees chance at work all over the place. Those are prima facie opposite views: the one lives in an animated world, the latter in a mechanistic one. However, says Bergson, whenever the primitive man is reproached for not believing in chance, or even when it is simply stated that one of his characteristics is “not to believe in chance,” the

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16 Bergson, TS, 140.
17 According to Mark Muldoon, the myth-making faculty, “is perhaps one of the most underrated notions in Bergsonian scholarhip” (Mark S. Muldoon, Tricks of Time. Bergson, Merleau-Ponty, and Ricoeur in Search of Time, Self and Meaning, 2006, 108). He signals, though, Deleuze and Phillippe Sergeant as notable exceptions (see p. 296, note 56). My work in this chapter is an effort to cover that deficit.
civilized man inevitably admits the *existence* of chance (*TS*, 147). Of course, the civilized man will rejoin that he “admits” the existence of chance, only to the extent that it amounts to a negation of the animated world: chance is just a name for such refutation, and for the set of probabilities left in the absence of mystic causes; but properly speaking it is nothing. Nothing substantial, at least.

It is clear, Bergson concedes, that the civilized man does not make of chance a completely active force. Chance is certainly impersonal, but if it were a “mere nothing,” he suggests, we would not even consider using the word (*TS*, 147). And indeed, Bergson thinks, in spite of all the civilizing elements that inform it, modern mentality will naturally glide into a more personal conception of chance. He gives the example of a roulette gambler who, by attributing his success or failure to good or bad luck, already conceives of chance in terms of a favorable or unfavorable *intention* (*TS*, 145). Thus, from being a purely mechanical outcome, the event is transformed so as to be of human significance.

Certainly, the gambler is completely capable of explaining the result by appealing to natural causes (the force with which the roulette was turned, the weight of the ball, etc.); but when, on top of that, says Bergson, the thought crosses his mind that “it was good (or bad) luck,” he is already “objectifying his will to win, and the resistance to this will […] in order to feel the presence of a hostile or friendly power, and thus give its full interest to the game” (*TS*, 146). Luck, therefore, interestingly resembles the mystic cause. This proves, our author thinks, “the kinship of this spontaneous intelligence with the primitive mentality”: “Scratch the surface, abolish everything we owe to an education which is perpetual and unceasing, and you find in the depth of our nature primitive humanity, or something very near it” (*TS*, 127).
Provided we distinguish in the primitive mind between the faculty for myth, on the one hand, and full-fledged mythology, taboos, and magic (in sum, primitive religion), on the other, this kinship will easily become apparent. While primitive religions are, according to Bergson, only late products, and even fixations and distortions of the initial impulse that gave rise to them, the fabulation faculty is their original force. This initial impulse is the source of indeterminate forces, which oscillate around the physical and the moral, orienting human action accordingly (TS, 126-29). Bergson speculates, for instance, that even if taboos ended up being associated with particular things or places, this must have been a “late solidification” of what was originally a “naked prohibition,” that is, a sheer force that resists and pushes against certain actions (TS, 126). Concrete taboos are the end-point of a force expressed in fabulation, which “before it completed its work” in primitive societies, it must have yielded “many prohibitions which are semi-physical, semi-moral restraints on certain individual acts” (TS, 126).

Bergson’s examination shows that modern people do orient themselves in a similar fashion, by appealing to semi-impersonal forces. He argues, for example, that the sight of a sign-board saying “Trespassers will be prosecuted” makes us perceive first of all the sheer prohibition as a resistance to our will, whereas only later we “have the vision of the constable lying in wait to report us” (TS, 126). Building on contemporary child-psychology research, he explains that the child who knocks his head against a table and then hits the table back, is not simply venting his anger on the table, or mistakenly thinking that the table is a person who struck him. “The truth is that between the identification of the table with a person and the perception of the table as an inanimate object, there lies an intermediate representation which is neither that of a thing nor of a person” (TS, 125). What the child perceives is the action of striking, the intention to hit; the table as an object is an accessory to the perception.
Bergson offers two more truly remarkable examples: William James’ description of his experience during the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, in which he had the “irresistible perception” of facing such natural phenomenon as “a living agent” (*TS*, 153-57); and Bergson’s own report of his reaction to the 1914 French war declaration, when he felt struck by the rather concrete character of the threat—that is, when a set of initially dispersed actions and events came together and, suddenly acquiring almost a personality of their own, formed that which we would eventually call World War I (*TS*, 159-60).

Now, the crucial point to recall here is that, according to Bergson’s phenomenology of perception and action, human beings share the ambiguous character of the forces that they take themselves to be surrounded by, such as the mystic cause, the figure of chance or luck, the war, and the earthquake. Their ambiguity resides in that, as conscious beings that exist in both time and space, they always do two things. On the one hand, as we saw in chapter 1, in trying to remain true to perception, they attune themselves to the heterogeneity of the so-called vital impulse, present both in the flux-like character of their inner life (inner perception), as well as in the manifold of sensations that they receive from all over (outer perception).

On the other hand, however, insofar as they are agents—that is, bodies moving in space—they must always “translate” the dense heterogeneity of perception into distinct and clear-cut, even if interconnected, actions.18 As we saw in chapter 2, against what is really a dense background of movement in time and space, human agents must make particular decisions that stand out, reductively, as simply choosing “X” or “Y.”

Seeing how exactly this shared ambiguity between human agency, on the one hand, and notions like the “mystic cause” and “chance,” on the other, turns the latter into important pedagogical tools for the exercise of the former, will take us back to Bergson’s theories on

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18 See Bergson, *HIT*, 53–85, and *MM*, chap. I.
language. In chapter 1, we saw how, in Bergson’s view, language distorts memory and our relation to the past by “compartmentalizing” perception, therefore hindering a proper exercise of individuality. In the next section, however, I will address not only Bergson’s phenomenology of perception, but of action—which we began to examine in chapter 2—as it relates to what Bergson calls “images”—signs, symbols, concepts, and all kinds of similar representations. While, as we have seen so far, signs and symbols as instruments of knowledge take us away from the reality of duration, their execution as instruments of action can indeed put us in touch with our agency. Once we have seen how our agency “interacts” with reality through signs and symbols, we will be in a position to see more clearly how certain “images of uncertainty” make us relate to reality in better or worse ways.

The “comradeship” between agency and reality

In Bergson’s view, human beings qua agents are engaged with reality in exchange and joint action. Now, in this “peer exchange” with reality, images are the accepted currency; but they are always so: something “in circulation.” Consider concepts, which are, for Bergson, the signs par excellence: they are the most abstract images. Again, for Bergson, concepts do not have the speculative role that philosophers ascribe to them. They do not represent reality; rather, any given “fact” is always an adaptation of reality to the interests of practice. That is why Bergson says that the concept has “very humble origins” (HIT, 69). Take the concept of “number.” In his view, it is the result of a certain number of actions that we must carry out to count things. “Place a dog in front of three apples and three houses. It will not be able to obtain the resemblance ‘three.’ We do because, in both cases, the same action is required from us: the action that
consists in counting ‘one, two, three’” (HIT, 73). No matter how sophisticated, the concept is something that belongs to the realm of action. According to Bergson, it is an instrument of action.

In his view, if we consider things as they are offered to perception, there is no reason we should put together certain things and not others. As we saw in chapter 1, for pure perception, everything is different from everything else: everything is part of the heterogeneous vital impulse. It is only because we need to act, that our brain “spontaneously” groups things under certain labels depending on our practical necessities. Otherwise, he claims, there would be no possible explanation for the mechanism through which we classify things.

Take the label “blue flowers.” Bergson asks, “Who authorized us to compare a nuance of blue with another nuance of blue, instead of with a sound, or an animal?” (HIT, 61). He thinks that there is no way we could have “come up with the idea” of putting together different shades of blue, unless we somehow had some sense of similarity between them available beforehand. But then, to understand how this sense of similarity is possible in our minds, we would need to go back again to perception—the perception of such a resemblance between different objects—entering some kind of circularity. Therefore, he concludes, a theory of perception by itself cannot break the circle and solve the question of how we put things together into categories.

The puzzle is solved, however, if we understand the practical origin of concepts and of signs in general, and therefore the eminently practical character of conceptual knowledge. Only when we need to distinguish between colors for the sake of some further vital or practical

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19 Animals do not have concepts but, Bergson says, they do have something “equivalent” to them within the realm of instinct. See HIT, 63-64.
interest, does it make sense to draw those distinctions. Again, these distinctions are the currency of our exchange with reality as agents.²⁰

That is why, according to Bergson, “concepts are questions that we ask to reality from a practical point of view, regarding the stance that we should take toward her, or the stance that she takes toward us” (HIT, 73, italics added). More generally, the images that we perceive in reality always “pose a question to our agency” (MM, 40-1). The psychological process behind this operation is explained by Bergson in his account of how artistic signs “act upon us.” For him, we do not “contemplate” art, as something inert laying in front of us. Rather, the artistic sign issues a “call to action” for us: the sign is the determination of a certain attitude, stance, gesture, or motion on our part, without which it could not be interpreted.

[…] it can be easily appreciated that the arts […] act upon us, not really through the representation of things, but through the attitude in which they place us. Either in painting, sculpture, and in music above all, there are undoubtedly certain inchoate attitudes that are determined in us, in which the artist places us; and the feelings that the artist wants to suggest to us become progressively incorporated into such inchoate attitudes. It is through the appeal to certain attitudes—either already carried out or only initiated, inchoate or imagined—that the sign acts upon us. The sign is the fastening of a certain attitude which, in most cases, determines in us a similar or complementary attitude, and the feelings that guided the symbolism of the artist become progressively incorporated in this attitude. In sum, the suggested attitude is a bridge thrown between the soul of the artist and our own. (HIT, 54)

Without interaction between sign and agency, interpretation is not possible. In Bergson’s opinion, if we merely consider the sign, on the one hand, and the signified thing, on the other, we will miss the bridge that makes their connection possible. As the passage shows, for him, such a transition requires action—literally, movement. The sign demands from us, as it were, that we “take it or leave it” (HIT, 65). This is most evident in his explanation for how interpretation of linguistic signs is possible.

Interpretation can only happen if there is, on our part, a series of actions—I do not mean fully carried out, but merely inchoate—by means of which we inwardly emphasize that which we listen to. There is a sort of inward repetition, not thorough but schematic, that serves us to chant, to stress what we hear. Without this active process by which we situate, with the help of our imagination, in the position of that who speaks—so that once having adopted such material attitudes we can enter into her feelings and ideas—without such inward process, interpretation is impossible (HIT, 54).

As we can see, for Bergson, language as an activity—that is, the enactment of signs which elicit certain reactions on our part, and not merely as a system of representation—does address an original dimension in us—namely, movement or character as moving bodies. Thus, we can say, language might not allow us to know reality, but it does allow us to move in it, giving us a code in which to trade with it. Again, this is true for images in general, beyond specifically linguistic signs: in Bergson’s view, any type of image or representation allows us, qua agents, to engage in exchange with reality.

Now, this exchange is always fluid. In it, clearly defined concepts and neatly-defined bodies come only secondarily, as we saw in the example of the child and the table. Something similar happens in the case of the fencer—one more of Bergson’s examples—who, in order to lunge properly—that is, in order to adequately anticipate and react to the reality that confronts him—“knows that it is the movement of the point which has drawn the foil [of his adversary] forward, that it is the foil that has drawn the arm forward, [and] that it is the arm that stretched out the body by stretching out itself” (TS, 104).

As these examples show, for Bergson, perception of movement as a datum of experience to which we respond in action, has preeminence over the perception of fixed matter, and over the production of clear-cut concepts. Reality “summons” us as agents, urging us to meet it in its own (ambiguous) terms. Thereby Bergson concludes that there is an original way of relating to the world as agents: flexibly and intuitively. That is the main lesson I derive from his phenomenology of action.
And yet, as we know, the paradigm of moral action in modernity often requires otherwise: it is based on the rigidity of reason and conceptual clarity. Action is considered moral only when it is autonomous—completely voluntary and consciously endorsed, with no place for unreflective habit or improvisation. Thus, moral theory establishes a well-known dichotomy: it reduces all possible activity to absolute voluntarism, on the one hand, and absolute automatism, on the other. For Bergson, however, this places inappropriate demands for moral agency: it requires us to make fully conscious decisions at every moment, supposing therefore, an almost omnipotent will.

Worse still, such demands are not just mistakes attributable to some lack of insight on the part of modern philosophers, but rather—as we have seen in chapters 1 and 2—they have their very root in intelligence’s natural tendency to, as Bergson says, solidify flexibility into categories (TS, 128). Given this powerful tendency, it seems to me our ability to attune ourselves to the original vagueness of agency should not be taken for granted. We must learn how to do so. Therefore, we need a model of what non-fully voluntary activity should look like.

Bergson’s account of how human agency interacts with the forces that she encounters in reality suggests that it finds in them some kind of “peer.” Therefore, the semi-personal forces that “escort” human agency perform a pedagogical function, serving us presumably in more than one way: they not only provide consolation in the face of frustration and disappointment, as Bergson himself explicitly maintains in The Two Sources, but offer a “mirror” as well on which to reflect and shape our own agency.21 They help us to maintain the dual condition of our agency, which—constituted both by the density of the vital-impulse and the discrete

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21 On this notion of “escorting” see Bergson, HIT, 71, where he says that different stimuli “accompany” (accompagner) and “demand” (exiger) analogous reactions on our part.
requirements of action—is not fully delineated, but still somehow stands out from the continuity of the given.

In other words, in my reading, the virtual instinct of our myth-making faculty shows us a bridge or a compromise between voluntary and distinctly personal action, on the one hand, and dead matter subject to blind necessity, on the other. In doing so, it “trains” us to better deal with uncertainty. Let us put it in yet one more way: uncertainty “offends” a completely defined and established personality, for which only the categorical will suffice. On the contrary, contingency is not necessarily an embarrassing match for what remains supple and unfinished anyway. As we come to acknowledge non-fully voluntary or semi-automatic activity in the world, we grasp a deflated and more flexible version of our own will. Again, this virtual instinct “coaches” us not only by encouraging action in the face of the depressing margin between our expectations and an eventual failure, but also, I think, by enabling us to take advantage of unforeseen opportunities and happy fortuities.

Indeed, by transforming occurrences into “peers” or “Events,” which, as Bergson says, “resemble a human being,” the myth-making faculty establishes “a certain comradeship” between my circumstance and myself, which in itself carries great pedagogical value (TS, 157). In this way, we come to see that while, for Bergson, our relation to our past is central to elucidate the meaning of individuality—and therefore of freedom—his account of action shows that a certain relation to the future—and, consequently, to uncertainty—plays a paramount role as well.22

22 See the short but very sharp and helpful article by David Lapoujade, “The Normal and the Pathological in Bergson.” MLN 120, no. 5 (2005): 1146–55. Lapoujade distinguishes two different kinds of “health” in Bergson, corresponding to the closed and the open morality, respectively. For Lapoujade, each one displays a different kind of confidence and of attachment to life. Even though, in what I have said so far, I have not relied on Bergson’s distinction between the closed and the open, I find Lapoujade’s reading highly congenial to mine, and very instructive for my own project.
The belief in chance and superstition

As I said before, according to Bergson, primitive religions are a late development of what started off as an original and healthy tendency to identify semi-personal forces in the outside world. Such a tendency, however, often gets out of control: following a “logic of absurdity,” “primitive” religion endlessly piles up one superstition over another, “leading the mind even further and further astray towards wilder and wilder consequences” (TS, 137). As Frédéric Keck explains, these religions are according to Bergson “a sign of a morbid tendency, the human tendency to think without acting, a form of collective dream or hallucination.”\(^{23}\) The mind embarks on an imaginative race, by which the once healthy myth-making faculty engages in an hallucinatory multiplication of absurdities, without any scruple about the intellectual superiority of its inventions.\(^{24}\)

However, notice that this tendency, even if it ends up in the realm of the irrational, the absurd, and even the monstrous, is not in itself foreign to intelligence. As Bergson writes, “[a]n essentially intelligent being is naturally superstitious, and […] intelligent creatures are the only superstitious beings” (TS, 109).\(^{25}\) Moreover, since, as we saw, “[t]he intelligence of primitive peoples is not essentially different from our own; [both have a tendency] to convert the dynamic into the static, and solidify actions into things” (TS, 128), it follows that this superstitious inclination should be present in both primitive and civilized mentalities.

If this is so, then the question is: what would such a tendency look like in the civilized context? If in primitive religion, the myth-making faculty “fashion[s], out of the elementary


\[^{24}\] On the difference between fabulation as a legitimate “faculty of the mind,” capable of “creating personalities whose stories we relate to ourselves,” and imagination as a morbid tendency to invent without intellectual scruple, see Bergson, TS, 195.

\[^{25}\] As Keck notes, for Bergson, “religion is first an intelligent reaction to a specific situation through adequate affects, but it then becomes a generalized fear of non-identified threats, which can be called superstition.” (Keck, “The Virtual, the Symbolic, and the Actual,” 1141, italics added).
personalities looming up at the outset, gods that assume more and more exalted form like those of mythology” (*TS*, 164-65), what kind of god-like figure can be fashioned out of the belief in chance? As we saw before, due to our myth-making faculty, the belief in chance already takes the form of the semi-personal force of *luck*. But then, again, the question is: what would it mean for our belief in chance to take *one more* step forward, and transmogrify into an absurd “collective dream or hallucination,” as it is pulled by the corrupting influence of a hypertrophic imagination and an intelligence that solidifies action, and “converts the dynamic into the static”?  

Bergson does discuss cases of superstition in the civilized world, and we have already reviewed some of his examples of our tendency to personify events (James and the earthquake, Bergson and the war, the child and the table). But Bergson’s *The Two Sources* lacks a more sustained reflection, parallel to that on primitive religion, about the morbid proclivities of the reification of *chance*, when it is aggravated and exaggerated along the lines of superstition in the primitive mentality. The reason, I think, why Bergson is not interested in that question is simply that in *The Two Sources* he has a very different agenda—namely, exploring what he calls “open morality.” After all, a crucial purpose of the book is to examine the “leap” that is required to arrive from the closed to the open perspective on morality and sociability. And, to be sure, the “insurance device”\(^26\) against the type of contingency specific to the open sphere will not be some corrupt version of chance, but on the contrary, the mystical confidence that “lifts the soul to another plane,” “ensur[ing] for [it] to a preeminent degree, the security and the serenity which is the function of the static religion to provide.”\(^27\)


\(^{27}\) Very briefly, for Bergson, open morality based on the commitment to equality and humanity characteristic is a sort of religion. Against Enlightenment secularist claims, the morality of equality and humanity is, for Bergson, not based on reason but on intuition. This intuition is the source of a type of confidence analogous to the confidence provided by traditional religions (the so-called “closed religions”). The embrace of humanity as a whole is based, in his view, on a creative emotion that is not arrived at by simply logically extending our particularistic moral
However, as Bergson himself admits, “true mysticism is rare” (TS, 213). Thus, we cannot generally expect to see and experience the confidence that bolsters the mystic feeling of humanity. Rather, more often than not, the believer in chance, by “the very application of intelligence to life open[s] the door to the unforeseen and let[s] in the feeling of risk” (TS, 138-39).

**Risk: the twin brother of chance**

As we have seen already, in Bergson’s account, chance lies on the border between the personal and the impersonal. “Chance is mechanism as though possessing an intention,” or “an intention emptied of its content” (TS, 148-49). In contrast, by the “feeling of risk” I will denote here the civilized mind’s relation to uncertainty, as it yields to the tendency to reify the semi-personal force of luck, looking in it for an increasingly more defined “counterpart.”

Just as, for Bergson, the belief in mystic causes and the belief in chance (either in the form of good or bad luck) are analogous, in that they are both products of our myth-making

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28 In his work, Keck contrasts the different kinds of assurance provided by static (primitive) religion, on the one hand, and by dynamic religion (the religion of humanity), on the other: in the former, we have the primitive storyteller obtaining assurance through the identification of mystic causes operating behind events; in the latter, we have the mystic’s confidence that intuits the totality of humanity, “which does not need any materiality to manifest itself” (Frédéric Keck, “Assurance and Confidence in The Two Sources of Morality and Religion,” in Bergson, Politics, and Religion, ed. Alexandre Lefebvre and Melanie White (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013). I see two differences between Keck’s treatment and what I am trying to do here. First, I compare the assurance provided by primitive religion (same as Keck), not with the mystic’s confidence, but with the assurance established by the modern belief in chance, and its trust in regularities. Second, I am trying to understand the significance of such a contrast, not for belief or intelligibility, but for action. However, I have found his work illuminating and reassuring.

29 To clarify, the notion of “risk” in its current usage in the social sciences immediately suggests the possibility of quantification. As it will become clear shortly, this is not the connotation that I want to attribute to the word. Notice also that “chance” is meant here to indicate the regularities that are captured and studied by statistics—which are, nonetheless, the necessary counterpart for anything to be random and fortuitous. Thanks to Christine Zabel, for helping me to clarify this point.
faculty, I understand the feeling of risk as being analogous to the belief in the “extravagant gods of mythology.” To put it in Roman terms, risk is chance when it is not anymore an appeal to good or bad luck, but the full-fledged goddess Fortuna.

As we will see, compared to chance’s wink, risk’s appeal is much more unequivocal. While chance asks us to acknowledge the existence of regularities that can be measured and predicted, risk—the “wild” twin brother of chance—always elicits our love or our aversion. It has a more defined face, and it asks for a more definite gesture.  

In turning to Jean-Marie Guyau’s reflections on the “love of risk,” and in order to better appreciate the extent to which they are pertinent here, I will first review the overlap between his and Bergson’s respective theories of obligation. Guyau, like Bergson, rejects both rationalist and sentimentalist accounts of duty. Both authors share an ontological conviction that there is something, beyond both reason and emotions, which ultimately accounts for it. This “something” is directly related in both cases to action and movement.

As we learn in the very first page of the book, the general project of The Two Sources is to “discover [the] deeper sources of our moral feelings” (TS, 16), and to explain “how a moral motive can have a hold upon the souls of men” (TS, 65). According to Bergson, no theory of moral obligation in terms of reason or sentiments is possible. As I said in chapter 2, for Bergson, moral obligation “is to the soul what force of gravity is to the body” (TS, 229). Just as the most we can do with gravity is devise a formula to figure out velocity and acceleration, without entertaining the hope of “explaining it away” by appealing to elements beyond the force it exerts,  

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30 Keck observes as well the link between “intentionality” and “personality” in Bergson’s account of the myth-making faculty (Keck, “Assurance and Confidence in The Two Sources,” 274).

31 While Bergson’s model of the closed society in TS follows Durkheim for the most part, his reflections on the force of obligation ostensibly coincide with Guyau’s. For comparative treatments between both authors see Keith Ansell-Pearson, “Morality and the philosophy of life in Guyau and Bergson,” and Vladimir Junkélévitch, “Deux Philosophes de La Vie.”
Bergson claims that we can build systems of duties that explain why we must do x or y, but no theorization of it, as a phenomenon, will follow in terms other than itself as a force of nature. Reason intervenes by regulating, but it cannot push us to action. Sentiments might solve part of the problem, but they do not explain why we have to regulate them in the first place. If obligation could speak, Bergson says—pointing again at the uncompromising limits of language—it would only articulate the following words: “You must because you must” (TS, 23).\(^{32}\) Given this, he thinks that the only way to scrutinize obligation is not to look for its cause, but rather to recur to phenomena that present similar effects.

Thus, Bergson turns to instances that, like obligation, produce or motivate actions: instincts in animals and habits in men. That is, in fact, the reason why he turns to our myth-making faculty as well: it is similar to duty because its effects (that is, the belief in mystic causes and the belief in chance) are forces that exert pressure on acting beings that—to put it in Kantian terms—do not pertain only to the noumenal, but also to the phenomenal world.

For his part, in *A Sketch of Morality without Obligation or Sanction*, Guyau argues that morality should be looked for in action, in “a kind of natural power, preceding knowledge—a power which impels us to act and to produce.”\(^{33}\) Just as Bergson declared moral conscience to be the pressure of obligation “as weighing on the will like a habit, each obligation dragging behind it the accumulated mass of [all] the others” (TS, 25), for Guyau duty is a fact “imposing itself on consciousness as a superior force” (SM, 91). From this shared set of insights, it follows that their strategy to study obligation will look very much alike.\(^{34}\) And indeed, Guyau asserts we must “try to clearly show this fact [of obligation] in its essential variations, and in its relations with other

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\(^{32}\) For Bergson’s sociobiology see, for instance, John Mullarkey, *Bergson and Philosophy*.


\(^{34}\) For an assessment of Guyau’s possible influence on Bergson’s TS, see Renzo Ragghianti, “Décomposer un texte,” 22-26. Notice that Bergson’s book appeared 48 years later than Guyau’s.
similar facts of consciousness” (SM, 90). Thus, correspondingly to Bergson’s search for phenomena with analogous effects to those of obligation, Guyau sets out to look for “admissible ‘equivalents’ or ‘substitutes’ of duty” (SM, 5).  

Among the suitable equivalents of duty, Guyau identifies “the love of risk in action and of struggle” (SM, 117). Both rationalists and hedonists, he claims, consider moral dilemmas as if the uncertainty of the outcomes could be somehow overcome (SM, 119). Instead, his treatment makes manifest that the love of risk is much more than just a disposition that can “vary” without substantially affecting agency itself, as economists assume in the notions of high or low risk-aversion. In microeconomic theory, our disposition towards risk is just one more datum in the agent’s “given preferences.” In Guyau’s picture, instead, the love of risk is more than just a preference: it concerns the agent’s moral capacity itself.  

Let us analyze more closely what this means. Guyau explores uncertainty as it is experienced by the agent. He acknowledges at the outset that the pleasure of victory and conquest tinge to a great extent the lure exerted by them (SM, 121). For that reason, he says, we

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35 To clarify: Guyau does not think of his work as debunking Kant’s theory of the categorical imperative. He refers to it as “psychologically exact and deep as the expression of a fact of consciousness” (SM, 89). But he regards it as insufficient: universalization will only get us so far; after which we must, so to speak, decide on the exception. His purpose, rather, is to examine the different forces that help us become, as it were, moral sovereigns of our life.  
36 More specifically, he does so as part of a reflection on the possibility of self-sacrifice in a context of moral dissolution. He asks: What could possible parallel a “duty to sacrifice oneself”? Given that, according to him, neither the categorical imperative nor hedonistic calculus will do, the question is, how can we “account for it”? The “love of risk” is an answer to this.  
37 Consider, for instance, the categorical imperative of acting in such a way that you could universalize the maxim of your action. Such a rule leaves out by definition, of course, any consideration about the probabilities associated with consequences of the action. It tries to situate morality in a terrain impervious to contingency. For its part, hedonist calculus either assumes with certainty that such and such pleasure or pain will follow, or at best ponders probabilities with the help of statistics, as if the “uncertainty-factor” could be appropriately subdued in that way (think here of any rational-choice theory approach to the subject). Guyau will not be satisfied by that kind of treatment.  
38 That is why, for him, what economists call “risk-indifferent” would be only an artificial designation for someone who feels either ambivalent, or someone who has not had the opportunity to be properly confronted by it. But it would be misleading if we conclude that therefore he is not “summoned” by risk; he is just pulled both ways, or maybe has not been pulled yet at all.
find clear expressions of the love of risk in professions such as the soldier, the huntsman, the traveler, the colonist, the medical doctor, and even the engineer.

That being said, he notices that victory, as the positive outcome of a risky undertaking, is merely one element among others that mark more deeply its moral meaning. At stake is not only victory, but also one’s deeds. Risk—as either danger or opportunity—implies a challenge, a call to action, which requires a disposition for adventure: “In calculating we must not take into account only good and bad chances, but also the pleasure of running these chances” (SM, 123, italics added). In other words, risk lets us become aware of our character as agents. Moreover, this awareness varies depending on the character of the opponent. We can be confronted, he explains, to other human beings in war, or to animals in hunting. We then identify ourselves as soldiers or hunters, respectively. We can also be challenged by nature or by objects, as the sailor who wrestles with the sea, the hiker with the mountain, the employee with a concrete task (and, we shall add, the writer with the blank page). Furthermore, we can resist the assault of “faceless” or impersonal enemies, like the patient who fights a mortal illness, the investor who struggles with a volatile and capricious financial world, or any “fighter in life” facing “difficulties of all sorts to be conquered” (SM, 122). Notice that in all the cases described by Guyau, risk—unlike chance—provides a much more personal epistemological compass: it defines both events and defines our identity more thoroughly.

It is undeniable that in Guyau there is something of an “ethics of danger and adventure,” potentially implying that “the more intrepid, the more excellent.” He is certainly closer to Nietzsche than Bergson ever was. Still, I do not think that a straightforward invitation to boldness constitutes Guyau’s main epistemological insight here. As I see it, the point is not that

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39 See Susan Gubar, Memoir of A Debulted Woman: Enduring Ovarian Cancer (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2012). She claims that a patient should not understand his or her situation as a struggle against illness, because if so you let yourself be defined by it.
those who are more prone to adventure feel more alive than people who are risk-averse, being therefore capable of superior action.\textsuperscript{40} Rather, his insight is that, no matter if we pursue or avoid it, risk lets us feel our life, and allows us to become aware of its value. Being tempted by risk means being challenged by it, regardless of your “revealed preferences” on that respect.\textsuperscript{41}

Guyau indicates, furthermore, that “[t]o the pleasure of risk is often added that of responsibility” (\textit{SM}, 124). For Guyau, risk is all the more thrilling when it combines adventure \textit{and} gravity. To put it in Kantian terms, risk is sublime when it involves something that commands respect. However, notice the difference between the sublimity of risk in Guyau, and the sublimity of the law in Kant. Guyau’s risk involves not only the presence of a lofty goal or principle, but also the momentousness of being, there and then, accountable for it. What matters is the weightiness of undertaking the risk necessary for the achievement of a certain goal or for the actualization of a certain principle.

Put differently, Guyau’s “love of risk” is analogous to Kantian “respect,” but with agency added. The “divinely great tension of mind and feelings” that we experience when confronted by risk is sublime only as it combines loftiness with the sense that “it depends on us.”\textsuperscript{42} Kant’s notion of respect displayed already a curious mix of activity and passivity (it is a feeling, but without the flaws of inclination); that is why it gives us a clue to how we “gain an interest” in the law, as Kant says. In Guyau however, the feeling of \textit{hope} produced in the undertaking of risks goes deeper into how we can be morally motivated. Hope—like temptation in the previous

\textsuperscript{40} As it is also not the case that those who are risk-averse, hold such preference due to a higher valuation of their lives, as a rational-choice theorist could very well argue.

\textsuperscript{41} Notice the similarities with Bergson on action and temptation, as developed in the previous chapter. Notice, as well, the parallelism in terms of the agent’s “interaction” with reality. The perception of risk in Guyau “mobilizes” us, similarly to what I described above in this chapter, under the label of Bergson’s notion of “a comradeship with reality.”

\textsuperscript{42} The exact phrase comes from a speech made by a German marshal, and quoted by Guyau, in which the former talks about the “elevated sentiment” of “knowing that the destiny of your country may depend on the orders which you give—this tension of mind and of feelings is divinely great!” (Guyau, \textit{SM}, 124).
Guyau’s examination of the “experience of risk” in the light of Bergson’s reflections on “the belief in chance” suggests several points. First, both constitute two different ways of dealing with the unexpected—the latter moderate, the former extreme; and, second, relatedly, they are both analogous to duty or obligation. Risk, however, as we have seen, indicates the way toward an always-latent distortion of the civilized mind as it relates to uncertainty. Risk has an extraordinary capacity to summon our agency in a way a simple “number indicating the odds” would not. It produces a distortion, I think, because—indpendently of whether we are risk-takers or risk-averse—risk presents an appeal that strikes us as urgent, capable of blinding us to all other concerns.

The ambiguities of risk

Guyau claims that our struggles (either with war, nature, illness, or difficulties in general) all share the character of the passionate duel: “In truth, he says, the doctor who starts for Senegal has decided upon a kind of duel with the yellow fever” (SM, 122). And indeed, the metaphor of the duel illustrates very well why the love of risk is a useful antidote for the shortcomings of the impersonal belief in chance. Since the fight will define the identity and the future of the fighters, there is no way in which the duelist could not take it as something personal. Again, risk sharpens our agency and defines our identity, and—from a certain point of view—those might be good things. However, the history of dueling presents interesting transformations that hint, in turn, at the moral ambiguities of the “love of risk.”

43 In this respect, see that even Hobbes, the fear-theorist par excellence, does not think that fear paralyzes. Thus, he distinguishes between fear and “being afraid” (see De Cive (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 45).
The passionate duel finds its ancestor in the judicial duel of the Middle Ages, which was a procedure used to settle accusations in cases where there was no other evidence available, such as witnesses or a confession of one of the parts. The parts involved would engage in a single combat, and the assumption was that God would reveal his will in the outcome. In that sense, the judicial duel was not supposed to be really a contest between two adversaries, but only the occasion for God to communicate the truth. The significance of the combat derived not from action but from knowledge; and victory did not really mean greatness, but goodness.

Whereas the judicial duel had at its center the discovery of truth, during its historical transformations in the late 19th- and early 20th-century it came to be seen not only as an instance of pernicious and uncivil violence, but mainly as something absurd: a mere display of narcissistic and megalomaniac tendencies. Conrad’s short story The duelists illustrates this folly: the contenders have repeatedly fought each other for a lifetime, but neither of them really knows anymore why they both keep doing it, nor the original basis of their enmity. The only motive that pushes them into fighting each other over and over is pure vainglory combined with imprudence.44

Exploring further Guyau’s suggestion to model our attitudes toward the struggles of life after the paradigm provided by the passionate duel, it is interesting to note that the duel—whether in its medieval or its modern version—represents, as an institution, a way of dealing with uncertainty. The judicial duel was supposed to be a medium for truth in the face of uncertainty (who is responsible for this crime?), while the passionate duel also seeks some kind of certitude in a given conflict between two adversaries (who is the best—the more courageous, the more honorable—among the opponents?). Whereas in the judicial duel it was innocence what was in doubt, the passionate duel is meant to prove the courage and honor of the rivals in

44 I thank Jaime del Palacio for bringing Conrad’s story to my attention.
question. In the former case, the combat was a medium for the revelation of a higher truth, while in the latter, it is the direct test of a mundane one.

Now, this transformation in the history of dueling suggests that the moral purchase which Guyau wants to draw from the latter might not be as unproblematic as he seems to take it is. The duelist attitude that he identifies as the paragon of moral agency might be closer to the vanity of the boastful man than to the important task of seeking truth and delivering justice. In the judicial duel, the legitimacy of the result came from (divine) knowledge, while in the passionate one, it comes from mere force, usually motivated by effrontery or, even worse, by domineering impulses.

If indeed the love of risk partakes in character with the passionate duel, then perhaps the only relation with uncertainty that this experience can offer to the modern mind dangerously oscillates between truth and absurdity, justice and force, meaning and meaninglessness. Thus, it is not clear the extent to which the love of risk can in fact be a good substitute for the moral shortcomings of the belief in chance: it might be able to make up for the frustratingly impersonal character of the latter, offering in principle an arena in which to exercise agency more assertively. But then, paradoxically, by exposing our agency in all its empowerment and all its vulnerability at the same time (that is, displaying uncertainty in all its magnitude), the feeling of risk has very often left us with a well-known dilemma—a grim one, indeed, which can be seen most clearly, I think, in the field of politics.

Whenever risk, contingency, and insecurity are given a preeminent focus in political thought—when they are turned into the main problems to be addressed—we are usually left with two options: either total insurance against risk at the cost of liberty (think of Hobbes’ Leviathan), or the absurdity of experiencing risk for the mere joy of it (the “intoxication with danger,” as
Guyau calls it, illustrated by the extolment of—or at least the compliance with—violence in different versions of nationalism, colonialism, capitalism, and terrorism, and displayed by a number of adventurers in politics, war, and finance) (SM, 122-4). I understand this dilemma as the instability of agency: it shows the difficulty of achieving a “middle ground” in our dealings with uncertainty, that neither stultifies agency by reducing it pure obedience, nor distends it through megalomania or recklessness.

**Conclusion**

As I said before, beginning with Plato, uncertainty has always informed moral and political theories in some way or another. More recently, Michael Sandel has articulated a communitarian attack against the legitimacy that speculation has acquired in contemporary economic systems.\(^45\) The claim is that speculation has corroded the values that we presumably uphold in the legal and political spheres, as distinctive of the way of life that the people living in constitutional democracies collectively endorse.

In today’s global capitalism, he explains, “people increasingly make money, not by producing goods and providing services, but by managing risk.”\(^46\) Practices that have become regular—such as purchasing death insurance for employees, for very sick or old people, or even for complete strangers—show the extent to which the world of finance feeds on the “speculation on life and death.” This is troubling because “an ethic of speculation [is] corrosive of moral and civic norms worth caring about.”\(^47\)

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\(^46\) Ibid., 335.

\(^47\) Ibid.
Others, from a more Foucauldian perspective, have explained how, in neo-liberal contexts, the power-dynamics in which subjectivities are produced in society (what is known as “governmentality”) fosters a subjugating attitude of boldness and audacity in the face of risk, under the banner of a particular work ethic and a rhetoric of self-responsibility. Thus, for instance, “discourse[s] on fiscal self-realization extolling the virtues of entrepreneurship and voluntarism as a personal ethic” really instantiate a framework of oppression, in which people are enjoined to fulfill an ideal in which risks should be fearlessly tamed, and uncertainty courageously faced.\(^48\) As a response, for example, one critic has suggested that procrastination can be endorsed as a resistance strategy, even if it represents “just one opening into the wider question of the contemporary practice of temporal counterconduct within the context of neoliberal governmentality.”\(^49\)

Rather than viewing the love of risk as a corroding practice in which speculation bets on the life and death of other people, or as a the epitome of “the production of the neoliberal subject as a self-producing subject,”\(^50\) following Bergson and Guyau, we see that, anthropologically speaking, our relation to uncertainty “naturally” displays a wide spectrum that allows for more or less assertive way of addressing it—or rather, to put it in a more Bergsonian fashion, a spectrum that allows for a more or less assertive way of letting us be addressed by it (i.a., \textit{HIT}, 53-4).

As we have seen, there are advantages and disadvantages of the different positions in such a spectrum. Guyau’s analysis of the love of risk shows that a more voluntaristic way of relating to uncertainty might have the advantage of boosting agency by giving us a more defined identity, enhancing our sense of responsibility or momentousness, and bringing forward the


\(^{49}\) Ibid., 78.

\(^{50}\) Ibid.
feeling of hope. However, Guyau’s analysis suggests that the love of risk presents a tendency towards polarization as well: just as in primitive religion superstition proliferated, gravitating towards the absurd and the monstrous, we tend to “dramatize” uncertainty, through the pressing injunction to take on challenges and risks, in the personal, professional, political spheres.

The phenomenological bridge between the belief in chance and the feeling of risk that I have traced here, shows two things. First, that the tendency to replace the former with the latter—what I have called the dramatization of uncertainty—is rooted in our anthropological condition. In other words, independently of the current capitalistic and neoliberal context, the love of risk is an ever-present human possibility—one which, moreover, has advantages and disadvantages of its own. Second, with Bergson, we explored the pedagogical purchase of the more moderate attitude toward uncertainty expressed in the belief in chance. In my interpretation, for Bergson—and in contrast to a criticism of speculation from a communitarian perspective that seeks to defend a set of shared ethical values, and to a more Foucauldian denunciation of risk-taking attitudes as a strategy of resistance within social power-structures—the virtues of such moderate attitude have to do, as we saw, with the proper cultivation of human agency.

We saw, for example, that by way of an appeal to luck, events acquire a status that “matches” our capacity to have some influence in them. This gives us the occasion of asserting our agency, but without assuming omnipotence or complete control, and therefore it represents a moderate way of relating to the uncertainty of the future. Given that luck is “a semi-voluntary

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51 Notice that “dramatize” here refers both to the tendency to exaggerate uncertainty, and to put it into a narrative form.
52 Notice that this notion of “flexibility in agency” has important resonances with Richard Vernon’s political interpretation of TS. He reads in Bergson’s opposition between the closed and the open a conflict that, “in its public form, […] requires continual boundary-crossings, which produce a mingled and hybrid political morality, and one that is inherently unstable.” Richard Vernon, “Bergson’s Two Sources Revisited.” 287. Again, I have not made any reference so far to the distinction between the closed and the open in Bergson, but (just as in the case of Lapoujade, see above, note 21), I find this observation to be very congenial to my overall interpretation of Bergson.
choice that may serve as a counterpart to [one’s] own [choice]” (TS, 146), it seems to provide, at least in principle, some check to an inflated notion of the will, becoming a potentially suitable model for our own agency.

As we have seen, Bergson rejects a fixed personal identity in favor of one capable of relying on both habit and improvisation. This kind of personality has the advantage, regarding uncertainty, of giving us resources for accepting challenges and taking risks, without expecting to be in complete control of an envisaged plan, nor putting our whole identity at stake. With its help, we would be able to accept the dictates of fortune, and deal with them both through the solidity of routine and the grace of spontaneity.

While Bergson is famous for having articulated an account of agency in which freedom is made possible through a particular relation to our past, the relevance of uncertainty for action, as we have seen here, makes it clear that our relation to the future is significant for a Bergsonian understanding of freedom as well. From that perspective, we do not approach the self from the side of memory, but rather, focus on its character as a “moving body,” capable—as Bergson says—of answering to reality “with a yes or a no,” depending on what the circumstances require (HIT, 65-7). In that sense, in contrast to the Kantian notion of the autonomous subject, as well as in contrast to a Guyauian/Nietzschean risk-lover Übermensch, Bergson offers a more modest, but also more versatile, notion of free agency in the face of uncertainty.

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53 On the importance of habit in Bergson’s thought, see Melanie White, “Habit as a Force of Life in Durkheim and Bergson.” See further, David Bissell, “Agitating the Powers of Habit: Towards a Volatile Politics of Thought.” Less attention has been paid to improvisation, though.
Chapter 4. Varieties of sympathy: Max Scheler’s critique of sentimentalism

In chapter 3, we examined Scheler’s condemnation of Kant’s universalistic notion of autonomy, and his corresponding endorsement of a personalistic and particularistic conception of what the “voice of conscience” tells each one of us in each case. Moreover, before that, in chapter 1, we saw that feelings have a fundamental place in Scheler’s ethics: the objective hierarchy of values is given to us through them. In other words, he rejects formalism in ethics, conceding instead a fundamental role to emotions, which however is not intended to refute moral objectivism. In order to understand what this combination consists in more precisely, and what is, in Scheler’s view, the nature and role of emotions in our moral and social life, I will turn now to his conception of sympathy and to his critique of the Enlightenment sentimentalism.

The topic of sympathy is particularly important for two main reasons. First, it is key to understand Scheler’s philosophical outlook, since—together with the emotion of ressentiment, which I will examine in the next chapter—it is the emotion to which he devoted more systematic and detailed analysis. Thus, it provides a privileged vantage point from which to appreciate his thought. Second, from a political theory perspective, both sympathy and emotional identification have been regarded as key phenomena. Indeed, more generally, in the past two decades political theorists have once again become intensely concerned about the overall place of emotions in political life. In reaction to what has been seen as an undue emphasis on deliberative politics,

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1 A version of this chapter is forthcoming in the Review of Politics 79, no. 3 (2017). I thank the editors of the journal for their help editing the text.

2 See among many others, Martha Nussbaum, Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Sharon R. Krause, Civil Passions: Moral Sentiment and Democratic
philosophers have sought to understand the undeniable—and salutary—role of rhetoric in the public sphere, as well as the importance of non-deliberative forms of participation in democratic politics. Furthermore, these concerns have an important counterpart in political science and sociology more broadly, as seen, for instance, in recent research on populism, mobilization, and alternative forms of representation.

As we know, contemporary political theory has often approached such themes with the help of the Enlightenment sentimentalists, such as Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith. However, Scheler offered a critique that cast serious doubt on the salutary character of sympathy as it was conceived by that tradition, on the grounds that it provided an unsatisfactory, and ultimately perverse, foundation for human association. In the context of a wider set of investigations intended to provide a phenomenological basis for ethics (NS, ii), he set out to identify what he saw as sympathy’s true character, and its legitimate place within human emotional life, distinguishing it from related but nonetheless different phenomena, which he thought eventually led to the corruption of human relationships.

Concerns about the noxious influence of sympathy have certainly not been absent in contemporary political theory either. For instance, both Arendt and Rawls questioned sympathy’s aptness as a political principle, owing to its illiberal, even violent, potential. Adam Deliberation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); and Michael L. Frazer, The Enlightenment of Sympathy: Justice and the Moral Sentiments in the Eighteenth Century and Today (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).


Smith’s account of sympathy—in my view, both the most subtle one among the sentimentalists, and the most aware of its political import—has been defended against these charges, as constituting a “distinctively liberal conception of justice.” Yet, before Arendt and Rawls, Scheler criticized Smith on different grounds. He argued that Smith’s project was ill equipped to identify and appreciate what, in his opinion, should be the proper basis of morality, namely, *moral value* (*NS*, 5). Even if, as we will see, Scheler’s objections to Smith’s “ethics of sympathy” are ultimately mistaken, he did have good political, anthropological, and pedagogical reasons to call into question the moral purchase of Smith’s project in his own time.

Smith’s proposal is a powerful and complex means to combat the vices that afflicted his own sociopolitical context, as well as to foster its required virtues. When we read Smith, we realize that the social bond, as he saw it, was mainly threatened by ambition, partiality, dissent, vanity, and faction; hence, his interest in the advancement of impartiality through self-command. The appeal to the “impartial spectator” is for those purposes an incredibly rich moral vehicle, both from a political and an anthropological point of view. However, the invitation to “identify” with the impartial spectator, to “enter into” his motives, as Smith would say, or worse

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7 Frazer, *Enlightenment of Sympathy*, 89.

8 The main discussions about faction in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* were added only to the sixth edition in 1790 (see e.g., *TMS*, 155-56, 215-16, 231-32, 242, 245). Many scholars agree that these additions were influenced by the French Revolution. Still, the problem of faction is present in Smith’s thought from early on. For instance, in a letter to Shelburne from 1759 (the year when *TMS* was first published), Smith writes: “I hear there is no faction in parliament, in which I am glad of. For tho’ a little faction now and then gives spirit to the nation the continuance of it obstructs all public business and puts it out of the power of the best Minister to do much good” (cited in Donald Winch, *Adam Smith’s Politics: An Essay in Historiographic Revision* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978], 160). Moreover, as Winch says, the problem of faction and dissent “provides the clue to Smith’s view of the colonial assemblies in America. Like the ‘troublesome jealousy’ of some small European republics, they had departed from the golden mean in becoming prey to ‘rancorous and virulent factions’” (ibid., 160). Finally, as Richard Tuck suggested to me, further evidence of the early importance of this topic in Smith’s thought is David Hume’s essays “Of Parties in General,” and “Of Parties in Great Britain,” published in 1741: Hume and Smith were close and shared many political views and opinions. Therefore, even if many of the explicit discussions of faction appear only in later editions, and are nurtured by both the American and the French Revolutions, they find a “natural home” in *TMS*. That, I think, is because the socio-psychological context was already there, which corresponds to faction as a decisive political concern in Smith’s thought.
still, to “make the impartial spectator enter into the principles of [one’s] conduct” (TMS, 191),
might not the best moral training if your concern is, as Scheler’s own was, with “emotional
contagion” and “emotional identification.” As we will see, these phenomena present a social
challenge that goes beyond the divisiveness and sedition which instead pervade Smith’s work
(NS, 43).

Finally, in light of the predicaments of what has been called “audience democracy”
(where citizens play the allegedly passive role of spectators, rather than the active one of civic
participation), and of the capacity of populist politics to realign socio-political identities
through the use of rhetoric in the public sphere, considering the up- and downsides of sympathy
and emotional identification is an indispensable task. As we will see, Scheler’s qualms about the
ethical and political promises of sympathy will prove helpful in this respect, provided that we
first make—as Martha Nussbaum suggests—a good diagnosis of the particular obstacles to

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10 The relevant sociopolitical context for Scheler’s reflections is, firstly, the rise of mass movements in Europe, and especially in Germany. In dialogue with the works of Gustav Le Bon, Gabriel Tarde, and Sigmund Freud, Scheler argues that what he calls “emotional contagion” and “emotional identification” are forms of collective interaction that emerge distinctively—even if not exclusively—in mass movements and other “psychopathic group-movements” (NS, 16). Second, his reflections on sympathy should be read against the background the so-called spirit-of-1914 narrative. According to this narrative, the outbreak of World War I was a moment of unification and collective renewal for the German nation, which remained a rich nationalistic reference throughout World War II. For many, the experiences of August 1914 constituted a “holy” and “heroic” moment, a “rebirth through war,” in which individual and collective identities were “fused and transformed,” and the soul of the German people was purified (see Jeffrey Verhey, The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth and Mobilization in Germany [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000]). In the second edition of Scheler’s book on sympathy (NS), published in 1922 (the first one appeared in 1912), he added that his observations had been confirmed by WWI. For Scheler’s changing positions regarding the spiritual meaning of the war see Zachary Davis, “The Values of War and Peace: Max Scheler’s Political Transformations,” and Hermann Lübbe, Politische Philosophie in Deutschland (Basel: B. Schwabe, 1963), 221-27, and John Nota, S.J. Max Scheler: The Man and his Work, tr. by Theodore Plantinga and John Nota (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983).


12 See bibliography cited in note 4 above.
appropriate sympathetic feelings that we face in our societies.\textsuperscript{13}

\textit{Scheler’s misreading of Smith}

Scheler’s general criticism of the “ethics of sympathy” is directed toward any system that claims to find in sympathy a proper foundation for morality. Thus, he is not arguing against the importance of sympathy, but rather against regarding it either as the criterion for distinguishing moral from non-moral action, or as the mechanism through which morality can be realized. Again, as we have seen in chapters one and two, he is interested in showing that morality cannot be grounded in either reason or feeling, but only in the adequate perception of value.

Scheler criticizes the account of sympathy offered generally by eighteenth-century British psychologists for explaining sympathy away, insofar as it traces sympathy back to the principles of pleasure or utility (\textit{NS}, 130). However, he acknowledges that Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Smith escape such a charge, since they do not take natural egoism for granted, nor conceive altruism and sympathy in terms of self-interest (\textit{NS}, 40).\textsuperscript{14} Indeed, on this score, Smith says that

it is not the view of this utility or hurtfulness which is either the first or principal source of our approbation and disapprobation. These sentiments are no doubt enhanced and enlivened by the perception of the beauty or deformity which results from this utility or hurtfulness. But still, I say, they are originally and essentially different from this perception. (\textit{TMS}, 188)

Despite this considerable advantage, Scheler thinks, Smith begs the question of morality by presupposing moral value, which is what he allegedly attempts to deduce. In Smith’s view, claims Scheler, moral judgment arises ultimately from adopting the standpoint of the ‘impartial spectator’: only “by participating, through fellow-feeling, in the [latter’s] hatred, anger,

\textsuperscript{13} Nussbaum, \textit{Upheavals of Thought}, 447.

\textsuperscript{14} This is one of the reasons why the contrast with Smith is more interesting than the one with, say, Bentham or Hume.
indignation and impulses of revenge” can we eventually judge others, and even ourselves (NS, 6). In other words, the charge is that Smith wrongly supposes that “an ethical judgment can only arise through the medium of fellow-feeling” (NS, 6). Thus, Scheler concludes, “according to Adam Smith, a man unjustly condemned and universally considered to be guilty should also acknowledge his guilt himself. Indeed (apart from errors of fact), he really would be ‘guilty’” (NS, 6).

This is clearly a gross misreading of Smith.15 For the latter, the consciousness of a real standard of propriety and merit are the necessary conditions for sympathy to arise, and not vice versa, even if they arise through sympathy. In other words, the distinction between good and evil does not depend, ontologically speaking, on the actual acknowledgment of such qualities. In Smith’s words:

The applause of the whole world will avail but little if our own conscience condemns us; and the disapprobation of all mankind is not capable of oppressing us when we are absolved by the tribunal within our own breast, and when our own mind tells us that mankind are in the wrong. (TSM, 129)

While Smith certainly emphasizes the role of other people’s gratitude in the process of learning what counts as good actions, or the role of resentment and hatred in the process of identifying bad ones, he repeatedly underscores the “reality of virtue” (TMS, 309) and the

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15 This misreading might be easily explained by the fact that, as Keith Tribe holds, discussion in Germany about TMS during the second half of the nineteenth century developed in the absence of readily available copies of the work. Two German translations of TMS had been published in the eighteenth century, but, Keith says, at the time German university libraries did not routinely purchase translations of English works. Further, no new German edition was available until Eckstein’s edition of 1926. This leads Tribe to conclude that “most of those who wrote in German about Theory of Moral Sentiments had not read the book.” (“‘Das Adam Smith Problem’ and the Origins of Modern Smith Scholarship,” History of European Ideas 34, no. 4 [December 2008], 518).

In Scheler’s private library, there is only a German translation of the Wealth of Nations (by Max Stirner, published in 1911), but no copy of TMS. Scheler’s English was not very good, so he most surely used a translation, but it is unclear which one. Most likely, it was one from a public library in Jena or Munich. However, since there are no records of their book exchange, and in Scheler’s few lecture notes there seem not to be any bibliographical notes concerning Adam Smith, it is difficult to know. I very much thank Wolfhart Henckmann for his help with this information. Scheler’s reading of Adam Smith might have been influenced by Gustav Störring’s Moralphilosophischen Streitfragen (Leipzig: Wilhelm Engelmann Verlag, 1903), which Scheler cites in the Ressentiment book. I thank Zachary Davis for pointing this out to me.
importance of the “consciousness of merit” (*TSM*, 82). He makes clear more than once that virtue is what makes the action worthy of gratitude, and vice what makes it worthy of resentment, and not the other way around. He observes, for instance, that “whatever appears to be the *proper* object of gratitude appears to *deserve* reward” (*TMS*, 67-69, italics added). That is different from saying that whatever appears to be the proper object of gratitude actually gets it. In other words, the claim is not that sympathy is the ultimate source of virtue, but only the “natural and original measure of [its] proper degree” (*TMS*, 306).

Moreover, in Smith, sympathy is an especially fine “detector of virtue,” capable of nuanced and subtle measures of it. He is very clear, for example, that “the love of praise-worthiness is by no means derived altogether from the love of praise” (*TMS*, 114), thereby sharply distinguishing love of virtue from vanity. Furthermore, in the spectrum that opens up between those two, he finds “love of true glory”—an intermediate passion, inferior to the love of virtue, but still attached to a correct and sincere reference to it (*TSM*, 309). The seeker of glory, says Smith, is able to see and cherish virtue for what it is, whereas the vain man, the one who loves only praise, either “desires praise for qualities which are not praise-worthy in any degree, or not in that degree in which he expects to be praised for them,” or “desires praise for what indeed very well deserves it, but what he perfectly knows does not belong to him” (*TMS*, 309). In sum, Smith offers a careful phenomenology of emotions, where sentimental diversity—something crucial from a Schelerian perspective, as we have seen—is very rarely neglected.16

This means, in my opinion, that sympathy in Smith actually incorporates, so to speak, something very similar to Scheler’s *Wertnehmung* or “perception of value,” a notion according to

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16 Cf. Remy Debes, “From *Einfühlung* to Empathy,” in *Sympathy: A History*, ed. Eric Schliesser (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 286-321, who also recognizes Scheler’s “wrongheaded reading” and “dismissive tone” with respect to both Smith and Hume (313), but who does not explore the extent to which Smith can actually push back against Scheler, thereby missing what I see as the real contrast between them.
which, again, feelings are some kind of in-built moral antenna through which we cognize values.¹⁷ To be sure, Smith lacks the conceptual apparatus and the terminology Scheler uses to approximate, through language, the nuances of value and feeling. However, as we saw, for Smith, sympathy is an imaginative faculty apart from reason and sensibility, with the capacity—not unlike Scheler’s feelings with respect to value—of “detecting” virtue. Virtue, in turn—not unlike Scheler’s values—has an ontologically independent status apart from pleasure or utility. For Smith, the faculty of sympathy is the one responsible for our capacity to approve and disapprove of (and not merely to be affected by) the actions, opinions, and feelings of others. Moral value resides in sympathy’s necessary relation to the consciousness of what he calls propriety and merit. All this, and no less, is meant when we say that, for Smith, sympathy is a moral sentiment insofar as it refers to what is virtuous.¹⁸

It would therefore, I think, not be completely misleading to say about Smithian sympathy what Scheler says about love and hate—namely, that it is an “act [that] plays the disclosing role in our value-comprehensions” (F, 261). Even if, again, the terminology would be completely foreign to him, Smith’s sympathy is something like an “intentional act,” which “relates originally” to moral value, just as Scheler would say about love (F, 257).¹⁹ Still, when faced with such an obvious misreading in the history of philosophy as in the case of Scheler with respect to Smith, it is important to inquire not so much what the mistake was, as why it happened. What kind of concerns made it more likely that Scheler would overlook these aspects of Smith’s work?

¹⁷ See chapter 1, pp. 41-42.

¹⁸ On the issue of Smith’s “sophisticated emotivism,” or “qualified moral objectivism,” see Charles Griswold, Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 129-30, and chap. 4.

¹⁹ To put it in more technical terms, sympathy, I think, is closer to Scheler’s Fühlen (feeling) than to his Gefühlen (feeling-states). For this distinction, see F, 253-64, and Ingrid Vendrell Ferran, Die Emotionen: Gefühle in der realistischen Phänomenologie (Berlin: Akademie, 2008), 205-10.
Before we set out to answer that question, it is important to notice that Smith avoids one further feature that Scheler condemns in his more general attack against the ethics of sympathy (one that, admittedly, he does not charge Smith with): the problem of “contagion of feeling.” According to Scheler, philosophers and psychologists tend to reduce sympathy to a phenomenon of automatic transmission of emotions, depicting it as a mere “reaction” akin to communicable diseases, leaving out all agency in the moral act of sympathizing (NS, 14-18). On the contrary, Scheler distinguishes between “true fellow-feeling,” “mere emotional infection,” and “emotional identification”—a set of distinctions which I will explore shortly.

On this point, let us recall that Smith says that sympathy “does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it” (TMS, 12). Therefore, we can safely say that he depicts sympathy not as a passive process of transmission, but as a reflective process intertwined with judgment. In Smith’s account, we cannot sympathize with the gratitude of another, unless we approve of the motives of the benefactor; and likewise, we cannot sympathize with her resentment, unless we simultaneously disapprove of the person who did the mischief (TMS, 71).

Even more, according to Smith, we are capable of feeling, through sympathy, passions of which the person sympathized with seems to be altogether incapable: “We blush for the impudence and rudeness of another, though he himself appears to have no sense of the impropriety of his own behaviour; because we cannot help feeling with what confusion we ourselves should be covered had we behaved in so absurd manner” (TSM, 12). Thus, on top of the acknowledgment of virtue as the real basis of the moral sentiments, we find no trace in Smith
of a story about “contagion,” such as would devalue the act of sympathizing.\footnote{Cf. Nussbaum, \textit{Upheavals of Thought}, 302n10, who states that Smith associates sympathy with contagion of feeling. I think this is imprecise, but probably not wrong, if by that she means (as I think she does) that Smith requires us actually to experience the feeling of the person that we sympathize with. See below, p. 161.}

However, there is another point of Scheler’s critique that does touch Smith’s theory, even if Scheler does not explicitly draw that connection. His observations on the “exercise of comparison” as an inaccurate portrayal of the experience of sympathy seem to address much more directly what I take to be the cornerstone of Smith’s theory of moral sentiments: the notion of the impartial spectator.

The impartial spectator is an artificial standpoint at which we arrive by way of comparing ourselves to others. This comparison, according to Smith, allows us to gradually get rid of all predispositions towards ourselves, achieving eventually an impartial perspective on every particular situation. Such impartiality constitutes the pillar of morality. Throughout his book, Smith presents several wordings for the mental exercise involved in it. Among others, we find that it is a comparison that “bring[s] somebody else’s case back home,” or that “transport[s] myself, at least in fancy, to a different station” (\textit{TMS}, 135), from which I can pick up the right proportion of a situation, an experience, or an event. These can all be seen as variations of the familiar idea of “placing oneself in another’s shoes.”

Scheler critiques this premise, and argues that a comparison can never be solid basis for true sympathy to arise, for the latter must be “a genuine out-reaching and entry into the other person and his individual situation, a true and authentic transcendence of one’s self” (\textit{NS}, 46). For him, the impartial onlooker is a nonstarter since “[t]rue fellow-feeling betrays itself in the very fact that it includes the existence and character of the other person as individual, as part of the object of commiseration or rejoicing” (\textit{NS}, 39, italics added). The way I would feel, or what I
would do if I underwent the same situation as another, is simply irrelevant to the kind of act that genuine sympathy should look like, for to be such it must preserve the individual uniqueness of the feelings of the other. Comparison, therefore, Scheler concludes, “must be ruled out as insufficient for an understanding of the situation” (NS, 40). This concern is rooted, in turn, in what, as we have seen, is probably the central aspect of Scheler’s metaphysical project: the preservation of absolute personal uniqueness; the affirmation of the irreducibility of the person to matter, concepts, sensations, or even reason (F, 371-74); and the corresponding identification of the values that belong to the ontological level of the individual person.

Before we assess whether this criticism really undermines Smith’s theory, I will give an overview of Scheler’s classification of the different phenomena of fellow-feeling, that is, the set of related feelings that have to do with partaking in the emotions of others. This will allow us, first, to become acquainted with Scheler’s approach to the constellation of emotional variations related to sympathy and their role in the constitution of social ties; and, second, it will prepare

21 Notice that this does not mean that we should ever draw any comparisons between us and others. That would actually be, to Scheler’s mind, morally defective. The problem is when such a comparison turns into the “epistemological basis” of the terms that it relates, transforming the way we perceive them as it puts them together. On this respect, see the following passage, which furthermore displays the Schelerian distinctions that I will get at later in this chapter: “We cannot agree with Georg Simmel, who says that the ‘noble man’ refuses to compare himself with anyone. A man who refuses any comparison is not noble, but an ‘oddity; in the Goethean sense, a ‘unique buffoon,’ or perhaps a snob. Yet Simmel has the right thing in mind. A comparison can be conceived in different ways. The two terms of a relation may be apprehended separately, prior to and independently of any comparison or other relation (such as ‘similarity’ or ‘identity’). Conversely, the perception of the terms may be the actualization of a previously apprehended but still indeterminate relation. It is a proven phenomenal fact that the relation between two terms […] can be contained in the perception of one of these alone. Thus we may be struck by the particular resemblance of one face to another which yet we cannot picture, but have to seek in our memory. The awareness of a relation here determines the conscious appearance of the second term. There is, indeed, phenomenal proof that there are pure experiences of relatedness, which select and actualize their terms only afterwards. The specific contents then come to occupy the still indeterminate places of a previously given relation. These distinctions are important here. The attitude which Simmel calls ‘nobility’ is distinguished by the fact that the comparison of values, the ‘measuring’ of my own value as against that of another person, is never the constitutive precondition for apprehending either. Moreover, the values are always apprehended in their entirety, not only in certain selected aspects. The “noble person” has completely naïve and non-reflective awareness of his own value and of his fullness of being, an obscure conviction which enriches every conscious moment of his existence, as if he were autonomously rooted in the universe. This should not be mistaken for ‘pride.’” (R, 31, italics added).

22 See bibliography on chapter 1, note 22.
the ground for identifying more precisely what, from a Schelerian perspective, is really problematic in Smith’s account.

**Varieties of sympathy**

As we have seen in previous chapters, for Scheler, moral agency depends on the diversity of feelings of which we are capable. Hence the importance of appreciating all the nuances and distinctions among them. He identifies four categories of fellow-feeling, arranged in a hierarchical structure. Their moral value varies in direct proportion to their capacity of connecting people through shared feelings and emotions, *while maintaining a clear distance between them*. In other words, for Scheler, “true sympathy”—that is, morally valuable sympathy—unites people through feeling, but prevents them from confounding themselves with each other.

First, Scheler finds what he calls *community of feeling* (*Miteinanderfühlen*), in which two or more people share the same sorrow or joy with one another. What characterizes this phenomenon is that people enjoy or suffer something *in common*, and not that they experience it *identically*. Scheler’s example is that of two parents standing beside the dead body of a beloved child. What matters here, he says, is not that the parents are afflicted by each other’s pain, or that they experience similar feelings, but that they are both originally afflicted by *the same pain* (*NS*, 13). This feeling preserves the individuality of the experience, while creating a bond between people.

Second, he identifies the experience in which we are able to perceive another’s suffering or joy, *but without partaking in it*. We visualize the feeling, but we do not feel it (he calls it *Nachgefühl*, which means “reproduced or vicarious feeling”). This is a crucial distinction for Scheler, and as we will see below, one of great political significance. His contention is that one
can see suffering more or less as one can see a tree. Suffering is one object among others, and therefore you do not need to “infer” its existence from the gestures of other people. Rather, expressions of feelings convey the experiences themselves directly. Just as I do not infer that there is a tree in front of me from the fact that I perceive its image, but actually see the tree, Scheler says that “it is in the blush that we perceive shame, in the laughter joy” (NS, 10).

The result of rejoicing with others, he says, is not that we “are joyful on their account, for this would then be simply our own joy, but that we are able to savour their joy without thereby needing to get into a joyful mood ourselves” (NS, 42). Again, just as we do not become an apple as we eat it (despite claims that “we are what we eat”), we do not need to become sad to be able to perceive sadness.

A comparison with Smith on this point is worth keeping in mind. As I said before, sympathy in Smith is not exclusively made out of feelings, but refers to a more complex phenomenon composed of reflection, judgment, and passions, whereby I can sympathize with someone even if that person herself does not feel sad or happy. Still, I do need to feel sad or happy on her behalf. Not in the case of Scheler, for whom, again, the reproduction or replication of the feeling of another is necessarily excluded in cases of “true sympathy.”

Next in Scheler’s hierarchy, we find emotional infection (Einfühlung), which is what, according to him, most theorists have in mind when they talk about sympathy. Emotional infection is the transference of emotional states, in a quite involuntary and unconscious fashion (NS, 15–16). It covers relatively innocuous cases, as when someone surrounds herself with cheerful people to be merrier for a while, as well as more serious ones, “where we are so caught up, as it were, in the other’s changing moods and interests that we no longer seem to lead a life of our own” (NS, 41–42). He finds typical examples of emotional contagion in all mass-
excitement and in the formation of public opinion (NS, 15).

For Scheler, the problem with this account of sympathy, as we saw, is the exclusion of what should be at the core of true fellow-feeling: seeing other people’s emotions as really pertaining to others. Emotional infection cancels this possibility by erasing the distance between those involved. In his view, sympathy does not require us to “bring others’ case home to our breast,” as Smith likes to say, or to look for situations where the sentiments of others “give occasion, coincide, and tally with our own” (TMS, 19). Rather, in sympathy we must acknowledge that we do not need to experience the same thing as someone else to be able to know what she is going through (NS, 10). In short, sympathy is a matter of adequate perception, and not of harmony, attunement, or coordination.

Finally, we get to what Scheler calls emotional identification (Einsfühlung). If the previous category already conveyed the idea of a pathological transference of sentiments, this one is its extrapolation. He offers a representative list of cases. Not all of them are necessarily negative, or even avoidable: some are just a normal phase of our personal development (some traits of the child’s mental life), and some others are preeminently desirable (truly loving sexual intercourse). However, the list includes the mass’s self-identification with a leader that engenders “a sense of identity among the members themselves” (NS, 19), or the further outcome of, as he puts it, “the mutual coalescence of [different people] into a single stream of instinct and feeling, whose pulse thereafter governs the behavior of all…so that ideas and schemes are driven

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23 By “pathological” I mean just passive as opposed to active; related to the senses, instead of to the spirit.

24 The examples he gives range from instances of identification in “primitive societies,” where a member of the totem believes he is the totem animal; the literal identification of a man with certain inanimate objects (for instance, stones), or with his ancestors; identification with deities in the mystery religions of antiquity; to the belief in reincarnation, the relation between a hypnotist and his subject; any instance of crowd behavior; multiple traits of the mental life of children, which are mostly exhibit in play; mental pathologies such as the so-called “divided consciousness” or more commonly now “multiple personality disorder”; truly loving sexual intercourse; and, the early bond between mother and child. (NS, 19)
wildly before it, like leaves before a storm” (NS, 25). In the second edition of Scheler’s book on sympathy, published in 1922, he remarks that “if there is any one thing within recent experience which serves to confirm these observations, it is the experience of the World War” (NS, 36).²⁵

Scheler thinks that these phenomena depend on a “region” that is intermediate between the body and the mind, or between matter and spirit (NS, 33), which, when “activated,” sets off a process where not only isolated feelings of another are unconsciously taken as one’s own (as in cases of emotional infection), but in which one’s own self is wholly identified with that of another (NS, 18). Hence, contrary to other interpretations of the experience of war and mass-mobilization as something either brutal or holy for those involved in them, for Scheler, these experiences cause “body and soul [to] go under together in a single passionate surge of collective activity” (NS, 36, italics added).

Now, it is precisely in light of the phenomenon of identification, and the corresponding “intermediate region” of the human psyche, that I wish to go back and consider again Smith’s impartial spectator. The comparison between Smith’s account of sympathy as crystallized in the standpoint of the impartial spectator, on the one hand, and Scheler’s own understanding of sympathy, on the other, shows that, at times, both authors are in outright opposition to each other in terms of their respective conceptions of the self and of moral agency. However, most interestingly, part of the distance that separates them seems to be best understood in more “strategic” terms: not so much as a substantive difference between them, but as a similar response to different moral and political problems. Such disparity in context will allow us, in turn, to single out the concerns that underpin Scheler’s criticism of Smith.

²⁵ See bibliography cited in note 9 above.
**Phenomenology of the impartial spectator and the problem of identification**

As I said before, a more proper criticism of Smith’s impartial spectator from a Schelerian perspective is that a comparison can never be a solid basis for true sympathy to arise, because the latter is supposed to be a “genuine out-reaching” or a real transcendence of one’s self (*NS*, 46). Admittedly, Smith’s choice of words as he elucidates the character of the impartial spectator might indeed sometimes suggest a deep self-centeredness. However, Smith does tackle the issue explicitly as he attempts to exonerate his construct from charges of egoism. On that score, he affirms:

When I condole with you for the loss of your only son, in order to enter into your grief I do not consider what I, a person of such a character and profession, should suffer, if I had a son, and if that son was unfortunately to die: but I consider what I should suffer if I was really you, and I not only change circumstances with you, but I change persons and characters. (*TMS*, 317)

This passage, among others, proves that it would be unfair to hold the charge of corrupting self-regard against Smith’s impartial spectator. However, still from a Schelerian perspective, it is worth looking at the opposite danger. Considering the foregoing reflections on emotional identification, the problem might not be that in Smith’s account the sympathizer loses the “phenomenological reference to the other person as such” (*NS*, 40), but rather the phenomenological reference to *her own self*:

In one of his characterizations of the impartial spectator, Smith says that as soon as someone “identifies himself with the ideal man within the breast, he soon becomes himself the impartial spectator of his own situation” (*TMS*, 148, italics added). In other words, in moral reasoning, the person *should lose sight* of himself, and adopt the persona—the motives, the passions, and the reasons—of the impartial spectator.

Now, this is not to suggest that the relation of identification that is established between, say, a hypnotist and his patient, or a charismatic despot and his subjects, is exactly the same as
that which exists between someone’s “inmate of the breast” and himself. The fact that the latter
is “merely a man in general” (TMS, 129), a “supposed” character that lives only in our
imagination with no particular connection to us or the people around us (TMS, 129–35), and
more importantly, someone that comes to existence through our own efforts of reflection aiming
at impartiality, makes the “inmate of the breast” probably not the best candidate for the kind of
phenomena that worries Scheler primarily. Freud’s theory of the superego notwithstanding, it
might be a stretch to say that both are equally instances of domination. Still, as a pedagogical
mechanism, the impartial spectator will be insufficient, and perhaps even counterproductive, to
fight the moral problem that Scheler finds most pernicious—namely, emotional identification.26

In the face of massive psychic usurpation, the answer cannot possibly be to advise people
to become the impartial spectators of their own situation, but on the contrary, to teach them how
to become moral agents. Just as ambition, faction, vainglory, and self-love are the main villains
of Smith’s story, the “almighty social authority” (NS, 6) and the “complete and total infection of
the very roots of individuality” (NS, 19) are those of Scheler’s. In this context, the appeal to
impartiality cannot do the job anymore.27 As we will see, where the most dangerous idol is not
self-love but “illusory self-knowledge,” stoicism will appear as a poor remedy, and the virtue of
self-command will not suffice. Where “identification with others” threatens the social bond more
deeply than faction, “standing alone” in moral matters will prove much more urgent to protect

Smith with a “projective” notion of sympathy, which leads her to attribute to it the potential drawbacks of “feed[ing]
atomism and detachment” (246). My analysis highlights the opposite danger.

27 Scheler interpreted the rise of fascism in Europe, and specifically among German youth, as a “reversal” of values,
in which spiritual values were subverted in favor of vital values. Such vital dimension corresponds, in turn, to the
“intermediate region” which—as we have seen—is activated, in his view, in cases of emotional contagion and
moral value (F, 319).28

Vain men consciously play a game in order to project a certain image in society, but as Scheler says, it is still they who present it: “they oscillate between this picture and an awareness of themselves as they really are” (NS, 43). On the contrary, for mental parasites—as he calls those thrown into a clinical condition by a morbidly bloated vanity—“the presence of an onlooker immediately upsets [their] natural self-possession, [their] consciousness of [themselves] being replaced by the image [of themselves] as seen by the onlooker, and as judged by the latter’s standards of preferences” (NS, 44). People affected in this way, he goes on, “will not be content, like the still normal prima donna type, to put on a stricken air so as to make others feel sorry for [them], or a gay one to cheer them up” (NS, 44); rather, in their minds “the picture comes to life,” and they really stage the desired calamity or hilarity (NS, 43).

Such a mis-en-scène, he claims, results from a “consciousness of internal emptiness and nullity,” “a vacuity which drives [a person] out of ‘himself’,” prompting him “to fill his empty belly with the experience of others” (NS, 43). Similarly to cases of hypnosis, where “the ‘seat’ of the hypnotic subject’s own intellectual activity is usurped by that of the hypnotist” (NS, 21), the mental parasite’s capacity for self-awareness is displaced by the presence of the spectator. Admittedly, Scheler is talking here about specific clinical cases of the then-called hysteria, but as mentioned before, he draws a link between individual and social afflications of this kind, and clearly finds collective manifestations of such type of identification in mass society.

Further, the maladies that Scheler diagnoses are all the more insidious insofar as, according to him, they often pass unavowed. This, he thinks, is due to the false confidence

28 Griswold has rightly denominated Smith’s pedagogical strategy as the “internalization of spectatorship.” Cf. Vivienne Brown’s suggestive interpretation, according to which we find in Smith (at least in the TMS) a much richer notion of agency than I allow here, based on a distinction between action and judgment, and how they are respectively affected (or not) by motives. See Vivienne Brown, “Agency and Discourse: Revisiting the Adam Smith Problem,” in Elgar Companion to Adam Smith, ed. Jeffrey Young (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2009), 52-72.
provided by what he calls, as we saw in chapter 1, “the idols of self-knowledge.” We tend to think that we have “first-hand knowledge” about ourselves, and know about others only in a secondary way. Scheler thinks this is wrong: taking self-knowledge for granted, we have forgotten the wisdom and the task underlying the Socratic dictum *Know thyself*. For him, we live first “in others” (*NS*, 247), and only gradually acquire a better sense of our own individuality. He worries that such “illusory self-certainty” has evolved into a legitimate human attitude, while, in reality, in his view, the roots of individuality are being depleted by the force of social authority.

Thus, while Smith’s whole arrangement is designed to save us from—as he puts it—the “delusions of self-love” (*TMS*, 159), for Scheler, a far more dangerous threat to moral development comes from our naive and arrogant, self-certainty. Given this diagnosis, the adequate corrective is not to become aware, as Smith would suggest, of the degree to which we “see ourselves through the eyes of others,” but—as we have seen in chapters one and three—to understand the individual processes in which we gain access “into our true depths” (*SPE*, 4), and in which we learn how to listen to the voice of our individual conscience.

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29 See pp. 47-48 above.

30 This is not to say that self-love is always bad, but that its corrupted or delusory version is. See Brown’s discussion of Smith’s Stoic interpretation of self-love, according to which “love for oneself” can become the basis for loving others, and thus cannot be conceived merely as an individualistic concern (Vivienne Brown, *Adam Smith’s Discourse: Canonicity, Commerce, and Conscience* [London: Routledge, 1994], 95-96). Still, my point is that, without the appropriate moral treatment, for Smith, self-love becomes the main source of moral trouble. This does not seem to be true for Scheler.

31 In a sharp interpretation, Samuel Fleischacker has argued that self-deception, and not *akrasia*, is the real problem that the impartial spectator is meant to address (“True to Ourselves? Adam Smith on Self-Deceit,” in *The Adam Smith Review*, vol. 6, ed. Fonna Forman-Barzilai [London: Routledge, 2011], 75-92). However, notice that self-deception is not the same as lack of self-knowledge. They differ crucially on what the object of knowledge is. In Fleischacker’s account, self-deceit happens when I misuse my moral resources, and talk myself into what I already know is not my ideal and my standard (88-89). So, even if, with Fleischaker, one acknowledges a cognitive problem at the root of partiality in Smith’s treatment, it would still be different from Scheler in two respects: first, self-deceit regards, for Smith, not knowledge about *myself*, but about my standard of morality. For Scheler, on the contrary, self-knowledge concerns me as a *person*, and not as a rational being capable of having standards or forming judgments (see *F*, 371–86). Second, even if the problem is put in terms of self-deceit, it is still true, I think, that, for Smith, self-love (and not illusory self-certainty) constitutes the main reason behind it.
This contrast is further illustrated by their respective interpretations of the Christian injunction to “love our neighbor.” Given Smith’s concern with the pathological swelling of self-love, he says that just as “to love our neighbour as we love ourselves is the great law of Christianity, so it is the great precept of nature to love ourselves only as we love our neighbour, or what comes to the same thing, as our neighbour is capable of loving us” (TMS, 25). See that Smith’s invitation is to take distance from our own agency in order to love in the appropriate measure. However, Scheler thinks, that is just to move away from the only place from which love (and hatred, as well) can become significant—namely, that of the agent herself. Only from the perspective of the agent, he says, can love (and hatred) “afford an evidence of their own” (NS, 150).

What evidence is that? As an emotion, love—like “true sympathy”—is, for Scheler, a way of apprehending values. That is why he says that love is “a vision of a higher value” (NS, 70) an emotional act, whose essence is a “movement of intention” by which values are “enhanced” (NS, 152-154). In other words, for Scheler, love is more just than taking interests into account. Like “true sympathy,” it requires us not to lose sight of the other person’s distinct and separate character; it entails a “whole-hearted endorsement of ‘his’ reality as an individual, and ‘his’ being what he is” (NS, 70).

For, Scheler it is a misrepresentation of the phenomenon of love to think that the love of another is a “mere quantitative ‘extension of self-love’.”32 Taking the other’s interests into account at the expense of mine, and therefore “forgetting” that I have a special relation with my own interests, is for Scheler a falsification of reality. It is delusive because it forces you to act “as

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32 Bergson’s criticism of certain interpretations of Christian love of humanity, as the gradual extension of the concentric circles of love and solidarity goes along the exact same lines as Scheler’s point here. See below chapter 5, p. 184, and note 23.
if” you were not yourself, and it invites you to treat the other “as if he were essentially identical with [your]self.” It obliterates the basic fact that there are two people and gets rid of the puzzle of finding the meaning of the relationship call “love,” by effectively annulling the relationship.33

Phenomenologically speaking, Smith’s failure to theorize the depths of human personality is perhaps most clearly revealed in the impartial spectator’s “extremely low time-discount rate,” as economists would say. On this score, Smith indicates:

The impartial spectator does not feel himself worn out by the present labour of those whose conduct he surveys; nor does he feel himself solicited by the importunate calls of their present appetites. To him their present, and what is likely to be their future situation, are very nearly the same: he sees them nearly at the same distance, and is affected by them very nearly in the same manner. (TMS, 215)

Strengthening the “man within” means overlooking time: placing the “solicitations of our present appetites” at the same level as those of the future, and, for the most part, letting go of the past (in economics parlance, it means assuming equal treatment of present and future, or what they call “zero discounting”). “Lived-time” is replaced here by time considered from afar. In fact, one of the most important differences—if not the chief one—between Smith’s early modern phenomenology of emotions, and the phenomenological approach of the late nineteenth century has to do with their respective treatments of time.34 For the latter, time constitutes one of the most important dimensions of the self; and this—at least in Scheler—has to do partly with the fact that only in time we can come to know ourselves. The “depths of our personality” can only be traversed with patience, endurance, and perseverance, all of which are virtues that would not make sense if we “flattened” time, so to speak, “pondering equally” every single moment.


34 See Christel Fricke and Dagfinn Follesdal, Intersubjectivity and Objectivity in Adam Smith and Edmund Husserl: A Collection of Essays (Frankfurt: Ontos, 2012).
So even if we grant, first, that part of Smith’s approach to time is a matter of prudence,\textsuperscript{35} and second, that it does not go as far as the Epicurean solution of annulling time in order to cancel both pain and pleasure (\textit{TMS}, 295), it is inescapable that Smith finds certain “pedagogical purchase” in time, which consists precisely in that we can learn how to neglect it. The impartial spectator must treat time, not as the proper and only dimension in which individuality can exist—as a more Schelerian approach would have it—but as that “great and universal comforter, [which] gradually composes the weak man to the same degree of tranquillity which a regard to his own dignity and manhood teaches the wise man to assume in the beginning” (\textit{TMS}, 151).

As this quotation shows, for Smith, the stakes of “zero discounting” are high: “suppressing” time is an exercise in dignity. Pedagogically speaking, the engagement with “lived experience” loses prominence in favor of the insight that “in all the irreparable calamities which affect himself immediately and directly, a wise man endeavours, from the beginning, to anticipate and to enjoy before-hand, that tranquillity which he foresees the course of a few months, or a few years, will certainly restore to him in the end” (\textit{TMS}, 151, italics added). Wisdom is thus acquired through tranquility and self-command.

Moreover, the absolute centrality of self-command in Smith’s scheme of virtues is a further characteristic that runs counter to the notion of individuality, conceived from a Schelerian standpoint. This is not to say that the life of the libertine is commendable for, or compatible with, a proper exercise of Schelerian individuality; but rather, that curbing certain impulses and passions will be pursued through other means, and not by cultivating self-control.

According to Smith, “self-command is not only itself a great virtue, but from it all the

\textsuperscript{35} It could be argued that, in Smith, a long-term approach is given priority mainly for the sake of prudence, but without, for that reason, allowing it to have the last say in all kinds of situations. However, I do not think this rejoinder is valid, since Smith gives a consistent treatment of time—one that favors a long-term approach—not only in the context of prudence, but also of duty and of utility. See, for example, \textit{TMS}, 190. I thank Charles Griswold for helping me to clarify this point.
other virtues seem to derive their principal lustre” (*TMS*, 241). Only through it can our sentiments and feelings be “in *exact proportion* to the vivacity and force with which we enter into and conceive of [the other’s] sentiments and feelings” (*TMS*, 152, italics added). In other words, the propriety and merit of our sentiments and passions depend to a large extent on self-command, as it allows us to harmonize with other people’s feelings.

Indeed harmony is the key metaphor to understand both the problems that Smith addresses, and the kind of solutions that he is able to offer. Its lack is Smith’s central sociopolitical diagnosis, and thus sympathy is that exercise of “prodigious effort” in which we “get attuned,” through self-command, to the other people’s feelings, until we arrive at the position of the impartial spectator. Reaching the latter’s pitch, so to speak, involves a formative process where—as Smith says—the person “must flatten, if I may be allowed to say so, the sharpness of [the passions’] natural tone, in order to reduce [them] to harmony and concord with the emotions of those who are about him” (*TMS*, 22).

Compare this to Scheler’s strategy. Like Smith, he thinks that the development of moral character depends on an appropriate “sentimental education,” but for him the latter is achieved not through self-control, but rather through adequate perception. Scheler’s conception of a proper moral training pursues not a modulated sensibility—as Smith recommends—but simply an *accurate* one. Morality is not about feeling less or more, but about being able to perceive, as we have said, all the nuances and gradations of value, by means of nuances and gradations of feeling. The expectation is that the “equilibrium” obtained from self-command in the former scheme will be already, so to speak, “built into the system” through a refined perception.\(^{36}\)

\(^{36}\) Cf. Leonidas Montes’ very interesting interpretation, according to which the virtue of self-command in Smith should not be traced to the Stoic tradition of *apatheia*, but to the Socratic doctrine of *enkrateia*. The latter refers to an enabling and empowering notion of inner power and rule over oneself, rather than to self-control, suppression and
To stick to the acoustic metaphors, Scheler’s conception of moral education requires us to “sharpen our ears” instead, making them more precise, in order to be able to listen to all the nuances of our emotional life. The ideal is not harmony, but something like perfect pitch. The primary virtue is not self-command, but, as he says, the ability to “stand alone” in moral matters, independent of other people, and even sometimes of universal norms (F, 318-27). Now, what can be the political advantages of conceiving sympathy that way?

As I said before, one of the alleged pitfalls of grounding political and social ties on sympathy, as Smith envisages, is that it carries along highly exigent demands of probity and incorruptibility, which can eventually end up in political oppression. Given the difficulty of enforcing the commitment to the principles of sympathy (how can it be proved that someone is, or is not, experiencing sympathy or compassion towards others?), any politics of sympathy is said to be potentially illiberal and violent—think of the connections to the Reign of Terror (Arendt’s example), or to the fight against terrorism, and its appeal to unity and loyalty against a common enemy.37

Scheler’s rejoinder, as we have seen, is that the collective bond should not depend on the restraint (“Adam Smith as an Eclectic Stoic,” in Adam Smith Review, vol. 4, ed. Vivienne Brown [Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2008], 30-56).

On the other hand, notice that Scheler’s main objection against self-control, seems to be its perversion in the cultural and socio-economic context of capitalism. On this respect, he says: “Originally, ‘self-control’ meant primarily the sovereignty of the spiritual person over the chaos of sensuous impulses, the knightly will to dominate one’s ‘appetites,’ the proud feeling—ruled by humility before and ‘in’ God—that one is strong enough to tame them, regardless of whether the consequences are good or bad from the point of view of personal utility. But now self-control becomes a mere means to run one’s business successfully with the aid of ‘soberness,’ ‘solidity,’ and ‘moderation’—if possible to the point of prevailing over one’s competitor. When there is no such goal, self-control is not considered as a positive value.” (R, 112). Notice in this passage, how—in accordance with the argument I have tried to advance in this chapter—the meaning, and therefore the assessment that we make of certain virtues can change profoundly depending on the context where it is exercised.

37 Cf. Frazer’s defense of Smith on this point, which consists, as I said, in showing that his version of sentimentalism “fully appreciates the distinctions among individuals in a way Hume’s public-interest-based theory fails to do” (Enlightenment of Sympathy, 90).
actual transmission of feelings, nor its integrity be protected by trying to prove or disprove the presence of such feelings. On the contrary, he thinks, striving to reproduce what other people feel will just end up in pretense and simulation, without providing a true path to sociability.

Another drawback associated with sympathy as a political principle is Rawls’ claim that the impartial spectator definition of justice cannot, on its own, avoid what, in his view, constitutes classical utilitarianism’s main drawback—namely, failing to take seriously the distinction between persons.\(^{38}\) In his view, while the impartial and sympathetic spectator does not necessarily lead to the collapse of individuality, given that it does not spring from a commitment to the distinction between persons, it will not be a proper guarantee against such a collapse either. Similarly, as we saw, from a Schelerian perspective, the impartial spectator is not a good guard against the phenomenon of excessive identification that undermines individuality. Moreover, in Scheler’s context—where the political developments jeopardized people’s capacity to remain conscious of their own person—the invitation to “apprehend our common humanity” through sympathy even pushes in the opposite way: focusing on what is common, it prescribes, so to speak, a fever-reducer to someone with hypothermia.

Rawls proposes that if we were to prevent the impartial observer from impairing individuality, a viable option would be to let him “be guided by the principles someone would choose if he knew that he is to split, so to speak, into the many members of society.” That is, instead of aiming at a common denominator, “he is to imagine that he is to divide into a plurality of persons whose life and experiences will be distinct in the usual way.”\(^{39}\) Thus, in Rawls’ view, an adequate corrective to the impartial spectator would take us precisely in the direction of a full

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\(^{39}\) Ibid., 166. Rawls takes the idea from Thomas Nagel.
recognition of diversity: since the construct proposes only one spectator, this “single individual is literally to become many persons.”

Interestingly, Rawls advances somehow in the Schelerian direction of “inner diversity.”

However, as we know, Rawls’ theory of justice does not follow such a “corrective,” and instead develops the construct of the original position, in which, on the contrary, individual experiences and memories are deemed morally irrelevant. Many have argued, from different fronts, that Rawls is insufficiently attentive to individuality and to diversity. I do not pretend to review or assess those arguments here. Instead, I will only indicate the reason why, from a Schelerian perspective, the original position looks indeed like a “depersonalizing device.” It concerns the fundamental cognitive and ethical role that emotions play in Scheler’s ethical theory.

As we saw, for Scheler, we can access moral value only through seeing others in all their particularity through our emotions as “organs of cognition.” The original position, therefore—with its injunction to anonymity, where people’s faces lie behind a veil of ignorance—does not seem an attractive starting point. Moreover, Scheler would have rejected the claim that benevolence and sympathy (understood in his own sense) lead only to confusion once the claims of people conflict with each other, as Rawls thinks. In Rawls’ (Kantian) view, “benevolence is at sea as long as its many loves are in opposition in the persons of its many objects.” For Scheler, on the contrary, the lack of determinacy and universal rules does not condemn us to be amiss in

40 Ibid.


42 Rawls, A Theory of Justice, 166.
One further objection to Smithian sympathy concerns its high emotional prescriptions (that is, the requirement that people actually feel what others do, and that they then moderate their sentiments up to the point of “perfect equilibrium”), which can eventually lead us into the way of anxiety, guilt, and hypocrisy. Being emotionally taxing, the argument goes, Smithian sympathy is morally implausible and even politically dangerous. In light of this, I want to briefly suggest that Scheler’s view of sympathy, unlike Smith’s, might offer a plausible account of the way in which certain people—say, those with the strenuous job of administering justice in a trial court of a malfunctioning and unfair criminal justice system—can “become vulnerable to the upset of another,” without therefore losing what it takes to carry out their commission.

The best example I have of this is a judge of such kind, whom I once had the chance to interview. Unlike many of her peers, she showed a great command of the personal and technical details of the cases. She seemed to know a good deal about the stories not only of the defendants themselves, but—quite impressively—of their nuclear and extended families as well. It was clear to me that she was personally acquainted with all these people, and totally capable of what Nussbaum calls “eudaimonistic judgment.”

However, at the same time, she struck me as being especially “insensitive” and

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43 For Scheler on the particularity of moral judgement, see F, 203-232, and below pp. 176.


45 Nussbaum, Upheavals of Thought, 325.

46 I did so as a recent college graduate, for a project sponsored by the Freie Universität Berlin to investigate the administration of criminal justice in Mexico City. I conducted twenty-seven in-depth interviews with trial court judges, who specialized in criminal cases.

47 Which means seeing someone as an “end whose good is to be promoted.” (Nussbaum, Upheavals of Thought, 321).
“pragmatic,” compared to other judges I met with. I do not mean to say that she was uninvolved, uninterested, or unresponsive, quite the opposite: as I said, she knew the cases very well, and she was lively and energetic—clearly the highly-effective, sturdy, and resolute type at work. But at the same time, you could tell that it was other people, and not her, who were going through the ordeal of facing a highly inefficient, bureaucratic, punitive, and discriminatory criminal justice system, even if she could portray it very well. She managed somehow to remain “unaffected by,” but was still “receptive to” the cases she tried. I left her office feeling encouraged, rather than depressed; and I remember thinking back then that without such a moral disposition, it would have been impossible to carry out a job such as hers—emotionally taxing, indeed, especially if one is capable, as she was, of taking others as ends in themselves—in the effective way it seemed she did.

**A Smithian alternative to identification?**

I have argued so far that the injunction to identify oneself with the impartial spectator will do poorly against the social maladies with which Scheler is concerned. However, “identification” is admittedly not the only metaphor that Smith offers for the relation between myself and the impartial spectator. There are other ways in which Smith depicts it. At some point he clarifies that the “inmate of the breast” is not actually the impartial spectator as such—it cannot be, since the latter is “supposed” or “imaginary,” while the former is certainly more real—but rather his representative. *Representation* is, however, an ambiguous term. Hence we can ask: what kind of representative is the “man within”? What kind of message does he transmit from that “great judge and arbiter of our conduct”? Smith is clear:

> It is he who whenever we are about to act so as to affect the happiness of others, calls to us, with voice capable of astonishing the most presumptuous of our passions, that we are but one of the multitude, in no respect better than any other in it. (TMS, 137)
In this striking passage, we find then that the alternative to full identification is not the preservation of individuality properly, but an immediate lapse into the Hobbesian injunction that we are “just one more” within the multitude. The voice of conscience reminds us of “the real littleness of ourselves,” and frees us from “the natural misrepresentations of self-love” (TMS, 137). Nothing could be more different from what Scheler’s “voice of conscience” has to say. As we saw in chapter 2, according to Scheler, “the more clearly the voice of conscience speaks, the more it must tell each person something different for the same situation” (F, 324). For Smith, conscience speaks through, among other things, our capacity to arrive at general rules (TMS, 159–70). For Scheler, on the contrary, conscience, properly understood, is “a cognitive organ insofar as it is the objective good for an individual” (F, 325). Conscience, in this legitimate sense, he says, protects the moral individual qua individual from “false claims of merely universal moral laws” (F, 325, italics added).

So even if it can be rightly argued that Smith’s recourse to spectatorship succeeds in preserving the distance between people, thus jettisoning complete identification, it is also true that his approach curtails individuality insofar as it is not positively interested in uniqueness.

48 Interestingly, the voice of conscience in Smith has been interpreted (and with reference to the exact same passage in TMS) along Kantian lines instead. See Samuel Fleischacker, “Adam Smith and Cultural Relativism,” Erasmus Journal for Philosophy and Economics 4, no. 2 (2011): 33.

49 To be clear, in Smith, general rules are not the only, or the main, moral resource available. For a good discussion of the role of general rules, see Fleischacker, “True to Ourselves?,” 84–88).

50 As I said in chapter 2 (p. 115), his conception could convey the idea that the good is self-evident, welcoming thus religious and political intolerance. However, as clarified before, I think that is a misinterpretation. Just as someone with a “trained ear” can actually find more things in a melody than those who are not familiar with music, conscience is an “organ” that needs training, to be able to deliver its message with all its subtlety. This same idea is echoed in Scheler’s sociology of knowledge, which will remain out of the scope of this dissertation. According to Scheler, there are three types of knowledge: metaphysical, religious, and positive. In his view, metaphysical knowledge is “an absolute yet thoroughly individually valid form of knowledge.” (Cited in Barber, Guardian of Dialogue, 22).

51 See both Griswold, Adam Smith and the Virtues of the Enlightenment, 88-91, who argues that Smith’s theatrical scheme preserves the distance between myself and the impartial spectator standpoint; and Brown, Adam Smith’s
Smith’s emphasis on the social construction of the self, and—to put it in a somewhat postmodern fashion—on how we come to exist only through the eyes of others, does undermine a concern for uniqueness and authenticity, thereby threatening individuality. After all, as it has been aptly put, in Smith we realize that “we do not have a moral self outside of human community.”

Scheler pushes us in just the opposite direction. In an admittedly obscure remark, Scheler observes that the core of individuality remains, even if we abstract from all physical and psychical differences. He argues that having got rid of the particularity of bodies, “including their here-and-nowness,” and of the particularities of “mental and spiritual content,” including specific thoughts, feelings, volitions, virtues, vices, and so on, “the individual diversity of their central personalities would still remain, despite the fact that the idea of personality would be the same in each of them” (NS, 34).

Conclusion

The examination I have offered in this chapter shows important contrasts between Smith’s and Scheler’s respective conceptions of moral agency. In each case, the moral import of time, the voice of conscience, and the conception of the moral self reflect very different views. From these, we can conclude that Smith’s and Scheler’s respective moral phenomenologies correspond to incommensurable understandings of moral experience. Consequently, we see different assessments of spectatorship and its role in the formation of moral character. For Smith, the spectator brings the moral sanction of publicity and reciprocity into our actions, whereas for

Discourse, chap. 3, where she argues that, hermeneutically, TMS “displays a radical doubt concerning the viability of the spectator mechanism,” precisely on account of the impossibility of achieving complete identification with the “man within” (251–56). Brown also argues that there is textual evidence that Smith himself was skeptical of the desirability of such a complete identification (255). Still, a concern about individuality is certainly absent from the picture.

52 Griswold, Adam Smith and the Virtues of the Enlightenment, 105.
Scheler, it taints them with the curse of inauthenticity and cowardice.

However, we saw as well that the differences between them are the result not only of their contrasting conceptions of the self, but of the different social threats that each one of them had to address: faction in Smith, emotional identification in Scheler. Thus, Smith encourages us to have the strength to overcome partiality by stepping out of ourselves, and taking distance from our own interests, while Scheler’s injunction is to have the courage to “stand alone” in moral matters, or to be able to respond for ourselves as individuals, even if we are alone in the world. Smith’s catchword is harmony, while Scheler exhorts us to stand on our feet, even if we cannot count on the solid ground of universalizability.

Morality, for Smith, can still safely trace the greatest human fears and desires—the desire to be beloved, and the fear of being alone. In other words, in trying to fulfill our desires and avoid our fears, we can pursue a moral life. For Scheler, those cannot provide a safe path anymore, since sociability has become importantly threatened as well by our tendency to “enter into” other people’s position to the point of collective fusion, where we no longer recognize our individual features.

While Smith does acknowledge that the applause of the whole world cannot guarantee the impartiality that only “inmate of the breast” can offer, he still relies on gratitude and condemnation as appropriate tools for our sentimental education. Scheler, on the other hand, appeals to other resources. Failing other people’s approbation and disapprobation as suitable guides in our moral education, the “external reference” to harmony must be lost and replaced by another framework. Such a task is largely to be met, in Scheler’s scheme, by the emotional hierarchy constitutive of the inner self, which—through its gradations of feelings and corresponding values—is supposed to provide us with a sharp and reliable moral compass.
For Scheler, the experience of sympathy becomes not only a bulwark against selfishness and ambition (as in Smith), but it also fosters an adequate awareness of one’s own individuality. Actually, it is expected to do both things simultaneously, and allegedly at a “deeper” level. On the one hand, since true sympathy is not based on a comparison and therefore avoids reasoning by analogy, it helps to dissipate what Scheler calls the “illusion of egocentricity,” that is, “the illusion of taking one’s own environment to be the world itself” (NS, 58).

On the other hand, and by the same token, “true sympathy” counters the opposite threat—namely, that of losing ourselves in emotional identification with others. By keeping a radical separation between people, and eliminating the requirement of reproducing the feeling that is being sympathized with, Schelerian sympathy is meant to address the danger posed to individuality by collective frenzy and the weight of public opinion—concerns that became especially pressing after the Great War. In addition to that, I have suggested that in especially strenuous circumstances—which are, however, by no means exceptional, like those of the judge I interviewed—Scheler’s approach might provide an accurate account of the moral disposition of some people, whose moral resourcefulness should serve as a model for civil servants and citizens alike.
Chapter 5. Personal Authority: political theology and philosophical anthropology in Bergson and Scheler

In the previous chapters I explored Bergson’s and Scheler’s respective notions of the person, which, as it became clear, are characterized by a “thick,” but not “solid,” picture of the self. This picture is “thick” as they both acknowledge the inner diversity that characterizes true individuality, but not “solid” because they consider this multiplicity to be in some sense ineffable, based on their emphasis on movement and action, respectively. For them, human action, because of its very nature, cannot be captured by fixed concepts, and therefore personality is “beyond words.” Correspondingly, the different ways in which both authors conceive freedom avoids universalizing rules or principles.

The question that I want to address in this last chapter is, what can authority be, in light of the personalist anthropology they both offer? How can authority claims be laid on someone whose character is unfixed and always unique, on a self whose “innermost essence” is ineffable? Can such a being be bound to authority and be at the same time free? As we will see, there is in both Scheler and Bergson a model of authority that is based on the notion of exemplarity. This refers to the kind of authority that resides in a person, whose example seems to have some moral claim on other people. Within their philosophical approaches, the significance of exemplary authority lies, first, in the centrality of the person, or of the “inner self” (as Bergson usually refers to it), as the fundamental category both in ethics, and in philosophy more generally; and, second, in their conception of personal freedom based on action. More specifically, exemplarity seems to have a special claim on persons in the Bergsonian or Schelerian sense, because it alone provides the kind of insights that can properly guide action or orient behavior, without therefore compromising the character as “acting persons” of those who are subject to them.
In both cases, the importance of exemplarity grows out of their criticisms of ethical rationalism: as we saw before, for Scheler and Bergson, a formalistic approach cannot preserve what is unique in the self; therefore, authority based on reason—what is generally known today as “epistemic authority,” à la Raz\(^1\)—will not suffice to engage the person as such, and cannot be an appropriate ground for freedom. Their emphasis on the uniqueness of the person, however, should not be understood either—to take up a comparison that I presented in the introduction—in the sense of Taylorian *authenticity*, according to which freedom is based on *originality*.

On the contrary, as we will see in this chapter, they advance, albeit in different ways, an ethics of *imitation* or *emulation*, which is allegedly superior to the injunction to “find the design of [one]self, against the demands of external conformity,”\(^2\) in preserving personal uniqueness. Behind such an ethics rests the politico-philosophical idea that when we follow an example through emulation or imitation, its authority can be, not only consistent with freedom, but even *contribute* to it, and to the development of our individual personality.

Bergson and Scheler’s contemporary Max Weber, famously developed a conception of authority, which, like theirs, puts personal figures at the forefront. In contrast to “bureaucratic” and “traditional” authority, Weber’s so-called “charismatic” authority is not based on either rational commands or time-honored and customary practices, but relies instead on the gift and qualities of individual personalities. However, while Weber did not consider any set of personal characteristics to account for the appeal exercised by charismatic figures—apart, of course, from their capacity to subvert norms and create new ones, that is, always *in relation* to the socio-political structure that surrounds them—Bergson and Scheler, as I have indicated, were

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particularly interested in normatively rooting this kind of authority in their philosophical anthropology, that is, in their respective conceptions of personality. I will take up Weber’s notion of charismatic authority as I examine their notions of exemplarity, since it provides a clear and illuminating point of contrast.

It is important to keep in mind that Weber’s charisma, on the one hand, and Bergson and Scheler’s exemplarity on the other, refer to a source of authority that is both broader and narrower than the political sphere. It lies on the field of what Richard Flathman has called “the authoritative,” which refers to the set of values and beliefs that form the background and bedrock of the legitimacy of anyone that enjoys merely procedural authority (that is, authority that results from a previously agreed upon procedure, so most political authorities in liberal democracies can be counted in there). These values and beliefs—and this is why “the authoritative” is broader than the political sphere—can subsist even in cases when in the role of authority is altogether repudiated. However, it is also narrower in that it might not necessarily override political authority understood in this procedural sense. In sum, both exemplarity and charisma are paradigms of authority whose anthropological relevance consists in showing certain ways in which human beings model their thoughts, their beliefs, and their behavior—in and out of the political sphere.

3 Think of the case of the Fox Indians, where no one was allowed to be in a relation of authority to anybody else, but where nonetheless, says Flathman, authoritative beliefs supporting precisely the idea of complete independence and individual autonomy formed the evaluative background of such practice. See Richard Flathman, The Practice of Political Authority: Authority and the Authoritative (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 25-26, 159-167.

Flathman distinguishes further between in and an authority. Someone in authority, derives his or her legitimacy from a formal procedure according to which he or she assumes a role of authority. An authority, on the contrary, is supposed to enjoy legitimacy independently of any formal or procedural criterion, based instead on some kind of more substantive qualification—typically, the possession of certain knowledge, experience, or talent. That is why it is usually referred to as epistemic authority.

4 It might, though, in some cases. Think of the authoritative as the potential ground for civil disobedience or even rebellion. However, I won’t touch upon this topic in this chapter.
In order to examine Bergson and Scheler’s conceptions of exemplarity, I shall turn to Bergson and Scheler’s their religious, and even theological views, as well as to their perspectives on the relation between modern democracy and Christianity. Such a step could seem perhaps surprising. However, as Patrick Riley liked to say, theology is political theory raised to a higher power. This is true for Bergson and Scheler, since their reflections on religion, and Christianity in particular, bring their philosophical insights together with questions of power, obedience, equality, and freedom. Those reflections will also provide an adequate framework for their discussions about exemplarity, insofar as they will help us to examine the values and beliefs that constitute the authoritative dimension in it.

In some sense, Bergson and Scheler have opposing views on the relation between modern democracy and Christianity. Bergson thought that Christianity was the source of the spiritual insight at the core of the modern “religion of humanity.” On the contrary, Scheler thought that Christian love and solidarity were diametrically opposed—and definitely superior—to what he calls “modern humanitarianism.” Moreover, he saw the latter as a product of bourgeois ressentiment. However, as we will see, these contrasting conclusions spring, in each case, from a set of ontological, epistemological, psychological, and moral commitments—all of them part of their personalist philosophy—which, as we have seen in the previous four chapters, coincide to a fair extent. Furthermore, interestingly, the contrast in their respective assessments on this point results as well from a shared repudiation of industrialism and modern capitalistic society.\footnote{For reasons of space and time, this last point will need to remain undeveloped in this chapter. However, it is an important element of the picture of the moral type (personality) that corresponds to their view of exemplary authority. In Appendix A, I include some pages on Bergson’s criticism of capitalistic luxury, indicating how they tie up with his reflections on exemplarity. In the book that will hopefully result from this dissertation, I will develop those thoughts into either an extended appendix, or probably a sixth final chapter.}

What explains the difference in Bergson and Scheler’s respective assessments of the relation between Christianity and democracy? Given the relevant similarities between the two
thinkers—both with respect to their conceptions of the person, and the models of authority that are found in their texts—such a difference has its roots, as we will see, in their respective views on sociability and equality. Bergson assumes an important degree of human sociability in modern democracies, while Scheler has a more Hobbesian picture of the human interaction that goes on in them. Furthermore, in the case of Bergson, Christianity, and the exemplarity model that is found in it—is compatible with the value of moral equality, while for Scheler, it is not. In light of this, it is not surprising that Bergson saw modern democracy in a positive light, while Scheler disparaged it as a perversion of the values of love and solidarity. Towards the end of the chapter, I will examine their ideas about equality through their contrasting assessments of the place of Jesus Christ as an exemplary figure within Christianity.

**Mysticism and modern democracy in Bergson**

In *The Two Sources*, Bergson claims that true cosmopolitanism requires a “qualitative leap” from the “closed-” to the “open society.” Arguing mainly against Durkheim—according to whom, cosmopolitan sociability is the result of the progressive widening of initially narrow social circles—Bergson contends that the embrace of humanity as a whole is not “continuous” with group-solidarity. For him, the “religion of humanity” (another name for what Bergson calls “open morality”) is a commitment to equality that does not issue from “logically extending” our particularistic moral relations—the tribe, the family, the community, or the nation-state—but rather, is an insight made possible *only* by the moral creativity of some visionary figures. Such moral creativity rests, not on reason, but on intuition.⁶

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⁶ Durkheim’s rational version of cosmopolitanism can be understood as a result of his “socialization” of Kantianism (See Steven Lukes, *Émile Durkheim. His life and work: a historical and critical study* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1973) chaps. 2 and 22). Bergson’s ideas that morality and freedom are not dependent on the universalization of maxims, nor on the logical deduction of categorical imperatives, explains Bergson’s reaction against it. However, Bergson’s position derives not only from his metaphysical views about moral obligation, but
Who are these visionary figures, on whom Bergson relies as the only possible historical source of the concern for humanity as a whole? Paradoxically, he turns to mysticism—an allegedly very personal and intimate phenomenon—to find the root of true cosmopolitanism. The “great mystic,” in Bergson’s depiction, combines what is most individual or particular with what is most collective or universal: “the task of the great mystic is to effect a radical transformation of humanity by setting an example” (TS, 239, italics added).

Before we can begin to assess the meaning of such affirmation, let’s clarify what he understands to be the highest or most complete sort of mysticism. Briefly reviewing the mysticism of Antiquity, as well as its Hindu variants, he concludes that in the “absolute sense” that he wants to give to the word, mysticism did not exist in antiquity. “Complete mysticism,” Bergson says, must be found, instead, in “the great Christian mystics,” since they offer a unique combination of three different things. First, according to him, they make manifest the “creative vocation” of human beings, through their conception of God as creator. Beyond any further piece of religious dogma, this is what really interests Bergson in Christian theology. He sees religion as the mere crystallization of what is alive and moving in the mystic soul. In his view, religion is to mysticism what popularization is to science, and therefore the mystic’s mission is not to transmit any dogmatic belief, but just to be an intensifier of...
religious faith.

Second, unlike philosophy, which posits “a motionless Mover, a Thought thinking itself, self-enclosed, operative only by the appeal to its perfection” (TS, 242). Christianity “regards God as a Being who can hold communication with us” (TS, 241). God is not to be contemplated, but interacted with. However, most importantly, such interaction or communication can never be the source of clear and positive directives regarding world affairs. In his view, God is not a “closed concept,” and his messages cannot be well-defined, “such as might enable us to conclude what the world is like or what it should be like” (TS, 262).

Third, even though he acknowledges that the mystical approach “is more metaphysical than moral” (TS, 234), for Bergson, mysticism is never mere contemplation. Considering figures like Saint Paul, Saint Theresa of Ávila, Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Saint Francis, George Fox, and Joan of Arc, he asserts that Christian mysticism is essentially active: “What it wants to do, with God’s help, is to complete the creation of the human species…” (TS, 234). Drawing on direct sources (that is, testimonies of the mystics themselves), as well as on what he takes to be reliable systematic studies on the topic, he observes that their way of life is

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8 He acknowledges, though, that this feature is not exclusive of the Christian religion, nor is it present in all its variants.

9 All of these figures are characterized by their political activity and social role, as missionaries (Saint Paul, c.5–c.67), founders of monasteries or religious orders (Saint Francis, 1181/1182–1226, founder of numerous orders, both of friars and nuns; Saint Catherine of Siena, 1347-1380, widely involved in politics and founder a women’s monastery; Saint Ignatius of Loyola, 1491-1556, founder of the Society of Jesus, i.e. Jesuits; Saint Theresa of Ávila, 1515-1582, reformer in the Carmelite Order; George Fox 1624–1691, founder of the Religious Society of Friends, i.e., Quakers), or, finally, military advisers (Joan of Arc, 1412–1431).

never aloof from worldly demands and concerns (TS, 240).

Together, these three points—the essence of human beings as creatures that can create in turn; the personal and ambiguous character of the divine message; and the bent towards action informed by a claim for justice—are, for Bergson, the unique core of Christian mysticism. Now, as I said, he affirms that true cosmopolitanism, the “religion of humanity,” was first made available in history only through the exemplary lives of the Christian mystics. That seems to be partly a historical, partly a metaphysical assertion; but Bergson is not very clear on this respect. Without necessarily assessing the value of the argument in terms of intellectual history, let us briefly explore the connections that Bergson draws between mysticism, humanity, and democracy, to understand what he is precisely looking for in mysticism.

Whatever the answer to Kant’s question “What is humanity?,” Bergson thinks that the best way to transmit it among human beings is by the example of some privileged individuals who lead a mystic life. For Bergson, one of the strengths of the “force of exemplarity” is the protection it offers against the corruption of the moral insights via institutional or bureaucratic channels. A master plan of social and political reform aimed at the realization of humanity is, for him, a self-defeating method (TS, 235). On the contrary, he welcomes “the superabundant energy

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12 For a historical argument defending the Christian pedigree of democratic ideas, especially that of human rights, see Samuel Moyn, Christian Human Rights.
spent [by the great mystics] in founding convents or religious orders,” as the only appropriate way of furthering the “mystic impetus.” The latter can be preserved only through “to a tiny handful of privileged souls which together would form a spiritual society” (TS, 326), and by the eventual multiplication of societies of this kind, “until such time as a profound change in the material conditions imposed on humanity by nature should permit, in spiritual matters, of a radical transformation” (TS, 236).

Still, even if Bergson does not see any systematic project of social and political reform as the adequate translation of the mystic insight on humanity, he does think that modern democracy finds its decisive element in it—the one that glues the rest of the normative pieces of modern democracy firmly together. The democratic ideal, composed only by the values of liberty and equality, establishes merely a direction, he says, but never “an arriving place.” Hence democracy’s original “negative” or “contestatory” character: in his view, “it was more than anything else as a protest that [democracy] was introduced into the world. Every sentence of the Declaration of the Rights of Man is a challenge to some abuse. The main thing was to put an end to intolerable suffering” (TS, 244). Democracy’s values, he thinks, are adequate to “prevent, reject, and overthrow,” but not to yield any “positive indication of what is to be done” (TS, 283). However, that is not a bad thing. “How is it possible—Bergson inquires rhetorically—to ask for a precise definition of liberty and equality when the future must lie open to all sorts of progress, and especially to the creation of new conditions under which it will be possible to have forms of liberty and equality which are impossible of realization, perhaps of conception, today?” (TS, 282). Because democracy is indeterminate, it is liable to constant “re-creation.” How does that happen, though? Here is where mysticism comes in.

Given the ambiguity of the negative character of democratic values, for Bergson,
fraternity was needed as the principle capable of integrating, reconciling, and giving direction to the other two. Fraternity is mysticism’s legacy, and therefore, in Bergson’s words, “democracy is evangelical in essence and that its motive power is love” (TS, 282).\textsuperscript{13} This applies, he thinks, for both the French and the American varieties of democracy, whose religious character, he says, is often misunderstood.\textsuperscript{14} For Bergson, liberty and equality can only be sketched in general outlines; however, “their content will improve as and when fraternity provides” (TS, 282).\textsuperscript{15} It is not that fraternity will provide the content of the democratic ideal, but that democracy’s ideal will improve as fraternity provides the spur to further the democratic project. Of course, for Bergson, mystic fraternity is very different from that which the philosophers foster “in the name of reason” (TS, 233). The great mystics’ spur towards humanity is what he calls an “already active ideal,” one that immediately motivate us, rather than binding us through reasons.\textsuperscript{16}

I have reviewed Bergson’s understanding of Christian mysticism, and of what he takes to be its contribution to modern democracy. What ultimately interests me is to flesh out the notion of exemplarity contained in Bergson’s interpretation of the “great Christian mystics,” and to examine why exemplarity thus enacted can claim to be preeminently democratic. However, before doing so, let’s review Scheler’ contrasting interpretation of Christianity and democracy.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[13] For an intellectual history of the role of love in solidarity, from antiquity to the present age, see Hauke Brunkhorst, \textit{Solidarity: from civic friendship to a global legal community} (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).
\item[15] The original reads, “On ne peut que tracer des cadres, ils se rempliront de mieux en mieux si la fraternité y pourvoit” (DS, 301).
\item[16] “The truth is that an ideal cannot become obligatory unless it is already active, in which case it is made obligatory, not by the idea contained in it, but by its cation” (TS, 270). For more on Bergson’s theory of obligation, see chapter 3, pp. 137ff above.
\end{footnotes}
Christian love vs. modern humanitarianism in Scheler

Contrary to Bergson, Scheler thinks that “Christianity does not contain the germ of modern socialist and democratic tendencies and value judgments” (R, 75). Moreover, Scheler contends that “the Christian conception of love was […] completely distorted by the positive alliances with the modern idea of humanitarian love into which all the Christian denominations entered to an increasing degree” (R, 92).

Scheler’s interpretation of the relation between Christianity and modern democracy takes the form of a refutation of Nietzsche’s argument that Christian morality springs from *ressentiment* of the weak against the strong. To recall, for Nietzsche, Christianity’s love of the neighbor, as well as its praise of the weak, poverty and suffering, spring from the frustration and bitterness that come with powerlessness.17 Those who lack power create new values that praise their morbid way of life and condemn the vitality of the strong. Scheler claims that while Nietzsche made a profound psychological discovery—to wit, that powerlessness, and the resentment that ensues from it, can be the source of new values—he misattributed the phenomenon to Christianity.

For him, Nietzsche was right in seeing modern democratic humanitarianism as the product of *ressentiment*. Even if Scheler admits that, historically, Christian morality and democratic humanitarianism have associated with each other, blending philosophically, ideologically, and politically, he claims—contra Nietzsche, and contra Bergson as well—that whenever that has happened, the true meaning of Christianity has been perverted.18

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18 As can be noticed, in many places Scheler does not distinguish between democracy as a set of practices and institutions and democratic principles and sentiments, such as egalitarianism and humanitarianism, equally condemning them all at the time he is developing his thoughts on *ressentiment* against Nietzsche (first published in 1912). World War I, however, modified Scheler’s (and everyone’s) political assessments regarding democracy in Europe. For an overview of Scheler’s intellectual transitions regarding the Europe’s political project before and after
According to Scheler, Christianity’s conception of love, and its corresponding conception of solidarity, do not spring from the experience of powerlessness, but on the contrary, of the experience of a surplus of power, vitality, and a superabundance of love. Comparing Christian love to ancient love, Scheler says that in the latter there is an “element of anxiety”: ancient love is always an ascent, “aspiration of the lower towards the higher” (R, 57), and thus a sign of need and lack. In that scheme, “the noble fears the descent to the less noble, [it] is afraid of being infected and pulled down” (R, 61). However, Christian love, as it traverses the opposite direction—from the nobler to the vulgar, from the healthy to the sick, from the rich to the poor, from the handsome to the ugly, from the good and saintly to the bad and common, and finally, from the Messiah to the sinners and publicans (R, 57), displays, its “inner security and vital plenitude” (R, 60).

Notice the similarities with Bergson’s conception of Christianity and Christian mysticism. To begin with, for Scheler, Christian love corresponds to a notion of life, whose goal is not merely self-preservation, but rather “expansion, development, growth in plenitude” (R, 59). Christianity’s lack of concern with the body and physical well-being, does not spring from a lack of vitality, nor from indifference to life and its preservation—even less from an infatuation with “blind obedience” or “discipline” per se (R, 94). Rather, it springs from the conviction that “all voluntary concentration on one’s own bodily well-being, all worry and anxiety, hampers rather than furthers the creative force which instinctively and beneficently governs all life” (R, 59).

Second, for Scheler, Christian love is not contemplation; it is action. In his words, “Christian love is essentially a spiritual action and movement, as independent of our body and senses as the acts and laws of thinking” (R, 80). Thus, in Christianity, “there is no longer a ‘highest good’ independent of and beyond the act and movement of love” (R, 58). That makes it the deepest root of Christian morality (R, 92).

Third, Christian love, according to Scheler, is eminently personal: “the Christian Deity is a personal God who created the world out of an infinite overflow of love […]—only to express this superabundance of love. This new notion of the deity is the conceptual theological expression of the changed attitude toward life” (R, 63).

19 Besides condemning the object of such a way of focusing our energy—namely, the body and mere material well-being—Scheler will also condemn its manner—that is, its “voluntary” aspect. I will come back later to this point (see p. 222 below).


21 All the elements that Bergson and Scheler have in common, are precisely what makes them part of the theological current within Christianity known as “modernism.” I will take up this point later on in my discussion of Scheler, but very briefly, let me say for now that religious modernism was an effort beginning at the end of the 19th and early 20th century to make religion relevant in the face of science, understanding the latter both as Geisteswissenschaften—history, anthropology, psychology—and as natural science, but as it was understood by many people at the time, that is, along vitalist, experimental, and evolutionary lines. Natural science, in this view, was conceived as the study of life, of the organic, as something that is always in flux, in movement, always changing, and not as something inert. Therefore, against Catholicism, modernism entailed a rejection of Thomism and scholasticism, in favor of a much mystical approach to religion. It pronounced itself against doctrine and against dogma, or in favor of the idea of the evolution of dogma. Of course, the reaction of the catholic church against modernism was very strong.

Modernism was also an effort to humanize and moralize religion. Therefore, it contested Protestantism’s sense of interiority, and it emphasized the public and collective character of religion. It put solidarity at the center, and considered humanity, and not only God, as a religious “object.” Both Scheler and Bergson were part of this debate,
Finally, like for Bergson, for Scheler, modern democracy is based on a negative set of claims, and thus has an antagonistic character: modern humanitarianism, says Scheler, is “in every respect a polemical and protesting concept” (R, 80). The difference with Bergson on this point is twofold. First, Bergson thinks that democratic fraternity is capable of absorbing, so to speak, Christianity’s principle of love, and thus of improving and augmenting the democratic way of life. Even if he agrees with Scheler that no clear-cut instructions for social and political reform can be derived from the core insights of Christian love, he does maintain that the latter can orient and inspire human efforts in those spheres. So, while he is not far apart from Scheler when the latter says that any attempt to derive “socio-political programs” from Christian morality cannot be but the product of a “turbid amalgamation” with utilitarianism (R, 93), Bergson would never say, like Scheler does, that in “humanity” there is nothing more than a mere aggregation of individuals, which does not respect the individuality of persons (R, 80).


22 Unlike Bergson in *The Two Sources*, where, as I said before, he states that the example of certain people has adequately served to carry the mystic insight to democratic shores, Scheler is condemning—at least in the early 1910s, when he is writing *Ressentiment*—any democratic effort of translation from Christianity’s spiritual insights: democracy contaminates Christianity at its origin, and therefore cannot enrich it creatively. Scheler claims in this book that “the immanence of the kingdom of God in man is not bound to any particular structure of state and society” (R, 74) (this in accordance with the gospel: God’s kingdom “is not of this world” (John, 10:36)). However, notice two things. First, in the early 1910s, Bergson was also very reluctant to accept any translation from the spiritual to the material, so to speak (think of Bergson’s work on the ontological difference between time and space). Second, by 1917, Scheler had changed his mind on this point, as he finally endorses a mixture of socialism and Christianity (OEM, 445): “Taking all these things into consideration, we may conclude that Stockholm and Rome will come much closer together: in this way, the oldest and the newest will be enabled to reinforce each other in the cultural reconstruction of Europe.” Therefore, taking into account the difference in dates of the two texts that I am mainly contrasting in this chapter—*The Two Sources*, by Bergson, written in the early 1930s, and *Ressentiment*, by Scheler, written 20 (very significant) years earlier—it is possible to identify a progression from a very skeptical position about the possibility of translating the spiritual into the material and a more nuanced one on this respect. See again, Zanfi, *Bergson e la filosofia tedesca 1907-1932*, chaps. 4 and 5.

23 Recall however that, for Bergson, the love for humanity is based on mystic intuition, and not on the logical gradual aggregation of more and more people from wider circles and networks. Thus, he seems not to be liable to Scheler’s charge of consequentialism and utilitarianism. In other words, I take Bergson’s emphasis on the leap
Second, the authors have a different conception of the kind of protest that is involved in the democratic project. While in Bergson’s view, democracy protests against the closed society, or perhaps only against what it finds unjust within the closed society—implying, therefore, that it is ultimately a legitimate and salutary protest—for Scheler, democracy is a protest of those “who fruitlessly resent the sting of authority” (*R*, 27, italics added). Again, following Nietzsche, he sees modern democratic principles as a resentful and barren reaction from those who are dominated against their oppressors. Now, according to Scheler, what authority does modern humanitarian love protest against? How does he know that its protest is pervaded by ressentiment?

In Scheler’s reading, modern democracy is not mainly a protest against the *Ancien Régime*, and the unfairness of an aristocratic structure of society. It has a deeper meaning. First, Scheler says, it is a protest against God and, more generally, against the divine. Modern humanitarianism loves “natural man” and not what is divine in him; it loves man as a member of the human race, and not as part of the kingdom of God.* Humanitarian love, according to him, loves an aggregation of human beings, and therefore cannot but correspond but to a utilitarian outlook, interested merely in material welfare. On the contrary, for him, Christian love looks at the individual person, and specifically at his or her salvation. It is essentially different from benevolence: it is interested in the act of love, not in its consequences (*R*, 62). As he forcefully

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says, Christian love “is not an institution of charity” (R, 62).  

Second, he says, “universal love of mankind” is a protest against the immediate circle of community and its values, both in time and in space (R, 86). Its emphasis on welfare of the future generations is a protest against the dead, against one’s own ancestors; and the “intense enthusiasm for mankind” manifests, in Scheler’s view, a repressed hatred of the community in which one has been formed (R, 86).

Finally, Scheler holds that modern humanitarianism is a protest against one’s own self: it is an expression of self-hatred. Altruism—in his view, the love of others, just insofar as they are others (R, 87-88)—is a way of fleeing from oneself, and therefore, he says, a morbid way of living and a sign of declining life, as Nietzsche rightly saw (R, 88). In contrast to this, Christian love is directed to others as to one’s self. The Christian’s “own salvation is as important to him as the love of his neighbor” (R, 87). Thus, he concludes, Christianity knows a form of self-love that is basically different from all egoism” (R, 87, translation slightly modified).  

Notice then that the thinkers’ contrasting assessments about the character of the “democratic protest”—for Bergson, it is an open-ended, and therefore fertile, ground for the mystic insight to sow its seed, while for Scheler, it is contaminated with ressentiment—and in consequence, their contrary conclusions regarding the link between Christianity and democracy, have nonetheless a significant common ground: first, and most importantly, they share a philosophical approach to Christian theology based on love as action and tinged with personalist elements; second, as we saw above, they both have important reservations about the translation

25 Moreover, for Scheler, “humanitarian love is a feeling, and a passive one, which arises primarily by means of psychical contagion when we perceive the outward expression of pain and joy” (R, 80). In that sense, modern humanitarian love is akin to the kind of sympathy that he condemns, as we saw in chapter 4.

from the spiritual to the material, and in fact agree about the impossibility of translating spiritual principles into well-defined political programs without perverting the former.

So, the question is, what exactly explains their disagreement? And how does that help us to give a proper framework to what interests me in this chapter—namely, different conceptions of exemplarity contained in their politico-theological interpretations? I see two ethico-political reasons, which constitute, in turn, key differences in their respective philosophico-anthropological conceptions. The first has to do with the role of trust in political life; the second, with equality. In chapter 3, I mentioned in passing that, for Bergson, open religion—the religion of humanity, modern democracy—constitutes, just as closed religion does, a strategy to face uncertainty: it is an “uplifting the soul,” and thus a way of restoring trust and confidence in the face of what we do not know and cannot control. Developing this point would take us much afar now, but let us only indicate that, from a Bergsonian perspective, it is precisely such trust that sets the conditions under which sociability and hope can emerge in modern society.

For Scheler, however, it is precisely on the issue of trust that modern democracy commits one of its principal moral mistakes. According to him, “modern morality is in every respect founded on distrust of men, particularly of their moral values” (R, 101). Taking Hobbes and Rousseau at their word, and observing closely the industrial bourgeois society of his day, Scheler does not think that trust in others can be warranted a safe place in modern democracy. Instead, its core of distrust, which is “so closely akin to ressentiment, has brought about modern moral

27 In this, I follow Frederic Keck’s terminology in interpreting Bergson’s TS.


The second, and most important, difference between both authors resides, I think, in their respective interpretations of the value of equality within Christianity. For Bergson, the “open society” made possible by Christian mysticism is fundamentally egalitarian, and the religion of humanity challenges “closed society” preeminently by erasing the distinctions and hierarchies that respond to tribe, race, family, or nation. The contrast with Scheler on this point is acute. According to his interpretation, the notion that all men are equivalent in God’s eyes is foreign to Christianity (*R*, 75). In his view, the true Christian conception is the opposite: “that God sees an immeasurable abundance of differences and value distinctions where our eyes” (*R*, 73). Notice the consistency between his theological perspective on this point, and his deep and complex notion of the self, which we have examined in previous chapters. Even if he acknowledges that Christianity refutes antiquity, together with its axiomatic belief that equal rights are always unjust, it only does so, he says, “by making an even greater qualitative distinction between men, which penetrates much more deeply into the ontological depths of the person” (*R*, 90).29

For him, the assumption that there is uniform spiritual structure across humanity, and that the disposition for salvation is everywhere identical, is “as foreign to the genuine Christian doctrine as it is to true antiquity” (*R*, 89). Whenever it has been introduced by Christianity, he explains, it is not as a truth, but “as a mere *pragmatic-pedagogic* assumption, indispensable for rendering missionary work possible and meaningful” (*R*, 90).

29 He cites evidence in the Christian dogma that this is so. I will not review it at length, given that my purpose is not directly theological, but suffice it to say that he cites, for instance, the Christian distinction between the state of nature and the state of grace; between carnal and reborn man; between sinners and redeemed people; as well as the existence of purgatory and hell, and the aristocratic structure of Christian ecclesiastic society, a structure which, he claims, “is continued and culminates in the invisible kingdom of God” (*R*, 75). That does not mean that Scheler rejects the universal character of Christianity, in the sense of it concerning all human beings. It just that it makes distinctions among the “universe” of people.
Together, these two differences—the trust that can be presumed in democratic societies, and the issue of whether there is moral equality between persons—explain, in my view, the differences between two philosophical and sociological approaches, that otherwise share so much. More could be said on each one of these points. However, my interest so far was only to lay out the authors’ respective interpretations regarding the relation between Christianity and democracy, in order to clarify the ethico-political frameworks in which their respective views on exemplarity make sense. To sum up, as we saw in the previous section, Bergson conceives modern democracy as an evangelical effort, animated by a concern to alleviate others’ suffering, whose origin is to be found in the great Christian mystics’ insights about humanity. As we will see in the next section, by virtue of this insight, the Christian mystics exercise an exemplary authority which—in the reading of Bergson that I am offering here—claims to combine freedom and equality. In other words, his conception of mysticism sets the grounds for a democratic theory of exemplary authority.\(^{30}\)

On the other hand, as we have just seen, for Scheler the ethical and social proposal of Christianity is fundamentally opposed to modern democracy. In his view, modern humanitarianism is characterized by *ressentiment* and distrust, in a way Christianity is not. The latter offers a way of acknowledging exemplary authority (God’s in the first place, and secondly, as we will see in the following section, that of the saints), and of exercising solidarity with others, free from *ressentiment* and rooted in self-love. In other words, for Scheler, Christianity provides the only spiritual and sociological scheme in which both exemplarity and solidarity are possible. Importantly, however, in his view, Christianity is not egalitarian, and therefore, even if

\(^{30}\) Cf. Thierry Gontier, “Open and Closed Societies: Voegelin as Reader of Bergson,” who argues that Voegelin “overcome[s] the hidden aristocratic ground of the Bergsonian distinction between the minority of spiritual heroes and the majority of dormant mystics” (31-34). Cf. Alexander Lefebvre, *Human Rights as a Way of Life*, who sees a democratic approach as well, but seems to overlook the question regarding hierarchy posed by the exemplarity of the mystics.
it does promise a successful combination of exemplary authority and individuality (or, more precisely, individual salvation), it does so at the cost of moral equality.

In the next section, I will delve into how exemplary authority is exercised according to each author, focusing on the ethical significance of such an exercise.

Bergson on mysticism: education as the preeminent political problem

Bergson’s theory of the spiritual origins of modern democracy raises the question of why, for him, should the mystics be the ultimate instantiation of democratic exemplarity, and not, say, Pericles or Lincoln? What is so special about mysticism? On this score, some of Bergson’s readers have pointed to the undeniable personal dimension of Bergson’s philosophical argument, according to which the book can be read as an account of his spiritual itinerary from Judaism to Christianity. Of course, this answer is very unsatisfactory in philosophical and political terms, because it makes the author’s proposal a result of his own religious idiosyncrasies.

A much more acceptable and interesting interpretation is to identify the direct coincidence between Bergson’s theory of philosophical intuition, on the one hand, and Christian mystical experience, on the other. Indeed, in the *Two Sources*, both the mystic and the philosopher are always presented alongside each other—the latter speaking for the more skeptical and contemplative side of an enterprise that has its active and reassuring side in the dispositions of the former.

Furthermore, according to Phillip Soulez, Bergson’s Nobel Prize acceptance speech in

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31 Pericles is Aristotle’s example, and Lincoln is Weber’s.


1928 marks the occasion where the philosopher publicly poses the question that would become one of the main focuses of *The Two Sources*, namely, that of the moral and ontological status of humanity. Expanding on Soulez’s hermeneutic hint, I suggest we should connect the Nobel speech and *The Two Sources* in yet one more respect. In his speech, Bergson says that “the political problem par excellence is the problem of education.”  

Thus, according to this interpretation, the political significance of exemplary authority as it is articulated in the book—that is, as we have seen, the exemplarity found in *mysticism*, and its connection to the so-called “religion of humanity”—should be eminently pedagogical. In other words, while writing *The Two Sources* in the early 1930s, Bergson’s political hopes regarding the “great mystics” and the future of humanity, had, I want to say, a distinctly educational ring to them.  

One of the main parallels drawn by Bergson between the great mystic and the philosopher is that they both seem to share in the methodological difficulty of safely or adequately transmitting the insights to which they both have “priority access.” Thus, in a sort of meta-reflection, Bergson dwells at length in this book on the appropriate writing method in philosophy.  

Comparing the art of writing in philosophy with that of the music composer, he explains that the philosopher must try, with the help of intelligence, to translate into music (that is, to express) an “indivisible emotion” that is originally “more than music and more than intelligence” (*TS*, 253). In what can be seen as Bergson’s version of the parable of the cave, he says that the

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34 http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1927/bergson-speech.html

35 Cfr. bibliography cited in note 30 above.

philosopher goes “back” (instead of “up”) to a different plane where he can be in touch with philosophical insights (TS, 253-54). As in Plato, some kind of force is exerted upon the philosopher: as the passage shows, this force pushes him to “create” (the “return,” in Plato’s case). Even if the “truths” with which he is contact “back there” were only seen or clearly felt once in a lifetime, they will let their demands be felt in a lasting way, “compelling” the philosopher to go to society back again, use the resources he finds there in speech, and—doing violence to language—try to provide new and fresh insights to humanity.

If this task is successfully accomplished, humanity will be enriched by it. The philosopher is entitled to be heard only insofar as he or she is capable of doing what Bergson is describing here. In other words, this process legitimizes the kind of authority which, according to Bergson, the mystic and the philosopher are entitled to. However, in Bergson’s case, unlike for Plato, the people cannot be forced to listen. They should be prompted and wooed into philosophy—just as Bergson himself did throughout his life, in infinite number of lectures given in halls full of eager listeners.

Additionally, as suggested by Bergson’s theories of cognition and recognition, in Bergson’s view, the philosopher’s audience does not sit passively, as a “receptacle” of his message. In the process of reflectively recognizing what the philosopher says and does, listeners will engage in an active process, in which they will presumably expand their capacity for freedom.37

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37 I cannot expound on Bergson’s theory of what he calls *reflective perception* or *attentive recognition*, developed in his early book, *Matter and Memory*. Suffice it to say, that according to this theory, as someone pays increased attention to an object, it is not the case that the former receives more and more information *from* the latter; but rather, the subject “puts in” a whole much more, in order to be able to recognize the object. That is why Bergson thinks this type of recognition is mainly a “centrifugal,” and not a “centripetal,” process: once we have initially perceived an object, our memory acts as a centrifugal force upon it, “sending” in its direction all the memory-images that resemble it, so that, as he says, “the elementary work of attention [is similar] to that of the telegraph clerk, who on receipt of an important despatch, sends it back again, word for word, in order to check its accuracy” (*MM*, 123). Recognition of objects in space happens as a result of this job. As Bergson puts it, images stored in memory “go out
Therefore, it might not be misleading to think of Bergson as offering here a sort of modern, “democratized” defense of the authority, to which some few exemplary figures are entitled. As a public intellectual, Bergson certainly mounted a defense of philosophy and mysticism before the city; though he would, of course, not argue that the great mystic or the philosopher may become king, but just that the majority should be persuaded of the benefits of listening, and even be instructed in the ways of philosophy. Such, moreover, is presumably not a utopian idea since, for Bergson, common sense is in certain respects much closer to philosophical intuition than it ever was for Plato. Even if common sense easily departs from philosophy, it is certainly closer to it than any highly intellectualized scientific approach.  

Furthermore, Bergson’s vindication of the exemplary figure differs crucially from Plato’s, in that the insight provided by mystical (and philosophical) intuition is thoroughly egalitarian: as I said before, in Bergson’s account, the mystic’s message has made the religion of humanity available for us. Likewise, the philosopher’s message is supposed to concern everyone equally. That is, indeed, the most reiterated lesson offered by Bergson in the essays and lectures compiled in the book titled La pensée et le mouvant (translated in English as The Creative Mind)—an anthology that puts together some of the most important texts and discourses by which Bergson popularized his ideas throughout his career. “Satisfactions which art will never give save to those favoured by nature and fortune, and only then upon rare occasions, philosophy thus to meet the perception, and, feeding on its substance acquire sufficient vigour and life to abide with it in space.” (MM, 135) Notice that this process is analogous to the model that I examined in chapter 1, regarding our relation to our own pasts. While the latter is developed in Time and Free Will, the former is presented in Matter and Memory.

38 As we have seen, Bergson criticizes the philosophical impulse to “be detached” and to think that speculation is the reverse of action. Not to lose a sense of the tone of his criticism, it might be useful to quote him here on this respect: “And faithful to the spirit of Plato, [Plotinus] thought that the discovery of truth demanded a conversion of the mind, which breaks away from the appearances here below and attaches itself to the realities above: ‘Let us flee to our beloved homeland!’—But as you see, it was a question of ‘fleeing.’ More precisely, for Plato and for all those who understand metaphysics in that way, breaking away from life and converting one’s attention consisted in transporting oneself immediately into a world different from the one we inhabit, in developing other faculties of perception than the senses and consciousness” (CM, 115).
understood will offer to all of us, at all times, by breathing life once again into the phantoms which surround us and by revivifying us” (CM, 106). Thus, underscoring the relatively democratic character of philosophy (at least compared to other disciplines), he promises that we can expect from it, the “joy and the strength” of feeling that “we are participating, creators of ourselves, in the great work of creation which is the origin of all things and which goes before our eyes” (CM, 86).

Such is the pedagogical character of the authority Bergson identifies in the mystics, as well as, by extension, in the philosopher. Confronted with these figures, he thinks, the majority can hold the expectation that, through a certain type of education, they can partake in the insights and, above all, in the way of life, of which they are an example. The most important theoretical alternative for the model of personal authority that results from Bergson’s (and Scheler’s, as we will see shortly) reflections on mysticism is, of course, Max Weber’s notion of charismatic figure. Weber’s notion—developed at the same time when Bergson and Scheler were writing on Christianity, democracy, and exemplarity—constitutes the paradigm of personal authority for those who—unlike Bergson and Scheler’s—have assumed the so-called “modern disenchantment.” Thus, Weberian charisma is the obvious point of contrast to understand and adequately assess the psychological, moral, sociological—and even existential—implications of the model of authority that our thinkers were exploring.

Weber conceives charismatic authority as that which “rest[s] on devotion to the specific and exceptional sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the

39 Bergson presents some version of this idea in “The Possible and the Real,” “Philosophical Intuition,” “The Perception of Change,” and “Introduction to Metaphysics,” all contained in CM.

40 Again, the emphasis on mysticism as a way of life resonates with Lefebvre’s reading of Bergson. However, my approach is different insofar as, in my view, the way of life that the mystics preeminently portray is not mainly related to human rights, but with certain simplicity of manners and opposition against luxury. On this last point, see Appendix A.
normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him.”\(^{41}\) Furthermore, he observes, “charisma can only be ‘awakened’ and ‘tested’; it cannot be ‘learned’ or ‘taught.’\(^{42}\) Finally, in Weber’s account, especially in religious instantiations of charismatic authority (i.e., prophets), the message conveyed (i.e., the prophetic revelation) “involves for both the prophet himself and for his followers [...] a unified view of the world derived from a consciously integrated and meaningful attitude toward life. To the prophet, both the life of man and the world, both social and cosmic events, have a certain systematic and coherent meaning.”\(^{43}\)

Thus, Weber’s charismatic figure furnishes a \textit{message} that produces a \textit{unified worldview}. Moreover, such a message has the moral and psychological effect of “producing a personality.” \textit{Personality}, for Weber, is a technical term denoting not only \textit{any} pattern of behavioral propensities and general dispositions, but rather, as he says, “a concept which entails a \textit{constant} and \textit{intrinsic} relation to certain ultimate values and meanings of life, values and meanings which are forged into purposes and thereby translated into rational-teleological action.”\(^{44}\) The holder of charismatic authority reveals or ordains normative patterns that are capable of giving coherence and constancy to a life, to a personality in Weber’s sense; hence its power of attraction. These values find no other ground outside of the leader’s own extraordinary qualities, which are acknowledged through constant “proofs” that confirm the “possession” of charisma (typically the


\(^{43}\) Weber, \textit{Max Weber on Charisma}, 266.

performance of miracles, or of great and heroic deeds).\footnote{Weber, \textit{Max Weber on Charisma}, 22-26. The “authentication of charisma” is always by way of the performance of deeds. However, Weber does talk about charisma as a “possession,” (see, for example, p. 196) and even of it being a “transferable entity” (see p. 57).}

How is this different from Bergson’s conception of exemplarity? First, as I said before, Bergson is not concerned at all with dogma or doctrine. For him, the exemplarity of the great mystics does not depend on their handing down specific commands, or revealing a concrete set of directives. Of course, this does not mean that actual recognition by others is dispensable. If the interest is in exemplarity—and not merely in mystic experience as such—the actual acknowledgment from others is, by definition, decisive, as Weber rightly observes about charisma.\footnote{Weber, \textit{Max Weber on Charisma}, 49. For Weber, de facto acknowledgment is key for charismatic authority to exist (although it is never its ultimate normative basis, constituted instead by the exceptional character of the leader). A similar circularity is identified by Bergson when he says that “an ideal cannot become obligatory unless it is already active, in which case it is not the idea contained in it, but its action, which makes it obligatory” (\textit{TS}, 210).} However—and this is the second difference—for Bergson, recognition is certainly learned, not “awakened.” Recognition is never an instantaneous or miraculous process, but depends instead on a gradual “education of the senses.”\footnote{See note 37 above, for the process involved in recognition. As a complex process, it is not something “automatic” or “spontaneous,” and as such, it involves training. See, more generally, \textit{MM}, chap. 2.}

Subjectively, for Weber, “recognition [of charisma] is a matter of complete personal devotion to the possessor of the quality, arising out of enthusiasm, or of despair and hope.”\footnote{Weber, \textit{Max Weber on Charisma}, 49.} Even in the case of what he calls “exemplary prophets” of the East, as opposed to the “ethical prophets” of the West, their sociological role is always, for him, “an effort to systematize all the manifestations of life; that is, to organize practical behavior into a direction of life, regardless of the form it may assume in any individual case.”\footnote{Weber, \textit{Max Weber on Charisma}, 267.} For Bergson, on the contrary, to follow the mystics does not mean to obey them devotedly, but to imitate them. Thus, the only expectation
that these figures can have in terms of influence or impact, is, by way of their example, to provide insights that are, as it were, “more than an advice but less than a command.”  

In contrast to Weber’s charismatic authority, the alternative that Bergson finds in mysticism—and which we shall shortly explore further with the help of Scheler—holds that the paradigmatic way of following is imitation and not obedience. This “ethics of imitation,” as I shall call it, suggests in turn—and I mean this as a hypothesis to be explored in the rest of this chapter—a possible way out of the dichotomy between heteronomous following, on the one hand, and autonomous freedom, on the other. Again, in the face of Rousseau’s question of how to obey while preserving our freedom, Bergson’s appeal to mysticism suggests that imitation is not only compatible with freedom, but actually a paramount resource in our way to building it up.

Naturally, not every instance of charismatic leadership would be susceptible to this kind of followship. That is one of the reasons that make mysticism especially suited to address Bergson’s concerns. I imagine that Lincoln’s leadership should have sparked in many people, out of admiration, the desire to become like him. However, upon reflection, we find that, first of all, as a matter of fact, that was not the kind of leadership that Lincoln primarily exercised (in other words, people did not follow him mainly out of a desire to become like him, but out of deference); and second, taken seriously, such expectation is unsound, and even immature.

To illustrate: it is characteristic of teenagers to dream that they become, not only like the figures they admire, the hero(ine)s of their favorite novels and films, but these characters

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50 Arendt’s conception of the true and original authority in the Roman Republic. She takes the quote from Mommsen.

themselves. Yet, the appeal of the juvenile fantasy of actually becoming these figures (and not only like them), lies in that one cannot reasonably expect to be satisfied with even a very good imitation of one’s heroes. Heroes are unique and completely exceptional. Thus, imitating them cannot possibly constitute (except perhaps in the case of a talented impersonator) a morally desirable goal in life. Therefore “following a hero” preserves, by definition, the gap between leader and follower.

In contrast, the role-model offered by a mystic or a philosopher seems, as it were, to “make room for others” in a way the exemplarity of Pericles or Lincoln does not—although it would certainly betray the right way of following, if you said you want to become Joan of Arc herself. To put it in Weberian terms, the mystical figure (and, as we said, by analogy, the philosopher as well) holds charismatic authority in a distinctive democratic fashion, which the exemplary politician does not seem to be capable of. Mystics are not heroes.

Another way of putting this is that if you want to become a mystic or a philosopher, it makes sense to imitate one, while if you want to become a statesman or -woman, it would be unsound to adopt imitation as your model to attain so. That fact is certainly related to the requirements of the political vocation, which involve specialized talents and skills, in a way mysticism and philosophy—at least in Bergson’s view—do not. Of course, this entails a

52 Scheler discusses a similar example in NS, 98.

53 It seems to be a completely different matter whether the exemplary politician is or not “representative” of those under his or her authority. An exemplary politician can represent the people—either because she shares with them certain socio-economic characteristics, or because she defends their interests and ideals—and still be unique, and hence not imitable. Lincoln is, again, a case in point.


55 To be sure, if you want to become the president of your own country, it makes sense to follow certain general directives, as others have done, in order to pursue a certain career path that can eventually land your dream job. However, aspiring to become the president of your country, and doing what is needed for that purpose, has much more to do with bureaucratic authority than with charisma.
conception of mysticism and of philosophy that we could call “Socratic,” in its appeal to ignorance and simplicity as the appropriate conditions for wisdom.

The same can be said about the comparison with geniuses. Bergson calls the mystic “more than a man,” and adds that “the same can be said of other forms of genius,” thereby suggesting that they could be regarded as such (TS, 213). However, in spite of the phrase just quoted, it is plain that Bergson is not thinking of their extraordinary character along the lines of genius as it was conceived, for instance, by the German Romantics. The mystics’ exceptional character, in Bergson’s view, does not have anything to do with originality. Evelyn Underhill—one of Bergson’s main sources on the character of mysticism—explains that all true saints detested eccentricity and singularity. Instead, their unique character is better captured by Bergson’s idea that they “constitute a species composed of a single individual” (TS, 268). Again, they paradoxically unite the particular and the generic. Therein lies their specifically democratic exemplarity, and that is the pedagogico-political lesson that, in my view, Bergson intends to extract from them.

**Scheler on sainthood: following without obeying**

Scheler’s treatment of sainthood is fairly analogous to Bergson’s treatment of mysticism: they both see sainthood and mysticism, respectively, through the lens of the personalist elements within Christianity. Like Bergson, Scheler’s reflections on exemplarity—and more specifically, saintly exemplarity—portray a way of following that, through the right kind of emulation,

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56 Cfr. Zanfi, *Bergson, la Tecnica, la Guerra*, 120-121, where she discusses Bergson’s idea that the mystics are like “moral genius,” but does not seem to identify the difference that I want to draw here.

enhances the follower.\textsuperscript{58} In them, I find—and again, in contrast with Weber, as well as with important variants of democratic political theory—a model of authority, in which following seems to escape obedience. Resonant with conceptions of “positive liberty”—but more specifically, as I will explain in a moment, based on reasons that respond directly to his ontological and epistemological presuppositions—following, for Scheler, does not mean “subjecting” our will to something else—not even to our own selves (Rousseau), or to the demands of reason (Kant). Following in his sense, seems to be able to escape the problem of “negating one’s own will,” partly because, according to Scheler, it is mistaken to take the will to be the “substrate of all our acts” \textit{(F, 29)}. For him, “there exists a large number of acts that are by no means acts of willing” \textit{(F, 29)}. As we will see, according to Scheler’s scheme, following an exemplary figure certainly falls within this category.\textsuperscript{59}

Scheler’s “ethics of emulation,” is rooted—just as Bergson’s ethics of imitation is—in his theory of the self. In contrast to Bergson, however, for Scheler, the type of emulation that enhances the follower is not democratic, since it is not founded on a morally egalitarian conception of human nature. Rather, it is rooted in the hierarchy of values that sustains his ethical theory from end to end, and which yields a moral hierarchy of people as well.

Before going into the details of Scheler’s conception of \textit{saintly} exemplarity specifically, let’s briefly restate that the importance of \textit{personal} authority within Scheler’s philosophical outlook springs from his moral personalism: for him, personal leadership and exemplarity appeal

\textsuperscript{58} As it will become clear below, Scheler distinguishes what I am translating here as “emulation” \textit{[nachfolgen]}, from “mere imitation” \textit{[folgen]}, which he condemns on the same ground as he condemns sympathy as contagion, as we saw in chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{59} This chapter is not on freedom, but on authority. However, of course, these are two fundamentally related themes. For some, like Hobbes, they are two sides of the same coin (“liberty is the silence of the laws”), while for others, like Scheler, the relation between them is not a zero-sum. Therefore, to put it in terms of freedom, we can say that, for Scheler, unlike for many modern philosophers, the latter is not completely rooted in the faculty of the will: for him, freedom concerns rather the whole person, involving the hierarchy of values and feelings that we have examined in previous chapters.
to us as persons, and therefore constitute a fundamental component of our moral world, and one of the most important resources for moral formation.\textsuperscript{60}

However, this claim is not only normative; it is rooted also in Scheler’s anti-associationist psychology, as we reviewed it in chapter 1. For him, exemplars are effective in a way rules, norms, and principles, would never be. Personal exemplars motivate us by a “faith” that our minds built upon them.

There is no greater error as that in a psychology or sociology that says we love or hate persons only because they say or did this or that, or because they have certain traits of character or because of the looks of their noses or smiles. Our souls are not so didactic as our understanding which always lags behind our loves and hates. We entertain attachments and apathies we cannot explain to ourselves. Rather, we love or hate, first of all, whole and total persons on the basis of an impression of their personal cast. Whenever we love or hate we also tend to consent or reject, to follow or to resist to follow. A teacher hated as a person can cause in us a disgust for an entire field of knowledge. (\textit{"EL,"} 147)

In chapter 2, we saw that, for Scheler, the voice of conscience, at its best, speaks to us as individuals, and not by universalizing norms, or by relying on tradition. Similarly, persons, and the (always particular) example they can set, constitute a privileged vehicle for the transmission of moral insights.\textsuperscript{61}

Scheler distinguishes between leaders, on the one hand, and exemplars, on the other,

\textsuperscript{60} For Scheler, the authority that resides in a morally good person is superior, in his view, to that which resides merely in tradition, on the one hand, or in contracts and consent, on the other. The reason is that this type of authority has the potential of appealing to people, not only as members of a given community or, alternatively, of a voluntarily-formed society, but by combining both the independency and the co-responsibility that characterizes, in his view, true moral individuality. On this point see Matthias Schloßberger, “The Varieties of Togetherness: Scheler on Collective Affective Intentionality”; Thomas Szanto, “Collectivizing Persons and Personifying Collectives: Reassessing Scheler on Group Personhood,” in \textit{The Phenomenology of Sociality: Discovering the ‘We,'} Thomas Szanto and Dermot Moran, eds., 296-312; and Zachary Davis, “Max Scheler on Becoming a Political Human Being,” ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2006, chap. 10.

\textsuperscript{61} In addition to the normative and psychological reasons, Scheler has sociological reason as well to be interested in personal authority—namely, his conviction that—following the economist Friedrich von Wieser, the sociologist Robert Michels, and other important researchers focusing at the time on the political role of elites—it is always a minority that which determines the course of history. See \textit{EL,} 130-135, \textit{SK,} 194-138, and Staude, \textit{Max Scheler,} 163-202.
suggesting that—morally and sociologically—the latter are more fundamental. Leaders, he says, demand our will: they demand specific actions on our part. Exemplars, on the contrary, “demand our being” ("EL," 135). Leaders must intend to lead, and must be recognized as such by the followers. On the contrary, exemplars can orient and inspire action without being aware of it. Followers, for their part, can be influenced by them without even being conscious of it. Indeed, Scheler claims, it is when we are less aware of somebody’s influence that it can have a more profound and definitive impact on us ("EL," 129); a “vividly effective” model has superior influence from that of the one that is “reflected upon” ("EL," 140).

More importantly, however, he says that exemplars determine the normative horizon in which leaders are selected: either negatively or positively, they set the actual, empirical standards that operate in the selection of leaders. The choice of leaders is, as he says, “a result of the gods we want to serve” ("EL," 135)—that is why, he says, “a theory of personal exemplars is much more important and fundamental than the question of leaders which is given so much one-sided attention today” ("EL," 135).62 Exemplars, as moral types, are not obtained empirically, either through inference or abstraction from historical and worldly experience ("EL," 133). Rather, he says, on the one hand, they are “given immediately”—just as the hierarchy of values is given to our consciousness; and, on the other, they are complemented “materially” through the experience of history. In Scheler’s words, “these tender and shadowy casts must drink the appropriate blood from the wells of the experience of history. It is only when they do this that they become concrete models” ("EL," 142).63

The main question that I want to address now is, how does Scheler characterize the act of

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62 In other words, they constitute the authoritative in Flathman’s sense (see note 3 above).

following an exemplar? What is the relation that this “following without obeying” establishes between the exemplar and the follower? First of all, Scheler distinguishes between, on the one hand, “true followship,” or what I translate here as “emulation” [nachfolgen], and, on the other, “mere copying” and “imitation” [folgen] (“EL,” 158). In contrast to the latter, the former indicates a way of following that is autonomous, one that springs rather “from the center of the personality” (“EL,” 84). According to Scheler, it occurs if the soul of the follower is “in harmony” with its exemplar, and is able thus to “grow into” the exemplary cast, forming itself “into” it (“EL.” 139). When it does so, it “measures its own being, life and actions by this exemplar, either in a secret or deliberate fashion; it affirms, praises, negates or disapproves of itself after his cast of value” (“EL,” 139). As in Bergson, in Scheler’s view, moral value is most safely and profoundly transmitted by this kind of following. On this score, he says:

If we look at the series of exemplars in families, especially those of parents, or at those found in estates, occupations, and peoples […], as well as at saintly exemplars, it is as if human beings pull themselves up by such interhuman exemplary strings. It is by the personal exemplars that our past remains present, alive and effective in the golden fabric of their moral value; it is through this past that all gracious geniuses dwell in the presence of the moment and release their forces toward a better future. (“EL,” 143, italics modified)

The “pulling-up” metaphor aims at capturing the distinction between “mere reproduction” and “true following,” that is, the practice of modelling oneself after the cast of the exemplar. Like his notion of “true sympathy,” examined in the previous chapter, “true following” entails “intelligent receptiveness,” instead of contagion or simulation (“EL,” 145).

Now, as we have also seen in previous chapters, the spiritual sphere is the highest one in Scheler’s hierarchy of values. Correspondingly, the highest type of exemplar is that of the saint. According to him, this is not only superior to the rest of exemplars, but also

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64 The other exemplars are the genius (including here artists, philosophers, sages, legislators, and judges), the hero, the “leading mind of civilization” (“der führende Geist der Zivilisation,” in the fields of science, technology,
“encompasses” and “inspires” them. In his words, “all other types of exemplary persons, ranging from the genius and hero, down to leaders of the economy, are either directly or indirectly dependent on prevailing religious exemplars” (“EL,” 152). The efficacy of religious models in every value of life and all the spheres of culture is due, as I understand the claim, to the fact that the core of our personality is spiritual. That is why saints are, for Scheler, morally and sociologically, the most decisive or influential type of exemplar. Again, the effect they exert does not have to be conscious or deliberate, neither on the part of exemplars, nor of the followers (“EL,” 134, 141, 153, 163-65). That is because, as I indicated above, this influence is not exerted upon our will, as something isolated within the self—as Scheler says, we cannot “choose” exemplars, as, say, we choose our favorite color (“EL,” 141)—but rather falls upon the constitution of the self as a whole, with its hierarchy of value and feeling.

Now, among the saints, Scheler reserves a special place to what he calls “the original saint,” who, in the case of Christianity is, of course, Jesus Christ. “Just as God is one, the person to whom he communicates his essence in the fullest way, is only one” (“EL,” 154). All the other saints—whom he calls, “derived” or “following” saints—are below Jesus Christ. How then is the act of following without obeying portrayed in this case? What does the relation between the original saint and following ones consist in? Here, again, Scheler’s effort to render the effect of the exemplar on the follower, without betraying the ineffability of the persons involved by reducing them to any of their concrete characteristics is apparent. According to Scheler, following the original saint consists in the act of “sharing” and “co-experiencing” with the exemplary figure, of whose virtue the true follower becomes then a “living mirror” (“EL,” 162/ economics) and the “master in the art of living” (der “Künstler des Genusses”). They correspond, in that order, to the following spheres of value: intellectual and psychic, vital, and hedonist. 64

65 It is open to question though, if today, spiritual exemplars could comprise instances other than saints.
Like with the “pulling-up” metaphor, according to which there is a chain of exemplary figures that pull up the ones below, with the metaphor of the mirror Scheler is indicating a conceptual distinction regarding the way followers can relate to such an exceptional figure. Unlike the genius, Scheler says, the saint is not admired; unlike the hero, he is not honored. Rather, the followers have faith in him. We saw before that, according to Scheler, exemplars in general elicit a sort of faith that is quite different from what we commonly understand by rational belief. This is even more so in the case of saints. Faith in the original saint concerns his person; it is not faith in an idea or a principle. For Scheler, his deeds and words are not “proofs,” but only “testimony” of his unique relation to God.

The highest, purest, and most spiritual form that the effectiveness of exemplars can assume is the faith, or the lack of faith, in a whole person whom we learned to understand from out of the spiritual center of his life by way of placing ourselves into him and by co-executing that person’s moral tenor and acts. (“EL,” 147)

Following the original saint means, says Scheler—admittedly somewhat cryptically—to “reflect the rays” (“EL,” 162/MC, 85) that he emanates in all directions—rays which, moreover, bring salvation to those who are able to “flash them back” (“EL,” 162/MC, 85). In doing so, he explains, the followers do not understand the exemplar “from his outer appearance, as someone who only imitates would” (“EL,” 147, translation slightly modified), but again, “out of the spiritual center of his life,” and by “placing themselves into” him (“EL,” 147).

To go back to the question that interests us here, what exactly about the exemplar do the followers emulate? Do they emulate his actions? His words and opinions? His thoughts? Facing, again, the difficulty of indicating precisely how this following can happen, Scheler says that unlike the genius, who “lives” in his works, and unlike the hero, who is who he is by virtue of his actions, the saintly exemplar has only his person. The holy man is “effective only through the
being of his person, and not through virtues, and even less through acts, works, deeds or actions. They are only pointers to his being and holiness” (“EL,” 157). Paraphrasing Schiller on the “noble soul,” Scheler says that the original saint pays with what he is, not with what he does (“EL,” 157).

So, if it is not with respect to works, words, or deeds, how is it that they “follow” him? Or, as Scheler puts it, “what is it that the saints who “followed Christ” wanted, experienced, or did?” (“EL,” 161). He answers, again, in consonance with what we saw in chapter 4: they did not want to be infected by him, “as if hypnotized by a leader” (“EL,” 161). He says that they did not want merely to copy him, “say, to live in Galilee, or be in despair in Gethsemane, or die on the cross” (“EL,” 161); nor to have sympathy with him; and not even, Scheler adds, to “share ‘with him’ the joy [Mitfreude ‘mit’] of his glorification” (“EL,” 161, translation slightly modified). In Scheler’s view, they only wanted to “co-live and re-live in one act the Spirit of his historically fortuitous, small and poor life” (“EL,” 161). It is only by “summoning” his presence that they are able to do this. The exemplar lives—is “really present”—among the followers: “his factual givenness is the in-dwelling in his followers, of which—he says—the Scripture cast a first symbolic shadow” (“EL,” 157).66

I will return to the role of the Scripture in Scheler’s interpretation. However, for now, let us stop for a moment to notice that Scheler’s theory of exemplarity is building upon an important theological debate about the relative importance of grace vs. human action in salvation. Put briefly and schematically, on the one hand, there is the Augustinian position that grace does not respond to merit: in view of the fallen condition of man, salvation is a grace from God, conceded

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66 In fact, “summoning” might not be the right word, because, according to Scheler, it is not as if the exemplar could be “invited” to be among the followers. Without being irresistible, one cannot be altogether “indifferent” towards it: that is why he says that the exemplar can be forgotten, but not “not remembered” (EL, 162).
especially through the atonement. Not only forgiveness for past sins, but for our condition as a whole—that is, our condition as sinners—was given to human beings by the crucifixion of Christ.

On the other hand, there is the position—most famously articulated in Pelagianism—that holds that that human action is paramount for salvation, such that divine grace is not really a gift, but the rightful reward for being good. Thus, as a result, this position tends to make room for human freedom, making salvation a matter of justice, and subscribing to a view of human perfectibility. In connection to this, this side of the debate minimizes the role of the atonement, and of Christ more generally, interpreting him “merely” as an example or, alternatively, as a teacher. The politico-philosophical importance of these debates is that, as has been argued, they already contain the main arguments that would be played out both in early modern political thought, regarding freedom and dignity of human beings, and in contemporary political theory, regarding moral luck and desert.67

Seen in this context, Scheler seems to be trying to carve a space for himself in the middle of these two positions. On the one hand, the importance that he gives to Christ as “the original saint,” his character as a person to which we relate directly in the act of love and faith, as well as the impossibility of being indifferent to his presence, correspond to the Augustinian position that underscores human fallenness and helplessness in the face of divine grace. His position thus

undermines, to some extent, human freedom, and what later would be called “human dignity.”

However, there are other elements in his treatment of exemplarity that pull in the opposite direction, seemingly opening up some space for freedom by means of other resources. Consider Scheler’s conception of Christ as an exemplar. This is a typically Pelagian motif, as it assigns him the role of a teacher or an example, at the expense of that of being our Savior. Scheler seems to aim thus at a middle point, making Christ a sort of *primus inter pares*: He is the original saint, but nonetheless a saint. Beyond this element, I find two other resources that take Scheler beyond the debate between Augustinianism and Pelagianism, and that come precisely from the modernist elements in this theology.

First, Scheler’s downplaying of doctrinal content. Hobbes had already shown us how reducing the required doctrinal beliefs to a bare minimum, helps to make room for freedom, as it reduces the scope of what the sovereign can legitimately demand from the subjects. That is why, for Hobbes, the only obligatory dogma is to believe that Jesus is the Christ. Now, Scheler seems to go beyond that. In his view, “Christianity does not mean to believe in an idea, for instance, to believe in the idea that Christ is the son of God, or to believe in the everlasting, everlasting...”

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68 This dimension of Scheler’s interpretation can be further seen in his writings about various topics; among them: humility, as the main virtue over and above dignity (“RV”); collective, instead of individual responsibility for all sins of mankind (*OEM*, 33-66, written in the aftermath of WWI); shame, as a positive virtue that somehow protects the self from evil, and allows the self to mature, as if within a cocoon or shell (“SFM”). However, see that on the issue of what comes first, whether an “active” repentance or a more “passive” reception of grace, in order for conversion to take effect, he takes a middle point and says that the removal of guilt is one and the same act with the entering of grace, therefore adopting a somewhat Arminian position in this respect (*OEM*, 48). It would require another project to develop and examine Scheler’s theological positions in all these respects, exploring how they coincide with, and differ from, previous debates about grace, dignity, and freedom, and studying the extent to which his thought can open untaken roads in contemporary political theories. On Scheler’s Augustinianism regarding religious knowledge, see Mary Evelyn Clarke, “The Contribution of Max Scheler to the Philosophy of Religion,” *The Philosophical Review* 43, no.6 (1934), 577-97. Clarke examines as well the anti-Augustinian developments of Scheler’s late philosophy of religion, namely, the rejection of God as the creator of the world, and the postulate that God and Man are mutually dependent, which took Scheler to conceive man as a “microcosm” and a “microtheos,” a co-creator with God. (594-93).

69 See note 21 above.

central, and living presence of the person of Christ in the world and in history” (“EL,” 156). Rather, as we have seen, Scheler says that only the “immediate, clear presence [of the exemplar] belongs to the essence of the holy” (“EL,” 156). Indeed, the most perfect and complete revelation, he says, is simply self-revelation (“EL,” 156).

What do we gain thus? Scheler is clear on this respect: what we lose in doctrinal content, we gain with respect to what he deems as the “essence of personhood.” As we saw in chapter 1, for him—and he reiterates this word by word in his reflections on exemplarity—“the person exists only in the execution or the movement of acts” (“EL,” 157, translation slightly modified). 71 Thus, the ties between original saint and the follower, does not consist in subscribing to any particular doctrine or belief, but rather “consist primarily in the “immediate co-experience,” which the right way of following—which he actually calls “free following” (“EL,” 147)—makes possible (“EL,” 156-57). More clearly, the derived saint “does not follow [the original saint] like someone who is obedient to laws, but he follows with him. Obedience is only the path on which he will reach free following in love” (“EL,” 158, translation slightly modified). Moreover, as we saw in a quotation cited above, the Scripture has, to a good extent, mainly a symbolic and pedagogical value. The reading of the Scripture, says Scheler, is “contemplation, edification, and mental exercise” (“EL,” 157): it allows us to engage in the proper spiritual exercises. Unlike the reading of scientific works, he explains, this practice is “an exercise in attitudes, regulation of one’s own positions, psychic techniques” (“EL,” 157, translation slightly modified). He says further:

Religious knowledge is not wholly present before liturgical expression; ritual in an essential vehicle of its growth. Thus while the religious act is certainly rooted

71 Notice that, according to Scheler, the original saint does not even exist in his acts. His person is beyond works, words and deeds. However, that is not the case for the “rest of mortals.” See below, p. 220, for more on the point that the original saint does not have an individuality.
in the mind and the spirit, in execution it invariably takes the form of a psycho-
physical rather than purely psychic unit. In this respect religious cognition is far
closer to an artistic apprehension of the world than to science and metaphysics.
(OEM, 265)\textsuperscript{72}

So, while, in Scheler’s reading, the original saint is indeed a “specific positive source of
cognition and experience” ("EL," 152), bequeathing to the followers what they will later
transmit by way of the gospel and their own examples, similarly to Bergson’s treatment of the
mystic insight, Scheler is mainly interested in the Scripture as something apart from its dogmatic
content.

The second modernist resource that Scheler uses to open up space for freedom in the
midst of his somewhat Augustian picture of the self—and which related to the previous point—is
his insistence on the independence of the original exemplar from any kind of material symbols.
In his view, it is necessary that the original saint does not leave any written work “that would
make his person directly accessible to us in subsequent history” ("EL," 157). In fact, he says,
that is one of the necessary, although not sufficient conditions of his “boundless efficacy” ("EL," 157)—and indeed that is why, in Antiquity, he explains, Socrates “came closest to holiness”
("EL," 158).

For our purposes, the importance of this point is that, given the absence of any other
“material” with which the original saint can work and create (like “wood, stone, or paint,” “EL,”
162, the only possibility that remains for him are persons as such. As I said before, for Scheler,
the original saint “can only be present through, and in, persons” ("EL," 162). Lacking any
specific empirical requirements for true following to occur, there is more space, so to speak, for

\textsuperscript{72} For the (especially late) importance of ritual in Scheler’s philosophy of religion, see Hafkesbrink, “The Meaning
of Objectivism and Realism in Max Scheler’s Philosophy of Religion.” 305-306, according to whom, for Scheler,
“the only fact which guarantees the religious object absolutely authentically is the existence of specific religious acts
and intentions” (305), although that does not mean that, for him, the reality of God depends on us—it is only its
guarantee that does; and Clarke, “The Contribution of Max Scheler to the Philosophy of Religion,” 586.
the follower to move.\textsuperscript{73}

Now, how can we make sense of Scheler’s personalist model of authority, and its corresponding mode of following? What is its significance, say, as an alternative to the obedience that is paid to a Weberian charismatic leader, as we examined it in the previous section? In my opinion, its significance lies on the way it tries to balance two related tensions. The first one is that, on the one hand, as we saw before, in following the original saint, the followers are attracted by something they do not choose. Scheler says that even before we can choose them, exemplars “possess us and attract us” (“EL,” 141). Moreover, contrary to a subject matter, which we can study at will, “no person is knowable by way of spontaneous penetration, but only by way of free self-disclosure toward another person” (“EL,” 153). Thus, again, seemingly constraining human freedom of choice, true following is “directed” from “the outside,” that is, by the exemplar. On the other hand, however, this constraint is nonetheless “open” or indeterminate, in the way that I indicated two paragraphs above. By insisting on the irrelevance of material or empirical conditions, and on the difference between free-following and mere copying, this apparently unfree attraction leaves much to be decided by that who follows.

The second tension is that, as Scheler claims, it is only by emulating another, in the ineffable manner that we have so far described, that the followers can truly become themselves.

\textsuperscript{73} I take this analysis to be consistent with John F. Crosby’s identification of several so-called “anti-authoritarian” elements in Scheler’s personalist philosophy. Among them, he lists the following: Scheler’s aversion to moral obligation, expressed in the claim that the more persons become awakened to values and come to know them intimately, the less they live by obligation; his idea that reward and punishment make no properly moral sense and that God does not reward and punish human beings; his idea of emulation of an exemplar, as opposed to the obeying of teachings and commands of a master; his preference of the method of “relaxation of the will” as opposed to undergoing conscious effort and exertion of the will as a way of cultivating one’s soul (John F. Crosby, “Person and Obligation: Critical Reflections on the Anti-Authoritarian Strain in Scheler’s Personalism, American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly 79, no. 1 (2005), 92). Crosby, however, is critical of this anti-authoritarian elements, and intends to restore the place of obligation and duty within a personalist outlook that he otherwise endorses. On Scheler’s so-called aversion to authority and obligation, see also Hans Urs von Baltasaa, Apocalypse der deutschen Seele III (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1998), 84-192; and Dietrich von Hildebrand, “Max Schelers Stellung zur katholischen Gedankenwelt,” in Die Menschheit am Scheideweg (Regensburg: Habbel Verlag, 1955), 609.
Emulation, as we saw, should be sharply distinguished from “mere copying,” even if it does constitute “the ever new reproduction of the cast of [the exemplar’s] person” (“EL,” 156). To put the tension in terms of freedom—and as graphically as possible—following Scheler’s metaphor of the “human chain” by which exemplary figures “lift” those below them, it is as if only by hanging onto this chain, and following the “pull” it exerts, you can become freer. In this process—displayed, according to Scheler, by people like Bernhard of Clairvaux, St. Francis, and Thomas a Kempis74—“man is initially drawn up by his more fitting models, whose highest kinds are drawn by God, and whose very highest is, according to Christian faith, God and man. Man ascends up this pyramid but on winding paths to reach out for his deepest self: ‘become who you are’” (“EL,” 143, translation slightly modified).75

Another way of looking at this tension is as follows. The original saint, the holy person, Scheler claims, does not possess an individuality (“EL,” 167). That is, he says, because an individual must be one among many, and the original saint, like God, is only one. However, ironically, it is only by imitating an exemplar who does not have an individuality, that the followers can acquire one; only so, can they become persons. If we translate this proposition into more contemporary debates about authority and identity, we might conclude that personhood cannot be properly intended: just as the following saints gain individuality by emulating that who does not have one—namely, the original saint, who, as we saw, does not offer any clear pattern

74 Bernard de Clairvaux (1090-1153), French abbot who was the primary reformer of the Cistercian order. Scheler esteems in him his mysticism, his emphasis on faith at the expense of doctrine, and his distinction between different types of knowledge. Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471), author of The Imitation of Christ, important Christian book on devotion. Scheler approves him for his emphasis on ritual, imitation, humility. St. Francis (1181-1226), Roman Catholic friar, of whom Scheler admires his conception of love as relation to God and the world, as well as his emphasis on poverty and frugality. See Max Scheler, “Franz von Assisi als Vorbild ‘erotischer’ Allseitigkeit,” in Schriften zur Anthropologie, ed. Martin Arndt (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1994), 287-97.

75 Notice again how the role of the will in Scheler’s picture of the self is diminished. As the conception of God leaves behind the (more Greek) notion of a self-sufficient and perfect, substance, to become instead a person with whom we can have direct communication, the human will seems to “subside” accordingly.
to follow, but just an invitation to “come along”—personhood cannot be a well-defined project, which we can envisage beforehand. In other words, the project of becoming autonomous, free—in sum, an individual—cannot be actively carried out—at least not without it turning into a self-defeating enterprise.

Let’s take the translation even further. I think that in this proposition we can see the seeds of the claim that identity cannot be sought for, because somehow in doing so, we lose its personal substance. According to this idea, as soon as we “tried to find ourselves,” as the contemporary defenders of authenticity invite us to do, we would lose ourselves: as soon as we tried to define our “identity,” we would betray it.76 As I said before, in my reading, these tensions show that, in his reflections on exemplarity, Scheler is, in effect, carving out some space between human action and grace—that is, between what is under our control, and what is not—trying to make room for a conception of freedom consistent with his theory of the self as we examined it in previous chapters—namely, an individuality that is aware of its inner multiplicity, and of its unique, personal, character.77

To sum up, in Scheler—as in Bergson—we find a conception of authority exercised by an exemplary figure, together with a conception of following characterized by emulation. Both authors share the Weberian idea that personal authority is a rich and indispensable source of moral education. They are both aware—just like Weber was, although from a very different metaphysical standpoint—that part of exemplarity’s ethico-political significance is that it tries to

76 See Taylor’s defense of the value of authenticity, and the ethics that follow from it, as well as recent efforts to criticize him, as for instance, Simon Feldman, Against Authenticity: Why You Shouldn’t Be Yourself (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2015). Feldman criticizes Taylor, but on grounds that Scheler would also find objectionable.

77 In this respect, my reading of Scheler would situate him within a tradition of thinking about freedom in positive terms, that is normally traced back to Benjamin Constant and Isaiah Berlin. For an argument against such tradition, see Eric Nelson, “Liberty: One Concept Too Many?,” Political Theory 33, no. 1 (2005): 58–78.
preserve individuality, and thus freedom, in the face of authority.

In both cases, the differences with Weber spring from their respective theories of personality. Put very briefly, Weber’s relativism towards values, and his skeptical approach in social science, yield a notion of personality that is “minimalistic,” or—as people would say today in political theory—“unencumbered.” On the contrary, as we have seen throughout this dissertation, Bergson and Scheler’s respective conceptions of personality are both dense and deep, although, of course, not for that reason less elusive. Immersed as they are in deeply theological and religious debates, Bergson and Scheler’s reflections on exemplarity hold the promise of making us familiar with a notion of personal authority, capable of accounting for an encumbered or complex self, but without renouncing, however, to the aspiration of individuality and freedom.

Philosophically speaking, this notion of personal authority, or exemplarity, goes hand in hand with two other elements within their theories. First, a “deflated,” “non-sovereign” conception of the will. We saw the same idea with Bergson in chapter 3 with respect to the uncertainty: for him, there are benefits that ensue from a will that is to some extent amorphous, capable of accommodating change as it comes. Only such a will is capable of accepting that it cannot be the sole author of its own life-story, since parts of the latter are written by others and by the circumstances.78 Likewise, I think, only such a conception of the will would be capable of dealing successfully with the tensions that we just explored with Scheler—namely, that identity should not be intended (that is, that it cannot spring directly from our will), and that following others (that is, the will of another) is not necessarily contrary to individuality and freedom.

Second, exemplarity as articulated in the works of Scheler and Bergson crucially depends

on the faculty of intuition, such as we have been examining it with our authors all along this dissertation. As I said in the introduction, their philosophical insights and proposals depend on the assumption that there is a faculty of cognition, different both from the understanding and from sensibility, that makes reality richer than what concepts and sensations offer. Exemplarity is no exception to this. In contrast, for instance, to what is usually referred to as “epistemic authority,” according to which someone is supposed to enjoy legitimacy on account of a substantive qualification—typically, the possession of certain knowledge, experience, or talent—the authority exercised by exemplars in Bergson’s and Scheler’s sense, cannot be captured by reason.\(^{79}\) Naturally, it cannot be captured either merely by our senses, and probably not even by our judgment.\(^{80}\) It needs to be captured by intuition (our sense of duration in our inner life, in Bergson; Wertnehmung, in Scheler). That is why, for Scheler, the kind of following that corresponds to personal exemplarity is sustained by faith in a person, and not in an idea. Likewise, that is why, for Bergson, modern democracy—the modern religion of humanity—rests on intuition, and not on reason.

Finally, notice that despite all the similarities that unite the authors’ respective approaches to exemplarity, there is, as I have already indicated, one important difference—especially from a politico-philosophical perspective. Whereas in Bergson I identified a democratic—that is, egalitarian—model of exemplarity, in Scheler’s treatment, his usual conceptual distinctions—in this case, that between folgen and nachfolgen, or between admiring, honoring, and reflecting—provide the clue for understanding the possibility of freedom in the


sense of the individual personhood, even in the midst of inequality or hierarchy. I will now turn to address this point.

**Scheler’s elusive aristocracy vs. Bergson’s modern defense of ostracism**

In this concluding section, I want to explore some possible implications of the difference between both authors regarding the moral equality of persons. In order to do so, I propose to address an intriguing puzzle that emerges from the comparative reading of their texts. The puzzle regards their respective treatments of Jesus Christ. As we just saw, Scheler reserves a special place to him, as Christianity’s “the original saint.” Even if such superiority is extremely elusive—it does not seem to require any positive belief, but just some kind of receptivity to Christ’s presence among the followers—Scheler does emphatically insist in the distinction between the original saint, and the ones who follow him.

Now, despite all the similarities between Bergson’s treatment of mysticism and Scheler’s treatment of sainthood, the former decidedly omits any special treatment of Christ. At most, we find a couple of references to him that, instead of underscoring Jesus’ extraordinary character, focus on Christ as a sign of man’s divinity. On this score, Bergson says:

From our standpoint, which shows us the divinity of all men, it matters little whether or no Christ be called a man. It does not even matter that he be called Christ. Those who have gone so far as to deny the existence of Jesus cannot prevent the Sermon on the Mount from being in the Gospels, with other divine sayings. Bestow what name you like on their author, there is no denying that there was one. The raising of such problems does not concern us here (TS, 239-40).

Why is that? Why would Bergson omit dwelling into, and even almost naming, the groundbreaking figure that gave rise to what he considers the highest moral exemplars in human history? How can we make sense of Bergson’s omission, and what can we learn from it?

81 I thank John Harpham, who originally called my attention to this point.
Especially, what can we learn from the contrast offered by Scheler’s emphasis on the original saint in his treatment of exemplarity?

I propose to think of this contrast in light, first, of their differing positions on moral equality, and second, of their respective theories of personality, as well as their respective treatments of language, as we have been exploring them in previous chapters. Seen from these vantage points, Bergson’s omission offers an interesting insight regarding the exercise of moral and political power, and the dynamics of freedom and domination. This insight, more specifically, has to do with the conditions of possibility for the practice of “following without obeying” to be successful.

Bergson’s treatment of the Christian mystics is, I think, especially conducive to accommodating imitation as a genuine moral practice. As he says: “if the great mystics are indeed such as we have described them, they are the imitators, and original but incomplete successors [continuateur], of what the Christ of the Gospels was completely” (TS, 240). And even more, he adds, “[Christ] Himself may be considered as the successor [continuateur] of the prophets of Israel” (TS, 240). Imitating, for Bergson, does not evoke the perils of inauthenticity or lack of autonomy, as Scheler would have it. He does not need to distinguish between imitation and emulation, or between “true reproduction” and “mere copying.” Rather, he simply says that by imitating Christ, the mystics carry forward in an original although incomplete way, what Jesus was completely and perfectly before them.

One way of understanding this contrast between both authors is to see Bergson’s treatment of mysticism as a way of minimizing the conditions under which imitation becomes indeed problematic—namely, the presence of an overwhelmingly extraordinary figure. The lack of emphasis on Christ’s singularity, in other words, make sense in order to spark the virtues of
imitation, making it easier to engage in the practice of emulating others. Scheler was onto something when he denounced the formula *imitatio Christi*, as an inaccurate depiction of what our relation to Christ should be. *Emulation*, not imitation, should be our aim—as usual, Scheler explores those distinctions conceptually. So while for Scheler the solution is found getting rid of imitation, avoiding thus the risk of simulacrum and domination, it is as if, for Bergson, the problem did not reside in the first term, *imitatio*, but in the second one, *Christi*.

The reason lies in his theory of personality and, relatedly, of language. The admittedly strange exclusion of the greatest figure of Christianity in Bergson’s treatment of “the religion of humanity,” and his exclusive focus on rather “subordinate figures” of Christian mysticism (that is, subordinate to Christ himself, such as Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint Catherine of Genoa, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Saint Francis, George Fox, etc.), amounts, in my reading, to a tacit acknowledgment of the easiness with which models become icons, and character becomes image.

For Bergson, language’s inability to provide a stronghold from which to resist the force of the example, makes it difficult to distinguish between admiring, honoring, and reflecting someone’s brightness. The easiness with which the flux of our inner life can be frozen by concepts and ready-made images, makes it difficult to resist the “force of the idol”—to use Scheler’s language. Think of it this way: Christ, because of his importance and uniqueness, is dangerously close to becoming a hero (he is indeed called “our Savior”). True, Scheler asserts that Christ is not a hero, but, again, from the Bergsonian vantage point of the inability of language to provide stable and meaningful distinctions, Christ’s uniqueness makes him, and especially figures like him, problematic in our psycho-sociological horizon. By expelling Christ from the picture, Bergson’s theory of exemplarity—together with his theories of personality and
language—can be understood as a modern defense of ostracism.\textsuperscript{82}

To reiterate: fallacious as it is from a strictly logical point of view, the idea is: heroes are unique, Christ is unique, ergo, from a psycho-sociological point of view, Christ (or figures like him) have the potential of becoming heroes, with all the drawbacks which that brings along for the purposes of moral education. Unique figures run the risk of becoming idols, and their followers run the risk of becoming sucked by the social power they exert. To put it in terms of the Schelerian distinction between leaders and exemplars, we could say that certain exemplars, because of their originality, become powerful resources in the hands of leaders, where they serve better the goals of command and domination, rather than those of the formation of moral autonomy.

Contrastingly, in Scheler, the distinction between imitation and emulation, and with the elusiveness or ineffability of the holy person, are together meant to assuage this danger. That is why, in the sub-heading, I defined his moral approach as “elusively aristocratic.” However, as we saw, that led to the tensions that I laid out above, in terms of individuality and freedom.\textsuperscript{83} In the face of these difficulties, the Bergsonian perspective invites us instead to preserve uniqueness without an appeal to the extraordinary; to make uniqueness, so to speak, anonymous. The role-model offered by the great Christian mystics as Bergson depicts them, tries to make, as it were, room for others in a way the original exemplarity of Christ cannot, setting thus the conditions for imitation to bring about the desired results.


\textsuperscript{83} See pp. 219-20.
Appendix A. Bergson’s critique of luxury and capitalism

In chapter 5, we saw that the exemplary authority Bergson acknowledges in the figure of the mystic is grounded on its democratic character: not only in virtue of the democratic way of following that this type of authority calls for, but also as a result of the message about humanity that it bears, and of its active and this-worldly character. These elements already explain to a good extent Bergson’s turn to mysticism. However, there are two additional elements that further account for the force that Bergson attributes to it, and that gain especial relevance in the political context of the early 1930s. These features, again, will be best appreciated in light of Weber’s work —however, this time in reference not to his authority-typology, but to his work on the ethics of Protestantism.

Weber’s Puritan personality, as an ideal-type, identifies a set of attitudes and dispositions that flourished in the cultural context of Protestantism, and that, famously, were especially conducive to the emergence of capitalism. This is not the place to review in detail Weber’s thesis, and the debates that surround it. It will suffice instead to identify the main strokes of this type of personality as Weber presents it, and above all, to keep in mind the cultural force that he attributed to Protestantism as a way of life.

The Protestant ethic is characterized, according to Weber, by a stern dedication to work, which ultimately serves the psychological need of dealing with the anxiety concerning salvation. In the absence of any certainty in this respect, and confronted with the impossibility of having any real influence on the outcome, the Puritan dutifully throws him or herself into the worldly activity of acquisition. Acquisitiveness, in turn, together with the ascetic imperative against luxury and any lavish use of property, fuels the formation of capitalism. Of course, the later prospects of capitalism as a viable economic system pose a completely different question, but
what interests Weber is simply the kind of mentality that set the appropriate stage for its emergence. This admittedly very schematic picture will serve, I hope, to appreciate the extent to which, structurally speaking, Bergson’s depiction of mysticism addresses the exact same questions as Weber’s Puritan type, offering, however, a different answer to them.

As we saw in chapter 3, what Bergson calls “closed morality” and “static (or primitive) religion” can be understood as “insurance devices”: mythology has the function of providing confidence to human beings in the face of uncertainty. Similarly, mysticism (or the “open” source of morality and religion) “lifts the soul to another plane,” “ensur[ing] for [it] to a preeminent degree, the security and the serenity which is the function of the static religion to provide” (TS, 213). Such security and serenity is made possible by the fact that, as we said before, unlike other types, Christian mysticism allows for a personal contact with the divine, in which the ruling principle is love. So, while the Puritan work ethic offers a psychological outlet in the face of uncertainty, mysticism offers the reassuring insight of hope.

The psychological infrastructure needed to sustain an attitude of devotion to work is attained by the Puritan’s rational systematization of his or her conduct, and the promotion of self-discipline. This strictly regulates the relation to his or her own self, and the interactions with others. By contrast, in Bergson’s account, mysticism fosters some kind of subtle flexibility, in which, even leadership roles can be swapped. On this respect, he says, for example, that the close study of the relations between the spiritual adviser and the soul seeking counsel in the mystic tradition, shows that “[the part] that has meekly [avec humilité] acquiesced in yielding to guidance has more than once, no less meekly, become the guide” (TS, 247).

This important contrast notwithstanding, Bergson’s conception of mysticism would not constitute a practical alternative to Weber’s asceticism if it were not for its fundamental active
character. As we saw in the previous section, unlike Weber, who certainly opposed the active character of ascetic Puritanism to the passivity of the mystic religions of Asia, Bergson thought that Christian mysticism does not fly away from the world.\(^1\) Thus, subverting Weber’s spectrum of religions and corresponding personalities, of which complete asceticism and complete mysticism are the extremes, Bergson’s proposes an active mystic, whose preeminent moral-psychological feature is, as we will see in the next section, what the author calls the practical ideal of “good sense” or “intellectual vigor.”

Of course, the active character of Bergson’s mystics and that of Weber’s Puritans are worlds apart—a contrast that takes us directly to the political agenda behind Bergson’s interest in mysticism. Bergson’s last chapter in The Two Sources, titled “Final Remarks: Mechanics and Mysticism,” is almost completely devoted to the problem of war. As I read the “Final Remarks,” it is an effort to present mysticism’s way of life as the most adequate remedy for war in the early 1930s. Writing in the interwar period, Bergson thought that war had two different roots. The first one, of course, was nature itself and its undying tendency toward the construction of barriers to safeguard and preserve the closed societies that we all live in.\(^2\) However, on top of this imperishable exclusionary side of every human association, says Bergson, there is an artificial source of war, which he completely attributes to industry, mechanization, and the ensuing

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\(^2\) As I said before, against naïve cosmopolitan hopes, Bergson explains that the closed side of morality cannot ever be ‘canceled’ or ‘left behind’ once and for all. The close and the open do not refer to two different kinds of societies (as in Popper’s later appropriation of the terms), but to two coexisting dispositions within every society, and thus war is an entirely natural outcome.
endless multiplication of needs.\textsuperscript{3}

Thus, in the “Final Remarks,” Bergson issues a vigorous call for a “return to simplicity”—the kind of simplicity he finds in Christian mysticism, and which he explicitly presents as the target of “three interrelated reactions”: “the Reformation, the Renaissance, and the first symptoms or precursory signs of the great inventive impetus [that] date from the same period” (TS, 308). Industriousness, \textit{not in itself}, but through the voracity of economic competition and the frivolity of luxury, makes it very unlikely, according to Bergson, that we have the moral resources to stop war.\textsuperscript{4} Even science, again, \textit{not in itself}, but as \textit{co-opted} by the artificial creation of needs and an inebriated spirit of invention, has contributed to the aggravation of the problem: “the last war (WWI), together with those future ones which we can dimly foresee, if we are indeed doomed to have more wars, is bound up with the industrial character of our civilization” (TS, 288).

Now, it is important to clarify the exact charge that Bergson holds against industry and mechanization. First of all, his claim is not destined to show, for instance, how particular economic enterprises are directly invested in war endeavors. Those studies exist in the field of political economy, and they can help us to understand the maladies that Bergson is diagnosing, but they would not provide a direct proof of this thesis. That is because his argument, as I understand it, is not that economic powers directly feed military conflicts (although, again, that would be a valuable piece of information to have a clearer picture of the situation), but that \textit{culturally} and \textit{morally}, given the frenzy of artificial needs and consumerism, humanity does not

\textsuperscript{3} Notice that the first root of war coincides with the first (closed) source of morality and religion, while the second, given the partial connection that Bergson certainly draws between open morality and mechanization (see below note 5), partially coincides with the second root of war. Thus, interestingly, in Bergson’s view, the “two sources of morality and religion,” are inextricably related to the two sources of contemporary war.

\textsuperscript{4} See Soulez and Worms, \textit{Bergson. Biographie}, 236.
have the moral capacity of addressing the problem of war.

In the “Final Remarks,” as well as in the passage of the Nobel speech I quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Bergson insists on the idea that machines have “extended the body of humanity,” while a comparable spiritual effort is lacking. Having been able to access and use the “potential energies stored up for millions of years, borrowed from the sun, deposited in coal, oil, etc.” (TS, 304-05), humanity is now endowed with a “body, distended out of all proportion, [in which] the soul remains what it was, too small to fill it, too weak to guide it. Hence the gap between the two. Hence the tremendous social, political and international problems which are just so many definitions of this gap, and which provoke so many chaotic and ineffectual efforts to fill it” (TS, 310). Thus, Bergson’s real concern is with a political culture and a social morality incapable of meeting the demands of the day—specifically, the threat of war, which, as I said, is manifestly the immediate background concern of Bergson’s last work.5

Second, even if he identifies industriousness and science as being part of the problem that threatens human civilization with highly destructive wars, Bergson’s argument is not a wholesale vilification of modernity and technology. The problem, as he sees it, is the “frenzy” in which civilization is trapped. He argues that, just as in the Middle Ages the frenzy of asceticism led to many exaggerations among the religious elite, and to a general indifference towards the conditions of daily existence among the masses (TS, 298), in modern times we witness the opposite fit of excitement, which, in his view, seriously aggravates the inescapable war-instinct present in any society. Thus, he proposes to make our lives “both more purposeful and more simple.” He calls for “less waste,” “less enviousness,” and invites us to turn against unsound

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5 Similarly, Caterina Zanfi connects Bergson’s interest in mysticism and religion with his concerns about mechanicism, industrialism and consumerism. See Caterina Zanfi, Bergson, la Tecnica, la Guerra. Una Rilettura delle Due Fonti, 122-23, 139. Zanfi also offers a very brief comparison between Weber and Bergson (see p. 134), but does not extend the analysis to their respective theories of personality or exemplarity, as I do in chapter 5.
cravings for comfort (TS, 302-03). He complains that technology is used for the comfort and luxury of the few, rather than for the liberation of all (TS, 309).

However, the “Final Remarks” are not a plea for a complete rejection of science and technology. On the contrary, there he states that “the mystical summons up the mechanical” (TS, 309). That is because mysticism, according to Bergson, in order to be complete, needs to free itself from the fear of hunger. Otherwise, it would be unable to achieve the “warm and hopeful” view of the world that characterizes it (that is why true mysticism, in his view, could not develop in India: because “inevitable famine doomed millions of wretches to die of starvation,” TS, 226).

In order to provide minimally, mysticism needs to rely on technology to some extent: “[m]an will rise above earthly things only if a powerful equipment supplies him with the requisite fulcrum” (TS, 309).

Bergson’s final dictum regarding the relation between the spiritual and the material is that “we must use matter to get away from matter” (TS, 309). Curiously enough, so expressed, such maxim could have been adopted by Weber’s Puritans as well. However, as we have seen, the underlying picture is very different. Even if, to be sure, Protestantism is allergic to luxury and opulence, it did, according to Weber, “[l]iberate the acquisition of wealth from the inhibitions of the traditionalist ethics,” sanctioning and fostering the development of industry and of accumulation. On the contrary, the latter, in Bergson’s view, constitute the archenemy in the battle to regain the moral resources necessary to resist war.

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6 Zanfi argues that Bergson’s positive connection between mechanicism and mysticism is one of the most original elements within the socio-theological arguments that he presents in The Two Sources (see Zanfi, Bergson, la Tecnica, la Guerra, 135, 143). She also offers an account of Bergson’s changes regarding the moral and philosophical implications of science and technology, in pp. 140-44.

Conclusion

The path that we have followed in this dissertation started out in Bergson’s and Scheler’s belief in intuition, and it aimed at reaching the ethico-political implications of such a belief. In both cases, that led us first to their respective conceptions of individuality or, more specifically, of personal uniqueness as the acknowledgement of some kind of inner diversity. In Bergson, as we saw in chapter 1, this meant the articulation of a notion of the “inner life” as something always in flux, changing and heterogeneous. The inner self thus understood escapes definition through concepts, and through language more generally. For him, our inner life is characterized by the passing of time—or by what he calls “duration”—and the response from us that it appropriately calls for is contained in what I have termed “Bergson’s alternative labor theory of value”—namely, that the past is of those who mix their labor with it, and acknowledge that it continues to act upon us. For Bergson, the past is neither fixed nor “gone for good,” even if it has, as one says, “passed” (moreover, we saw that Scheler shares such a conviction with Bergson).¹

Bergson’s conception of individuality as inner diversity lived in time took us, in turn, to a notion of agency that I explored in chapters 2 and 3. In the former chapter, the examination of Bergson’s phenomenology of agency yielded—against Kant’s conception that morality should be based on nothing less than the categorical imperative—what I called a “phenomenology of hesitation,” in which the oscillations of action in time and space are duly accepted as a constitutive trait of moral character. This was furthered in chapter 3, where I examined with Bergson and Guyau different ways of conceiving and dealing with uncertainty. There, I explained in what sense a Bergsonian conception of agency—founded on a non-sovereign will, and propped by habit and improvisation—is better endowed to deal with chance and contingency,

¹ See above p. 61, note 68.

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that is, with the future, and with our lack of control over it. I argued that whether we are eventually able to display this kind of agency as we relate to our past and our future, goes hand in hand with our capacity to grasp our individuality along Bergsonian lines—or, put differently, our capacity to intuit the duration of our inner self.

In the case of Scheler, as we saw in chapter 1, our faculty of intuition is exercised through a hierarchy of emotions, which gives us access to a corresponding hierarchy of value. Together, these parallel hierarchies exhibit the emotional complexity and the ethical richness of human life. Individuality—or personal uniqueness, as Scheler would say—is realized through our ability to discriminate between different nuances of emotions and values, without reducing any one of them to another. Such a conception of individuality leads, in turn, to distinctive notions of both autonomy and sympathy, as we saw in chapters 2 and 4, respectively.

Scheler’s notion of autonomy, based on the individuality of experience, as well as on the emotional and moral complexity of self, presented a challenge to Kant’s principle of publicity: the voice of conscience speaks always in particulars, and therefore, being responsible does not mean to publicly justify the maxim of our actions; rather, it means to be able to, first listen, and then respond to the singularity of such a voice. Again, our access to particularity in this sense is based on the faculty of intuition, which is understood however not as “magical,” “innate” or “spontaneous,” but rather, as something that should be trained and nurtured throughout our whole life.

Such a conception of individual moral existence—our own, as well as that of others—is the ground for Scheler’s conception of “true sympathy.” As we saw in chapter 4, the latter consists, for Scheler, in the capacity to understand the feelings of others, without however the injunction of feeling ourselves as they do—to put it in Platonic terms, we must “live in common”
without therefore “having pains and pleasures in common.”\(^2\) Compared to the Enlightenment sentimentalists—not to say to 19\(^{th}\)-century psychologists who held an empiricist and reductionist view of the psyche and of human moral capacities—Schelerian sympathy offers, or so I argued, distinctive protections for individuality against the socio-political threats proper to mass society.

Finally, in chapter 5, I examined the conceptions of exemplarity that we find in Bergson and in Scheler. Here, I wish here to relate briefly these conceptions of exemplarity to the issue of obligation, as it has appeared in one way or another throughout this dissertation. In chapters 2 and 3, we saw that, for Bergson, obligation cannot be based on reason, because the latter cannot binds us: only something that “matches” our agency can do so. Thus, from our perspective as agents, our relation to the law—namely, obligation—is comparable to our relation to crime or offense—namely, temptation. In other words, both obligation and temptation concern us as agents, and therefore, have an irreducible personal dimension. A similar idea can be found in Scheler’s insistence on the singularity of conscience: only something that matches, so to speak, the ontological status of the person, can speak to it bindingly. In other words, the honesty required by the worth of one’s own personal self obliges more than any rational or positive law.

Notice, then, that the model of authority contained in Schelerian and Bergsonian exemplarity responds to the same idea. To use again Flathman’s term, the “authoritative dimension” of the \textit{person} is rooted, in Scheler and Bergson, in its privileged ontological status, which is revealed to us by intuition. That is why we can ever grasp what is exemplary in someone only through such a faculty as well. Therefore, faced with the problem of false prophets, Bergson and Scheler’s reflections would not be able to offer a clear set of criteria that would allow us to distinguish falsehood from truth in this respect. However, their respective treatments

of exemplarity do tell us two things. First, they show us that we do have a faculty that allows us to recognize the force of an example; second, more importantly, that given our condition as persons, exemplarity has a privileged place in our moral formation.

Accordingly, neither Bergsonian nor Schelerian exemplarity has an answer to the question of whether the rule of laws, or that of men, is preferable. That is because their reflections are not only, or mainly, about rule or command, but about what obliges us in foro interno, that is, as agents or persons. As I said in chapter 5, that is both broader and narrower than the problem of who or what should rule.\(^3\) It is broader, because it regards what constitutes us as potential subjects to any kind of obligation—moral, religious, or political. Its political relevance in this sense comes from its anthropological significance: exemplarity shows us, or so my argument was, a way in which authority can be consistent, and even conducive to, human freedom. As we saw, this conception of authority requires a “deflated” notion of the will: for this kind of self, emulation or imitation (mimesis), habit, improvisation, and a good sentimental education more broadly, gain relevance at the expense of any emphasis on “voluntary” action.

However, the scope of exemplarity thus understood is also narrower than the question about rule, because exemplary authority cannot be said to always trump political obligation understood in a more positive, or juridical sense—although sometimes it might: think of cases of political and civil disobedience, or even of rebellion and revolution more broadly, in which claims derived from exemplary authority can play a very important role. The latter issue, however, is something that must remain outside of the scope of this dissertation.

Two further questions result from these reflections that will also remain unanswered here, but that I would nonetheless like to put forward, as potential directions for future research.

\(^3\) See above, p. 182.
First, to what extent does contemporary democratic theory, and contemporary democracies, depend indeed on an appeal to intuition? Does the notion of humanity, as treated in theories of cosmopolitanism or global-justice, and in the principles (and practice) of international law, feed on a notion that cannot be adequately accounted for by reason?

Second, and pushing in the contrary direction, to what extent does liberal democratic theory and practice rather exclude the development of the faculty of intuition? Liberal-democracy’s focus on the rule of law and not of men, and the corresponding civic education centered around reason and deliberation, might not be adequately equipped to foster the kind of moral education that intuition would require. What is liberal democracy missing out by neglecting what can be perceived in ways that its conception of legitimacy is not prepared to account for?
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