The Routledge Handbook of Political Phenomenology

Edited by Steffen Herrmann, Gerhard Thonhauser, Sophie Loidolt, Tobias Matzner, and Nils Baratella

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF POLITICAL PHENOMENOLOGY

Phenomenology has primarily been concerned with conceptual questions about knowledge and ontology. However, in recent years, the rise of interest and research in applied phenomenology has seen the study of political phenomenology move to a central place in the study of phenomenology generally.

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- Phenomenology of Alterity
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INTRODUCING POLITICAL PHENOMENOLOGY

Gerhard Thonhauser, Sophie Loidolt, and Steffen Herrmann

1. Introduction

The idea to edit a handbook on political phenomenology was motivated by three main reasons. In this introduction, we want to present them as opening theses to our field of exploration: (1) Political phenomenology exists in different variants today, even if not always under this name. We believe, however, that these approaches can justifiably be covered and systematized under the label 'political phenomenology.' Our goal is therefore to bring its different strands into dialogue with each other, to connect them to resources in the history of phenomenology, and to make them available to researchers from various disciplines and traditions who are interested in using phenomenological concepts and methods. (2) Political phenomenology makes an important systematic contribution to political theory. Our thesis is that it functions as a valuable corrective to dominant trends in current political philosophy and therefore serves a crucial function within contemporary political thought. By addressing what is understood as 'political' in political phenomenology, we aim to elaborate on the specific strengths and focuses of its various approaches. (3) Political phenomenology catalyzes crucial debates within the phenomenological tradition. As this handbook is meant to show, the history of political phenomenology goes back as far as the history of phenomenology itself. Reflecting on the history of the different phases and variants of its politicization not only serves as a significant medium for the self-understanding of the phenomenological movement but also allows it to be seen as a situated and engaged endeavor rather than a detached theoretical undertaking.

2. Contemporary Strands of Political Phenomenology

Let us begin the introduction of currently existing strands of political phenomenology by identifying three approaches in the contemporary intellectual landscape. A great deal of important work is being done under the label 'critical phenomenology.' The origins of critical phenomenology can be traced back to the meetings of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (see the very useful introduction by Magrí and McQueen 2023). Critical phenomenology is now a well-established approach with a lexicon style volume

elaborating on its key concepts (Weiss, Murphy, Salamon 2020) and its own journal (*Puncta: Journal of Critical Phenomenology*). There is a lively debate about what exactly is 'critical' about critical phenomenology and if and how critical phenomenology is different from classical phenomenology (Salamon 2018; Guenther 2021; Aldea, Heimämaa, and Carr 2022; Thonhauser 2023; Herrmann 2023a).

Moving from the North American context from which critical phenomenology originated to the German-speaking area, we find a second variation of contemporary political phenomenology that could be called the 'Waldenfels school.' Besides developing his own responsive phenomenology of the political (see Chapter 20), Bernhard Waldenfels was key in introducing French thinkers such as Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Foucault, and Derrida to German-speaking philosophy. Many of his students made use of different resources from those French philosophers for critical and political purposes: for instance, by combining a Foucauldian analysis of power with phenomenological questions (Gehring 2004) or by developing a Levinasian politics of alterity (Bedorf 2003; Gelhard 2005). Continuing this tradition, the bi-annual conference of the German Society for Phenomenological Research in 2017 had the title 'Phenomenology and the Political'. A selection of talks from this conference, including a systematic approach to the field of political phenomenology, was published under the title *Political Phenomenology: Experience, Ontology, Episteme* (Bedorf and Herrmann 2020).

Finally, moving to the British and Scandinavian context, the movement of 'applied' and, more specifically, 'engaged phenomenology' offers a third approach to using phenomenological tools for socio-political analysis. As the term is currently used, 'applied phenomenology' denotes any attempt to adopt concepts and methods from phenomenology for empirical work in disciplines such as psychology, cognitive science, sociology, anthropology, health sciences, nursing studies, and sports sciences (for an overview, see Burch 2021). Engaged phenomenology emphasizes the political commitment in these applications. The conference of the British Society of Phenomenology even saw it necessary to address the topic of engaged phenomenology in two parts, in 2020 and 2022. As in the case of critical phenomenology, it is an ongoing topic of lively debate whether applied/engaged phenomenology is defined by a unique method, how it relates to classical or 'pure' (as it is usually called in those debates) phenomenology, and in what sense it is rightfully deemed a phenomenological approach (see Zahavi 2023).

On the basis of the aforementioned approaches, one can speak of a political turn in contemporary phenomenology, the manifold manifestations of which we want to do justice to in this handbook. However, it should also be emphasized that even if this explicit politicization of phenomenology has only recently begun, politicization has always been present in phenomenology. This is often neglected in current discourse, and we suspect that a major reason is that the politicization the founding generation of phenomenology had in mind was not critical emancipative, but rather critical conservative. Indeed, it more often took the form of an orientation towards the tradition and pursued conservative, sometimes even reactionary aims. As, for example, the debate on *Gemeinschaft* vs. *Gesellschaft* (community vs. society) illustrates, many proponents of the first generation of phenomenology were politicized in that way (see Introduction to Part I and Chapter 4). Some also pursued revolutionary or enlightenment goals, but not in terms of an emancipatory fight against oppression, discrimination, and exploitation. While a leftist-emancipatory politicization of phenomenology most likely does not date back to the founders of phenomenology, it is not as if it does not have a long and rich history. Most importantly, French existentialism and

its serious attempt to bring phenomenology and Marxism together should be mentioned here. We cover this endeavor extensively in Part II. Similar developments took place in other countries of postwar Europe, such as in Italian phenomarxism, the Yugoslav Praxis School, and among dissidents in Central and Eastern European Warsaw Pact countries (see Chapter 23).

This handbook in this sense reinvestigates what the phenomenological tradition can offer to contemporary approaches to political phenomenology. And it therefore not only explores concepts *for* a political phenomenology but also draws these concepts *from* phenomenology. The systematic question that comes to mind here is: What actually makes a phenomenological approach 'political'? Or, to put it differently: What constitutes 'the political' in political phenomenology?

3. The Systematic Contribution of Political Phenomenology to Political Thought

A systematic understanding of what makes a phenomenological approach specifically political (in contrast, for example, to an ethical or socio-ontological approach) has only recently begun to emerge. While we are aware that broad characterizations of this kind are usually doomed to failure due to their generality, we will try to offer a preliminary understanding here of what constitutes the political in political phenomenology according to our considerations. This heuristic orientation should also make transparent what has guided us in the selection of authors and topics. As we see it, the political in political phenomenology can be roughly summarized in three respects. (1) First, in a narrow sense. In this case, the attribute 'political' stands for a certain subject area. Political systems such as democracy and totalitarianism, as well as their structural elements such as constitutions and laws, or institutions and their division of power come into view here. In this perspective, political phenomenology fits into the broad field of political theory, whose task it is to investigate the foundations, structures, and functions of political communities. (2) The second orientation aims at the politicization of our experience and therefore can be conceived as a critical political phenomenology. Here classifications, norms, and practices that appear as given in the 'natural attitude' are analyzed using phenomenological tools. This makes it possible to show that they are the result of social and historical processes of constitution and institution. As a consequence, they can become the object of social negotiation. In this case, the political aspect of political phenomenology consists of the politicization of phenomena that appear to us in everyday life as immediately given. (3) If we take this further, we can see a broad concept of political phenomenology emerge. We distinguish it from the other two in the sense that it takes up the fact that social classifications, norms, and practices are 'thick concepts' that cannot simply be described without being evaluated by our descriptions. For example, the analyses of gendered identities, the status of norms such as femininity and masculinity, and the examination of the multiple ways of doing gender are political because describing these phenomena requires taking sides. This is what the attribute 'political' stands for in the third case.

The varieties of what is 'political' in political phenomenology can thus be interpreted as a focus on a *subject area*, as a mode of *critical questioning*, or as a *partisan statement*. If one wants to deepen the first understanding of political phenomenology in the sense of addressing a subject area, it is helpful to build on the well-known distinction between 'policy,' 'politics,' and 'polity.' *Policy* primarily refers to certain political contents and topics, such

as ecology, social issues, and education; *politics*, on the other hand, refers to the negotiation of such topics in the public and the institutional spaces of the political community; *polity*, finally, refers to the principles and regulatory structures of the political community, such as those laid down in a constitution. With this tripartite division, we can distinguish between themes, processes, and institutions of the political order. Phenomenology can contribute to the investigation of such fields in different ways by presenting its own analysis of certain topics, such as migration, technology, and ecology (see Chapters 31, 34 and 35). This can enable a new kind of access to and perspective on these topics. At the same time, however, phenomenological reflection can also be used to focus on political processes, such as consensus formation, compromise, and dispute, and thus elucidate what they entail (e.g., from an intentional perspective) and how they should be shaped (Herrmann 2023b). Finally, it can also reflect on the normative foundation of political orders by developing its own conception of intersubjectivity, community, and communality (Loidolt 2018). Political phenomenology thus enters the broad field of classical political philosophy, in which liberalism, deliberativism, and republicanism are the most powerful currents. Political phenomenology is not committed to any of these options, insofar as it is not a fixed theoretical framework but is, in itself, heterogeneous. Depending on whether one operates with Heidegger, Fanon, or Arendt, one will accordingly arrive at quite different political orientations. Nonetheless, it seems crucial to us that all the different phenomenologies derive their respective norms from concrete experience. Political phenomenologies do not work in the vacuum of ideas; they start with concrete bodily, affective, and social experiences in order develop a political standpoint.

Another important distinction of political thought is helpful here and allows us to deepen our understanding of the second and third strands of phenomenology: Since the 1980s, the distinction between '*la politique*' (politics) and '*le politique*' (the political) has become widely established in francophone political philosophy (Marchart 2007). Although this distinction appears in different terminological variations in the works of various authors, it always systematically expresses a demarcation line that is drawn vis-à-vis traditional political theory. The latter is criticized for only asking about the organization of political processes while remaining blind to the constitution of the political framework itself. Where theories of politics, for example, focus on concrete questions of distribution, theories of the political ask how the political subjects who can lay claim to just distribution are constituted in the first place. Hence, theories of the political can be understood primarily as theories of the critical interrogation of all those basic concepts and assumptions that classical political theory has established or simply adopted from political discourse. Accordingly, theories of the political are interested in all those social and political movements that question what we take for granted. (This can have a merely theoretical or a more activist side.) It is therefore exemplary for the kind of understanding of political phenomenology we portrayed earlier as critical questioning. The continuities with phenomenology become obvious if we look at the lineage of ideas and constellations of authors: Claude Lefort, a student of Merleau-Ponty, played a fundamental role in shaping the distinction between '*le politique*' and '*la politique*' and, consequently, also in the development of radical democratic theories of the political that rely on this distinction. (See Chapters 7 and 25.)

In summary, we can say that what is political about political phenomenology can be understood in terms of a subject area, a process of critical questioning, or taking a political stance. As a final characterization of these three aspects of political phenomenology, we can point out three respective counter-positions that our authors target or criticize: (1) Political

phenomenology as a theory of political contents, structures, and procedures is usually directed against a *political normativism*. Phenomenologists criticize such theories for wanting to analyze political norms such as freedom, equality, or solidarity on the basis of theory without resorting to the lived experience of subjects. Political phenomenology, on the other hand, tries to offer saturated normative concepts gained from experiences of community, (in)justice, freedom, solidarity, etc. (2) Political phenomenology as critical questioning is directed against all forms of *political fundamentalism*. Such fundamentalism is typically found in political orders that claim to realize the natural or historic-teleological order of things. In the form of totalitarianism, it aims to close and destroy all possible alternatives to its own ideological narrative. A tuned-down version of this attitude is found today in authoritarianism and populism, in which the voice of the people and the irrefutable power of tradition are claimed as sources of unequivocal answers to all political problems. In all cases, political fundamentalism is characterized by a denial of plurality. Many versions of political phenomenology instead show precisely how plurality, alterity, and contingency are existential or even ontological factors that amount to keeping the 'place of power' empty and open. (This, again, is Lefort's formulation of the paradigm of the democratic age.) (3) Finally, political phenomenology as a form of partisanship for a specific conception of the political order contradicts notions of *political functionalism*. Political functionalism understands politics solely from the perspective of coordination and control. As a result, democratic processes of power formation are primarily regarded as instrumental processes of outcome acquisition. Several strands of political phenomenology argue that this not only might result in a cynical kind of realpolitik but also disregards the fact that political action belongs to the basic and intrinsically meaningful dispositions of human life. While in no way exhaustive, these remarks aim to offer our systematical take on what can be regarded as political phenomenology and what its possible contribution to the debate can be.

4. The Political History of Political Phenomenology

The last section of this introduction presents the main guidelines by which we have ordered and grouped the different authors and movements presented in this handbook. The narrative we want to present about phenomenology becoming political is that in each case, it is deeply influenced by the respective historical events that shaped the 20th and 21st century in Europe and beyond.

The first deep rupture, which coincides with the generation of the founding phenomenologists, is the First World War—i.e., 'The Great War'—followed by a time of crisis for the newly emerging, fragile democracies in Europe (see de Warren and Vongehr 2017; Hacke 2018). What was known as the 'old world' no longer existed after this war. The political and societal changes were so massive that many philosophical responses called for a new radicalism—which Husserl, for example, always regarded positively in the sense of going back to the 'roots' (see Husserl 1994, 408–11). In Part I of this handbook, we aim to show that the important founding figures of phenomenology (Husserl, Scheler, and Heidegger, as well as Stein, Reinach, von Hildebrand, and Kolnai) were shattered and/or inspired by their political situation and were therefore not at all as 'unpolitical' as is usually claimed. Even though one might not endorse their political stances, and even if there are highly problematic cases such as Heidegger, it is impossible to claim that early or classic phenomenologists did not care about politics. In fact, it was nearly impossible not to position oneself or to analyze the 'crisis' that 'European mankind' was in.

The second catastrophic event that followed shortly after and as a consequence of the failure of the interwar period was the Second World War. Parts II and III and, to a certain extent, also Part IV revolve around the deeply shattering realities of the Holocaust, totalitarianism, and occupation, as well as the aftermath of colonial liberation and the Cold War. Part II covers the phenomenological proponents of French existentialism (Sartre, Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty, Thảo, Fanon), who were known to be engaged public intellectuals and political writers addressing economic, sexist, and racist oppression. The spotlight in this handbook is on how they politicized themselves and phenomenology in the struggle with colonialism, National Socialism, and Stalinism. Part III covers a more heterogeneous group (Schütz, Arendt, Anders, Patočka) who expressed care for the social and political world after totalitarianism and who also looked critically at the challenges of technology, bureaucracy, and consumerist society. What becomes visible here are the different directions in which a Husserlian and a Heideggerian approach are taken and how phenomenology was politicized beyond the influence of Marxism. Part IV continues to be characterized by the project to overcome a thinking of totality; however, the focus here is directed towards alterity rather than an analysis of the social and political world. Several authors discussed in this section (Levinas, Ricœur, Derrida, Irigaray, Waldenfels) in this sense started out with ethical projects that subsequently, inevitably politicized themselves. On the timeline, we move from the 1970s to the 1990s, from the cultural revolution of 1968 to the end of the Soviet Union in 1989 and the challenges posed by an increasingly pluralistic and globalized 'postmodern' world, where nonidentity (or identity politics), difference, and the relation between the self and the other gained traction as political questions.

Part V introduces a kind of incision before we proceed to the contemporary questions and developments. It covers the cross-cutting issue of fruitful debates and controversies between political phenomenology and other politico-philosophical approaches, especially those that continue to inspire discussions today: the long cultivated enmity with Critical Theory, for example, which contemporary 'critical phenomenology' seems to have productively overcome, or the manifold approaches to combining phenomenology with Marxism, which, beyond the French Existentialists, we find in different forms in Italy and the former Yugoslavia. Other important debates have taken place with queer theory, which moved from salient criticisms to a new rapprochement, and with post-foundationalism, which sparked new ontologies of the political based on contingency and difference.

Finally, the last and largest Part VI provides an outlook on contemporary debates fueled by post-democratic indifference, so-called 'culture wars,' the rise of populist and neo-fascist movements, and an ecological and climate crisis that can no longer be denied. Without trying to historicize specific groups or strands of today's debates—for which we believe it is too early—we have focused on specific topics here. Political, critical, applied, and engaged phenomenologists are all active participants (maybe with different emphases) in analyzing and discussing these contemporary challenges of crisis and transformation. We have tried to map out topical clusters of race/decolonization, migration/refuge, (trans)gender, (dis)ability, technology, and ecology that intersect and interact with one another. Chapters on white ignorance and affect and emotion additionally demonstrate the phenomenological resources for analyzing today's polarized societies.

Given that the overall structure of the handbook stretches over a broad frame of time and political orientation, we hope to offer a rich and nuanced understanding of what political phenomenology has been and what it can be today. As is always the case, we had to be selective and discussed a great deal about who and what should be included in our

handbook. Being aware that every selection can be questioned with good arguments, we have tried to supply the author-focused parts (Parts I through IV) with a 'context' chapter at the end. This at least allows a broader view of the figures and contexts that played a role in each phase of the development of political phenomenology. By engaging with its history, this handbook explores the opportunities but also the pitfalls of a phenomenological engagement with politics. We see Part I as addressing the founders and foundations of phenomenology. Parts II through IV represent three different paths or 'pillars' for how a politicization of phenomenology took place. Part V is there to demonstrate that the politicization of phenomenology is not just an internal debate but was inspired by mutual influences and controversies with other traditions, which are fruitfully taken up. Finally, Part VI aims to show how phenomenology can contribute to tackling pressing political issues of our present time.

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PART I

Founders of Phenomenology

INTRODUCTION TO PART I

Plural Beginnings, Ambivalent Heritage

Sophie Loidolt

1. Introduction[1]

Thinkers, as Hannah Arendt (1977a, 75–78) says, can distance themselves from worldly events in order to make sense of them. But they cannot escape the times they live in. Part I of this handbook looks at the founders of phenomenology and examines their politicization through the events of the Great War and the interwar period. Given the genesis of phenomenology, the authors we cover in this part exclusively originate in Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and there is therefore also a specific focus on the impact WWI had on these countries. A complete breakdown of the political and social order, followed by economic instability, made the political situation explosive. Modernity had finally arrived in the form of mass society, the contingency of formerly fixed orders, and a split society, torn between a widespread feeling of humiliation and the will to radical renewal—reaching out in very different directions. Democracy, installed in both countries after the war, lacked traditions and was regarded as the weakest option by many people, not least a large number of intellectuals. Self-perceptions between a 'capitalist West' and a 'communist East,' and pretty soon a fascist Italy in the south, shaped and sharpened political orientations. While there were only rare exceptions that succeeded in channeling the energy of the nationalist movements of the 19th century into a republican and democratic project (Czechoslovakia would be one example), the common case was rather that its radicalized forms saw themselves in opposition to their existing states and forms of government.

2. The Politicizations of Early Phenomenologists

In this environment, a philosophical approach that claims to go back to the 'things themselves' cannot remain untouched. This is not only because phenomenology always regarded itself as a radical renewal in philosophy; it was a shared conviction of early and classical phenomenologists[2] that this must also have existential and political consequences and that being a phenomenologist was intrinsically tied to an idea of some sort of 'community.' To be sure, the directions that this idea was supposed to take were imagined quite differently. The landscape of positions is wide and would demand its own detailed investigation. In this handbook, we had to limit ourselves to throwing a spotlight on the main figures Edmund

Husserl, Max Scheler, and Martin Heidegger. In an additional chapter, we try to give at least a synthesized impression of some of the most interesting and influential figures of early phenomenology in this regard: Adolf Reinach, Edith Stein, Dietrich von Hildebrand, and Aurel Kolnai. Many more could be named. To address two sides of the spectrum, Arnold Metzger had in 1919 sent a manuscript with the title *Phänomenologie der Revolution* (*Phenomenology of Revolution*) to Husserl, in which he advocated a renewal of Marxism through a strictly ethical idea of the "loving community"[3] (Metzger 1979, 15)—beyond mere economic change and beyond a liberal form of democracy. Husserl responded enthusiastically, emphasizing how Metzger's "selfless devotion to 'ideas'" (Husserl 1994b, 407) and his "splendid ethical radicalism or maximalism" (411) had refreshed his heart. He even confirmed his anti-capitalist sentiments (407) and saw a "striking relationship between the new revolutionary movement and phenomenology" (414) but also made clear that he had serious doubts, up to a "decisive No!" (411), concerning Metzger's ideas. Instead, he portrayed his own whole philosophical path as a way to God (Husserl 1994b, 408; see also Kohák 1963). Metzger came to Freiburg in 1920 and worked for four years as Husserl's assistant. Another assistant who joined in this period, along with Martin Heidegger, was Oskar Becker. Becker was initially working in mathematics and logic. As his former friend Karl Löwith tells us in his bitter evaluation of Becker's "'awakening' in reverse" (1994, 47), his "initially apolitical" interest in "race" (49) developed into an open and convinced affirmation of Hitler's politics. In the 1930s, Becker published papers with titles like "Nordic Metaphysics" in a journal called *Rasse*.

A brief look at the women involved in the phenomenological movement similarly demonstrates the diversity of possible political backgrounds, orientations, and developments. Edith Stein's path from her Jewish origins to Catholicism is famous as well as exemplary[4] and converges with her community- and person-based conception of the state, which she entertained even before her conversion. Gerda Walther, known for her seminal work on the *Ontology of Social Communities* (1923), came from a social-democratic background and was raised without religion; later, she turned to mystics, parapsychology, and in 1944 to Catholicism (Walther 1960). The sense in which this might also have had political implications still needs to be researched. Else Voigtländer (1920) started out with what she called a 'phenomenological psychology,' continued her career in welfare education in the 1920s by collaborating with the racial hygienist Adalbert Gregor, and ended up being a director of a penal institution for women in the Third Reich. Her German nationalistic and antisemitic background already clearly shines through in a text on "The Psychology of Political Positionings" from 1920, which is also a telling document about political self-evaluations of this time. Whatever form their politicizations (or, for that matter, their de-politicizations) took, it is important to note that all these women were denied their desire to pursue a habilitation and further academic career—partly by the master Husserl himself, who regarded women as not yet fit for that task.[5] Valuable research on this topic has started in recent years and needs to be continued.[6]

Even if the specific stories of politicization are complex and diverse, as these brief remarks intend to show, I would claim that it is nevertheless possible to identify certain political trends in early and classic phenomenology:

1. As has been mentioned before, the topic of community is essential. This is also the field in which the phenomenologists' confrontation with modernity gains its shape. Ever since Ferdinand Tönnies, one of the founding fathers of sociology, introduced the difference between

Gemeinschaft (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society) in 1887, there has been a lively debate about these two social formations and their association with political orientations such as socialism and liberalism. Max Weber and Georg Simmel added to the conceptualization of modern society with their descriptions of social differentiation, instrumental rationality, and the systemic impact of modern capitalism. As Gerhard Thonhauser (2022) notes, Max Scheler complemented these notions of *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft* with the idea of the 'mass' or crowd (*Masse*) from Gustave Le Bon's crowd psychology and thereby set the stage for the way in which phenomenology approached sociality. As will become evident in the subsequent chapters, all phenomenologists defend a notion of community against society, which reflects their worries regarding an emerging mass society. They often combine this with an ethics of values and personalities of higher order or an idea of historicity and the common fate of a people. Regardless of how these thoughts could be made fruitful in other ways, this effectively resulted in two political positions: one of ethical community,[7] which can range from Catholic conservatism to a utopian anarchism and universalism, and one of a more historically conceived revolutionary community, trying to 'overcome' modernity, which saw potential in National Socialism.

2. As a second common feature, phenomenologists are united in being anti-materialists and anti-naturalists; on a political level, this results in a problematic relation with Marxism, even if its ethical and utopian ideas of a classless society are appreciated.

3. Given their skeptical take on the development of modern capitalist society, many phenomenological positions can be characterized as anti-capitalist for ethical reasons and, consequently, as anti-liberal, communitarian, and eventually influential for the development of ordo-liberalism (Miettinen 2016). If we compare their existing or non-existing political statements with those of the outspoken defenders of liberal democracy in the interwar period, such as Hans Kelsen and Helmuth Plessner, it also has to be said that phenomenologists did not out themselves as burning democrats. It might be telling that Plessner (1999), who at least had a background in phenomenology, was the only one who fiercely criticized the notion of community, also pointing to its possible problematic political implications.

4. Finally, a certain cosmopolitan universalism (Husserl) and pluralistic multiculturalism (Scheler) are typical of the international political visions of early or classical phenomenologists. This can come in the form of a nationalist mission—the German or European spirit containing an idea of salvation—and, moreover, must be criticized from today's perspective for its obvious Eurocentrism (see Chapter 30). As declared beliefs in a European community, these ideas need, on the one hand, to be contextualized as anti-nationalist statements in their time and can be read today in terms of a necessarily pluralistic and self-critical historical and intercultural reflection (Miettinnen 2020); on the other hand, they obviously also contain an ignorance of colonial oppression and an uncritical affirmation of a special position for Europe.

3. Complicated Heritage, Fruitful Sources, and the Myth of Unpolitical Classical Phenomenology

To a large extent, dealing with the political heritage of early and classical phenomenology is no easy or comfortable task. This is true of the aforementioned positionings and, more concretely, of explicit bellicose statements made during the First World War

(notably Scheler's) and involvements with National Socialism and antisemitism.[8] The debate on Heidegger, refueled after the appearance of the *Black Notebooks*, is certainly the most prominent example for the predicament and intellectual challenge this leaves us with.[9] Heidegger is not the only problematic case, though; a recent publication has examined the work and life of Else Voigtländer (Vendrell Ferran 2023). Digging a little deeper, also seemingly unproblematic figures like Ludwig Landgrebe[10] and Hans-Georg Gadamer[11] made dubious statements about race and the National Socialist Party, and even in the case of the outspoken opposition to National Socialism and antisemitism that we find in von Hildebrandt, it is difficult not to feel unease in the face of his Austrofascist liaison.[12]

There are several strategies to deal with this. One option would be to completely ignore or avoid any of the early or classic phenomenologists if one wants to engage with political phenomenology. As editors of this handbook, we naturally don't think this makes much sense. On the contrary: We would insist that being aware of the history and context is the only way to come to a well-founded assessment of how philosophical concepts and political orientation hang together. This is, of course, the key question if one aims at the second option of a fruitful reappropriation of politically relevant ideas, approaches, and conceptions we find in early and classic phenomenology. That such a reappropriation is possible is demonstrated through the history of ideas itself, given the French Existentialists' (see Part II) as well as other (mostly French) reappropriations of Heidegger's thought (see Chapter 25). The question of 'contamination' will remain valid and is not something that can be answered once and for all. Instead, it can only be treated by thorough ongoing critical studies that discern a fruitful hermeneutics of suspicion from a simple conviction without examination. Our handbook wants to contribute to a differentiated assessment of this ambivalent heritage. Another option for fruitful reappropriation is to simply extract certain concepts and place them into a different framework. A recent example for this would be Rachel Bath's attempt to understand Edith Stein's ideas of value modification and reiterative empathy as a "contribution to critical phenomenology" (Bath 2021, 24). In this case as well, our handbook—and specifically this part of it—aims to make clear that certain concepts, analyses, and methods that phenomenologists developed in a non-political or different political context can be employed in a contemporary critical manner; on the other hand, we should remain aware that most of these thinkers indeed had quite different political ideas and visions of their own.

Most importantly, the following chapters should demonstrate that early and classic phenomenologists were not just caught up in abstract debates on eidetic, transcendental, or existential foundations of phenomenology but always connected this to social, ethical, and political questions. It might come as a surprise, but even Husserl confesses in his letter to Metzger that his decision to live as a purely scientific philosopher does not mean that truth and science would have the highest value for him. Instead, he would also see himself as a servant to shaping practical life and leading humanity, a task, however, his *daimonion* had warned him not to take up (Husserl 1994b, 409). The widespread preconception that phenomenology is only a theoretical endeavor that does not have to say much about political questions or is politically neutral is wrong. This does not rule out a certain naïveté concerning political implementation and institutionalization. But it could also be identified as an idealistic or utopian take on politics we so seldom find today.

4. Overview of Chapters

In Chapter 1 of this part, my co-author Dan Zahavi and I try to sort out the two distinctive traits of Edmund Husserl's approach to politics. While appreciating that Husserlian concepts such as the horizon, the lived body, and the lifeworld have been employed in a critical and politicizing way, we aim to show that, for Husserl himself, a phenomenology of communities related to ethical ideas and ideals is at the heart of his take on political questions.

In Chapter 2, Zachary Davis follows the remarkable transformation of Max Scheler's political thought. While at the beginning of World War I, Scheler (1990, 94) defended the "genius of war" and German aggression, he appreciated the ideal of pacifism under the impression of the 1920s. His attention was specifically directed at the growing political crisis and the rise of fascism. At the center of this examination are Scheler's analyses of a politics of resentment, which Davis sees as the crucial political hinge between his works on sociology, philosophical anthropology, metaphysics, and history.

Chapter 3 is yet another necessary engagement with Martin Heidegger's political ideas and entanglements in the context of this handbook. Richard Polt gives a focused and comprehensive overview that reaches from *Being and Time* up to Heidegger's postwar writings, including the *Black Notebooks*. He makes clear how the early political visions of *Being and Time* are directed against liberal-democratic conceptions and shows how Heidegger's continued affirmation of Nazism is connected to the idea of bringing about the collapse of modernity and clearing the path for a new inception of being. Polt's assessment is that in all these phases, Heidegger's thought remains too divorced from concrete experience to offer political guidance—an assessment that not only echoes Hannah Arendt's (1977b, 157) judgment but also reads as an interesting claim in the context of this handbook, where we try to show that political phenomenology's competence lies precisely in tying political concepts to experience.

Chapter 4, in conclusion, provides us with more context on the historical situation in the interwar period and the concrete engagement of the generation of early phenomenologists who expanded the range of realist phenomenology into areas of political and social concern: civil law, the state, empathy, community, and ethics. Michael Gubser follows Adolf Reinach's and Edith Stein's theoretical developments and then delves deeper into the political engagement of Dietrich von Hildebrand, who joined a group of conservative Catholic critics of Nazism based around the journal *Der christliche Ständestaat* in Vienna. Also, Aurel Kolnai enlisted phenomenology in the battle against Nazism, although he broke with von Hildebrand regarding the latter's support for authoritarian rule. Gubser shows how early phenomenologists provided philosophical arguments for critics of totalitarian regimes in these troubled times.

Notes

1 I would like to thank Matthias Schloßberger for providing me with plenty of texts and background information for this chapter.
2 Part I covers the 'classic phenomenologists' such as Husserl, Heidegger, and Scheler, as well as people from the Göttingen and Munich schools, such as Reinach, Stein, and von Hildebrandt. For the latter, the notion 'early phenomenologists' seems more appropriate; sometimes this group is also labeled 'realist phenomenologists,' given their realist stance concerning essences and their rejection of Husserl's transcendental turn.
3 All English translations of the original German in this chapter are my own.

4 Husserl speaks of the "neo-Catholic movement with its army of converts, whose great star is Max Scheler" (Husserl 1994a, 24). Husserl had converted himself but was a convinced Protestant. Indeed, Reinach had also converted to Protestantism in 1916.

5 See Husserl's "expert opinion" (*Gutachten*) on the habilitation of women from 1915 (Husserl 1994d, 216–17). In the case of Edith Stein, Husserl seemed to have been of a more positive opinion; however, as his letter exchange with Georg Misch (Husserl 1994c, 271) reveals, her Jewish origins presented another, intersectional impediment—which he regretted.

6 See the research that has been done in the context of the Center for History of Women's Philosophers in Paderborn, as well as work by Íngrid Vendrell Ferran, George Heffernan, Rodney Parker, and Thomas Vongehr.

7 However radically this ethical community is conceived, property relations are never explicitly questioned. Critical theorists—more specifically, Ernst Bloch (1987, 144)—already criticized this heavily with regard to Reinach's notion of property: "The blindness of phenomenology to the economic-historical production and genesis of 'essential contents' has the effect of letting capitalist patterns of thought flow unimpeded and uncontrolled into the 'intrinsically obvious nature of the matter.'"

8 It also has to be noted that phenomenology was defamed by Nazi proponents as "Jewish Philosophy." See *Meyers-Lexikon* (1938).

9 For a recent critical survey, see Thomä 2023.

10 In his correspondence with Husserl, Landgrebe indicated as early as 1932, in response to Husserl's question as to whether he was now also a National Socialist, that he had "always stood on the right," that he endeavored to appreciate the National Socialist movement "objectively for its achievement and function in the political play of forces," and that he was willing to believe "that despite all its aberrations there must be a good core in it" (Husserl 1994b, 299). Husserl warns him urgently and also makes it unmistakably clear that he considers a habilitation and career in Germany "out of the question, since your wife falls under the Non-Aryan Law" (Husserl 1994b, 313). Nevertheless, Landgrebe wrote in a draft letter of July 1933 (we do not know if it was sent in this form) that he was now certain that the "German fate has been decided for an unforeseeable long time" and that he considered it his duty to "no longer stand aside." He adds, oddly, that it is not made "entirely easy" for his honored teacher to empathize with "the commitment to National Socialist Germany that is contained in these words" (Husserl 1994b, 382).

11 In an interview from 1990, Gadamer defends Oskar Becker as a "good race theoretician, just like Ferdinand Clauß" and calls his "race-theoretical interests . . . absolutely legitimate" (Gadamer 1990, 546). Clauß was also a former student and assistant of Husserl and an influential race theorist in the 1920s and during the National Socialist era. Husserl refused to accept his work on the "The Nordic Soul" as a habilitation thesis.

12 For a brief informative overview of many figures in the phenomenological movement under National Socialism, see Alloa and Caminada 2023. This clearly shows that more in-depth research is a desideratum.

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1

EDMUND HUSSERL

Idealistic Politics and Communal Spirit

Sophie Loidolt and Dan Zahavi

1. Introduction

The founder of phenomenology is neither known as a political philosopher nor as an intellectual who publicly expressed his political position. However, this should not lead us to think that Husserl himself or his thoughts were completely "unpolitical"[1] (Schuhmann 1988, 18–19).[2] Different suggestions have been made concerning the potential political implications of his phenomenology, though it remains difficult to pin him down on these matters. In this chapter, we will differentiate between his contribution to a political theory/ philosophy and his likely political opinions and stances—although we also acknowledge that these elements often correlate and that one might be a key to the other.

Our main claim is that two things are distinctive in Husserl's approach to politics: First, it is of utmost importance for him that politics should be guided by 'ideas,' which means that it should not just administer the status quo or engage in realpolitik but be regulated by an idealistic, maybe even utopian picture of how the state and the community should be organized (cf. e.g. Husserl 1956, 16; 1959, 199–201; 1973a, 107; 1987, 289). Second, Husserl clearly grounds 'the political' (i.e., the existential basis for organized politics) in a phenomenology of communities. Hence, one could speak of an idealistic politics, situated in a community-based approach to the political. At the same time, however, Husserl also sees politics as a practical endeavor, one that can and must be supplemented with theoretical knowledge but that realizes itself only as "praxis" and remains the domain of the professional "politician" (Husserl 1954, 328; 1973c, 410). This also entails a close link between the political, the ethical, and the social dimension. *Politics*, for Husserl, concerns the organization of the state and the community as well as the external relations between states, up to a unified humanity. It is not fully clear whether, in Husserl's view, the ultimate goal of a unified universal humanity would still be in need of the state and the law or whether the latter would wither away to make room for a universal ethical community—which he calls "the community of love" (Husserl 1973b, 172–75; 2014, 301–2, 512–15). (Schuhmann 1988 and Hart 1992 argue in this direction.) Yet the status of this ideal seems to serve more as an ethical orientation point than a concrete strategic political goal. The role of *ethics* in connection with politics is thus to be "constructive" (Husserl 1996, 305) in the sense of rationally examining the values and norms (in Husserlian terms: the axiological and

practical dimensions) of communal life. This process must remain open to renewal since its ideal goal can only lie in infinity (Husserl 1989, 34, 36). Finally, the *social* dimension, in which these ideas must be situated, in which they emerge and in which they can only be realized through the participation of all members, also has its own dynamics of historicity, generativity, and communication. Therefore, communities, identities, but also home and alienworlds are not fixed entities but can constantly be reconfigured.

What Husserl understands by science (*Wissenschaft*) and rationality and their task in this intertwinement of politics, ethics, and sociality can be drawn from his thoughts presented in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. Indeed, as a philosopher, Husserl warned his audience of the political consequences of a technologized naturalism bereft of meaning and forgetful of (inter)subjective accomplishment and responsibility. In this sense, the mathematization of politics is just as pernicious as the mathematization of the lifeworld, since it necessarily gives rise to irrationalist tendencies as a compensation for the lack of existential meaning. The "true rationality" (Husserl 1989, 6) that Husserl speaks about is hence one that originates in the lifeworld and remains tied to persons, in science as well as in ethics and politics.

The reception of Husserl's political ideas and its possible role for a political phenomenology have, no doubt, been controversial. Often, Husserl's whole approach was refused point blank, based on a prior rejection of his alleged transcendentalism, solipsism, internalism, subjectivism, essentialism, Platonism, etc. More recent debates have focused more on Husserl's social ontology while critical phenomenologists have used conceptual and methodical tools, such as the reduction, the Leib/Körper distinction, habitualization, sedimentation, the lifeworld, etc. in order to conduct political inquiries. Although often associated with Merleau-Ponty's approach, Husserl remains the original source of most of these tools. Without trying to save or defend the whole range of Husserl's political ideas, we therefore believe that a careful discussion is needed in order to assess which challenges or opportunities Husserl's framework—conceptualized as a remedy for 'crisis'—really poses or offers for a phenomenology of the political.

2. Husserl's Political Phenomenology

2.1 *Idealistic Politics*

Politics, writes Husserl to Dietrich Mahnke in May 1933, basically threw him twice into a "dangerous personal crisis": once, it was "the War" (WWI) that shattered his "philanthropic optimism" and showed him how ideals could be "misused in the most abominable way as means for war" (Husserl 1994b, 493).[3] Now, in 1933, his exclusion from the German people "attacks the deepest roots of my existence" (Husserl 1994b, 493). Husserl's own identity struggles tell a complicated political story: brought up with German culture as an assimilated Jew in the Austro-Hungarian Empire in Moravia, Husserl came to admire and love the tradition of German philosophy and *Geistesgeschichte*. Not only did he occasionally 'forget' his Jewish origin; he also actively converted to Protestantism under the "tremendous and life-changing impression of the New Testament" as a young man in Vienna (Husserl 1994b, 432). Later, he became a German citizen and civil servant as a university professor in Göttingen/Freiburg and even came to identify with the German enthusiasm for war, although his "Daimonion" (Husserl 1994c, 409) had warned him against speaking out publicly. This only anticipated his later disappointment. That he, who considered his philosophy

to fulfill the promise of German thought, had to end his life in utter and painful "loneliness," expelled from the university by the Nazis and persecuted as a "Jewish intellectualist," was an absurdity he experienced with desperation (Husserl 1994b, 494–95). Without reducing him to his biography, these circumstances should not be ignored when trying to assess his writings about community, especially during the last years of his life.

As for his own political inclinations, Husserl is indeed not easy to pin down as even in his *Briefwechsel*, explicit positionings are rare. In a letter to the monarchist Graf von Keyserling from 1919, Husserl once mentions that "politically, I always stood on monarchical ground" (Husserl 1994d, 223). But this can be contrasted with a letter to Roman Ingarden from 1918, in which he states that the old regime "had failed in every respect" and that he did not think "that it would ever resurge" (Husserl 1994b, 201). What Husserl cares about more than ever in the days after the Great War is a renewal he thinks can only be born out of a love for 'ideas'; as long as this "truly selfless devotion to ideas," is present, Husserl can be quite tolerant, even welcoming toward political positions he normally rejects, such as Marxism and social democracy (Husserl 1994c, 407).[4] For Husserl, the real opponents are materialist, reductionist, and skeptical positions, which reflects how his theoretical positions influence his political stances. Materialism, for Husserl, is not only the problematic, hopefully outdated component of social democracy (Husserl 1994b, 94); he also holds it responsible for capitalism and claims that it is at the basis of racism and antisemitism (Husserl 1994b, 23, 494). What might be more surprising is that Husserl also proves to be a critic of liberalism, when understood as a Hobbesian form of psychological naturalism combined with a view of society as consisting of a multitude of atomistic, self-interested individuals. Those who falsely take Husserl to be a solipsist should take this outspoken "anti-individualist view of the social realm" (Miettinen 2023) seriously. Finally, a politics of hate deeply troubled Husserl, who claimed that its poisonous effects drove nations and groups apart. He already mentioned this in 1902 in a letter to Masaryk vis-à-vis developments in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy (Husserl 1994a, 107) and even more in 1919, when he bitterly noticed that German desperation produces a "raging antisemitism, that gets angrier by the day" (Husserl 1994b, 24, 433). This is why "love" was important for Husserl, not only as a Christian motto but also as a striving for a communal life in harmony, underpinned by respect for ideas, wisdom, and beauty (Husserl 1994b, 24)—a life of respectful cosmopolitanism, in which differences were recognized and appreciated but nobody was reduced to a pseudo-materialist basis (in race or class, one might add).

Even if some letters as well as his published writings on renewal strike this rather enthusiastic tone and display more "suggestive than critically clarified concepts" (Schuhmann 1988, 186), Husserl does not want to be a naïve dreamer. He mocks the excessive sentiment for '*Geist*' found in Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy and clearly disapproves of the "neo-Catholic movement with its army of converts, whose great star is Max Scheler" (Husserl 1994b, 24; cf. also Husserl 1994a, 114).[5] Husserl wants to remain a sober idealist and calls for "an ethos, as plain as possible" (Husserl 1994d, 226).

But what is this 'love of ideas' about? Husserl often alludes to Plato in this context and has therefore repeatedly been characterized as a political Platonist (Schuhmann 1988; Held 2012). But it is important to be clear about what exactly this does and does not amount to. It does not, for example, amount to a tripartite division of society (rulers, auxiliaries, and producing classes), it entails no radical ideas on education, nor does it advocate for philosophers to be the rulers. Husserl's own characterization of the central idea of Platonism, as it has been taken up since the Renaissance, is rather broad: it entails "reshap[ing] not

only oneself ethically, but the whole human environment, the political, the social existence of mankind on the basis of free reason, and through the insights of a universal philosophy" (Husserl 1954, 6). In *First Philosophy*, Husserl is more specific in that he credits Plato for the insight that the single human being must be seen as a functional member in the unity of a communal life. Therefore, "the idea of reason is not an individual but a community idea" under which social formations need to be normatively evaluated (Husserl 1956, 15f.). This not only founds a "social ethics" (Husserl 1989, 21) but also anticipates the conception of a personality of higher order—and Husserl does not hesitate to invoke the Platonist picture of "man on a big scale" (Husserl 1956, 16) in this context. Husserl thus seems to take a rather strong communitarian inspiration from Plato, combined with the approach of a constant normative evaluation that must also occur as a common communicative, intra- and interpersonal, rational (i.e., justifiable) practice. As Miettinen puts it: "Politics is more than the sum of individual interests: it is the creation of a shared will and a shared *telos* for the 'personality of a higher-order'" (2023, 455). It is obvious that this political model emphasizes harmony more than conflict, unity more than plurality, and a form of living more characterized by rational insight than political debate. But it would not shy away from radical reforms since Husserl's constant call for renewal (*Erneuerung*) aims at an open, utopian future, characterized by personal responsibility and communal ideals. Husserl is aware that the idea of an "absolutely valuable community" cannot be "a priori statically realized" (Husserl 1959, 199). Hence, its form necessarily implies an infinite process of becoming (cf. Husserl 1959, 199–201; 1989, 58, 117f.). Husserl values tradition, but what he values more is the promise of a common life guided by reason while being able to respect the diverse ways of its realizations (Husserl 1994b, 201, 432; 1993, 9–10).

The function of philosophers in this enterprise would be to generate, as one would say today, the 'expert knowledge' on how to 'construct' a just legal system. Husserl envisages this as a phenomenological "working community" (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft*) (Husserl 1954, 133, 439), with phenomenologists considering themselves "functionaries of mankind" (Husserl 1954, 15), who are entrusted with a critical and continuously ongoing, perhaps infinite task. But as Husserl notes, this expert knowledge also needs to convince the whole people; otherwise, it has neither political nor legal value:

> The construction of a philosophical law by individual philosophers does not yet create law. They would first have to convince the public of it, the community at large would have to take it up in its will. [Note on the margin:] Perhaps there would have to be a philosophers' estate, recognized in the profession of constructing "right law" [*richtiges Recht*] as an idea, and the will to follow this estate.
> *(Husserl Ms. A II 1, 6b; cited in Loidolt 2010, 59)*

What we can see here is that Husserl's model of politics (in this case, qua legislation) *somehow* includes the people but remains rather rudimentary in its dichotomy of 'expert knowledge' and 'will to follow.' Most of the political operations typical of democracies are absent rather than present in this constellation: deliberative and participatory processes, public debates on expert knowledge that would add different aspects and angels, institutional mediation, compromise, etc. Only when these processes indeed take place can one truly speak of the formation of a common will and joint decisions through political practices. This is something very different than simply taking something up in one's will. Husserl thus seems to underestimate the political sphere itself or shy away from it, probably because of

the traditional philosophical concern that it might replace *episteme* (knowledge) with endless debates of a plurality of *doxai* (opinions). This could eventually end up in irrationalism and skepticism. Even though Husserl defended the doxa of the lifeworld against naturalistic mathematization, this does not automatically make him an advocate for democracy. At least, nothing of the sort can be found in his writings, neither arguments and statements pro or contra the democratic system—which is remarkable, given that he lived in the Weimar Republic, where this issue was constantly and existentially at stake (cf. Hacke 2018). One can only speculate: Had he seen democracy as a political expression of relativism, he might have been critical; had he regarded it as fostering personal autonomy, he might have taken a more positive stance. But, to our knowledge, there is no concrete passage in his writings that would settle these questions. In any case, we think it is important not to de-historize him and take his political ideas as simply converging with today's image of a liberal democracy.

What is also possible is that Husserl regarded the specific political form of government (constitutional monarchy, democratic republic, communitarian formations without a state, etc.) to be of secondary importance as long as it helped realize the idea of a "philosophical humanity," striving toward the "true world" as its correlate—which rules out tyranny or other forms of suppression. This merger of politics, ethics, and philosophy might indeed be seen as the core of Husserl's Platonism. Plato was not the only thinker to influence Husserl in this manner, however. Johann Gottlieb Fichte was another important source of inspiration, especially during World War One.[6] Fichte's ideas of mankind striving through an "instinct of reason" toward the "ethical world-order" (which is God itself as its teleological principle) and culminating in a "blissful humanity" (Husserl 1987, 277) complemented Husserl's otherwise Kantian and cosmopolitan ideas with material values and emotions beyond mere duty. But the bliss soon ended for Husserl as he was not even accepted as a member of the Fichte Society, founded in 1914, because of his Jewish origins (Husserl 1994b, 24, 430). These circumstances alerted him to the fact that the "constant ethical progress" (Husserl 1989, 4) *he* envisioned was meant to strive not toward an exclusive nationalism but toward a universalist humanity, a society that was inclusive of all people and nations and that was, indeed, guided by 'ideas' people could freely relate to.

As we have pointed out, Husserl doesn't offer many descriptions of political institutions or processes. In his discussion of communities, however, he does provide detailed analyses of communication, conflict, association, common will, and action. Whether we might find the realm of "the political" in Husserl's phenomenology of communities is to be seen.

2.2 A Community-Based Approach to the Political

Husserl's analysis of the constitution of communities is wide-ranging and characterized by a distinct bottom-up approach. Not only does his investigation move from dyadic relations to increasingly complex social formations, but he also emphasizes the extent to which social formations that are established through specific forms of intentional activity are founded on pre-theoretical, passive, and instinctual forms of connectedness (Husserl 1962, 486, 514). Husserl speaks of the mother-child connection as the most original of all and then explains how the scope of one's social environment as a result of one's socialization increasingly widens to include siblings, friends, the local community, and eventually "my nation with its customs, its language, etc." (Husserl 1973c, 511). By being socialized, we also inherit

and appropriate a tradition that is passed down over generations: a tradition that comes to normatively regulate, orient, and organize our experiences and actions by serving as a guide for how we ought to think and act. But the reason for Husserl's focus on the dyad is that culturalization and socialization in the first instance happen through bodily interaction and communication (Husserl 1973c, 472–73; Meindl and Zahavi 2023). By being addressed, my personal development is being influenced by the thoughts and feelings of others (Husserl 1952, 268). This already happens pre-verbally (Husserl 1973b, 167), but soon it takes linguistic form, and it is precisely by "speaking, listening, and replying" that subjects "form a we that is unified, communalized in a specific way" (Husserl 1973c, 476). Husserl often refers to the 'we' that is generated out of this intentional co-determination or interlocking as an "I-you community" (Husserl 1973c, 476) or a "communicative community" (*Mitteilungsgemeinschaft*) (Husserl 1973c, 475).

A first stage of unification occurs when mutual understanding is achieved. Such mutual understanding is to be found even in situations of disagreement, rejection, or conflict. In fact, Husserl is quite insistent that a communicative community doesn't require agreement. Even antagonistic encounters in which we are "against-each-other" count as cases in which I and another are "within-one-another" in the sense of being communicatively intertwined (Husserl 1973c, 477). Even when we fight with others over territory, scarce resources, etc., there is something that is shared (Husserl 2008, 197).

But a new, qualitatively different kind of unification occurs when one's communicative intention isn't simply understood but also fulfilled or realized by the other. Husserl discusses different cases of such volitional intertwinements, which he sometimes calls practical communities of will (*praktische Willensgemeinschaften*). There are short-lived ephemeral types, as when somebody makes a request that I comply with or when a group of persons jointly establish a shared goal and act accordingly (Husserl 1973b, 170). The latter group might disperse when the goal is realized, but there are also more enduring and habitualized groups that are unified by normative systems of duties and rights (Husserl 1973a, 105), which Husserl sometimes calls "personalities of higher order" (Husserl 1973b, 197, 200). Subjects can "unite inwardly-personally and finally become a personality of a higher order, an association, a nation, etc., in which lives a will, a purpose, an embodiment of practical convictions, political or scientific" (Husserl 1973b, 90).

To form a personality of higher order, more is needed than a shared tradition and membership in a language community (*Sprachgemeinschaft*). It also requires a unity of will. But what does this amount to? Just as an individual person can be the substrate of both fleeting and enduring acts and can be said to possess convictions, evaluations, volitions, etc., a well-structured group formation—say, a government, a faculty, an executive board etc.—can be said to have convictions, make resolutions, perform actions, etc. (Husserl 1989, 22). By coordinating their activities to realize a common goal—a goal that is communally striven for—the individual volitions of the members are transformed into "member-volitions" (*Mitgliedswille*) (Husserl 1973a, 108).

It is important not to misunderstand Husserl. He often talks of the higher-order personality or communal spirit (*Gemeingeist*) as a "many-headed subjectivity" (Husserl 1973b, 218). A community is composed of a multiplicity of persons, each with their own stream of consciousness. There is never a fusional unification. Moreover, the supra-personal common spirit that is alive in the community members and flows through them—or rather, as Husserl writes, "out of them" (Husserl 1973b, 200)—is dependent on their continuing contributions. The higher-order personality is "a communicative unity" founded on

multiplicities; its substrate is none other than the "communicative multiplicity of persons" (Husserl 1973b, 200–201) that are intentionally integrated.

For Husserl, social formations of a certain size need structures in place for their maintenance; they require divisions of labor, in which the willing and acting of individuals are coordinated with one another and subordinated to the communal willing. They will feature members who do not simply live their own private lives but also act in an official capacity as functionaries or representatives of the group and who, by performing their duties and acting in the name of the group will, let the wills of others work in them (Husserl 1973b, 183).

In an early text from 1910, Husserl argues that the existence and persistence of a political organization like a state depends not on the existence of specific individuals but on the existence of individuals with appropriate attitudes and beliefs. As he writes, it can only exist if it is supported by functionaries who possess the requisite state consciousness (*Staatsbewusstsein*) (Husserl 1973a, 110). But again, this is not about participating in a collective stream of consciousness but about identifying with a communal normative codex.

In a much later text from August 1934, Husserl explicitly equates the generative context that every human being is embedded within with the nation (Husserl 1993, 9). He then states that every nation, as a supra-personal totality, coexists with other nations and that this coexistence isn't to be understood as a physical being next to each other but as a communicative, spiritual exchange that can be either peaceful or conflictual (Husserl 1993, 10). Husserl's emphasis on the importance of communication again makes it clear that he doesn't think of national unity as being based on ties of blood but on a shared life in a shared place with a shared history (Husserl 1973b, 183). One passage in his letters to Masaryk makes explicit that this does not even require speaking one and the same language. Indeed, one can see the "idea" of a unified Czechoslovakia as exemplary for how Husserl envisions political unity in a nation, as well as its relation to other nations. This is also a point at which his personal convictions very probably converge with his theoretical ones:

> May your [Masaryk's] old ideal of a national ethical existence be fulfilled in the empire at whose head Providence has placed you and to whose good genius you have been chosen: A single nation, united by the love of the common homeland and by the unity of patriotic history—a nation, not separated by the different languages, but mutually enriching and elevating itself by the mutual participation in the linguistically developing cultural achievements. You have already educated me to this ideal in Leipzig! May the Republic, through such political-ethical ennoblement, become the ethical foundation for the renewal of the European culture, which is highly endangered by nationalistic degeneration.
>
> *(Husserl 1994a, 120)*

Where, then, do we find 'the political' in Husserl? The unifying process of nation-building, the constitution of a higher-order person (the 'nation state'), can certainly be seen as a political process based on and rooted in communities with their phenomenologically described features. It is political in the sense that it willfully unites the communities by norms, which distinctively goes beyond simply being a "cultural community": "Political community—cultural community, this does not coincide" (Husserl 2008, 528). However, Husserl has not much to say about intra-communal conflicts regarding fundamental questions of justice, distribution of wealth, or the economic system of a state: i.e., classic political conflicts between 'right' and 'left.' Instead, he discusses the constitutive importance of

inter-communal encounters, of encounters between conflicting spheres of normality. It even seems that he uses the term 'political' mainly in this context. In one text from 1934–35, for example, Husserl remarks that the "life of a nation in a unified internationality results in a development of a new kind of historicity, the political historicity" (Husserl 1993, 10). Judging by this use of the term, "becoming political" (Husserl 1993, 11) is primarily tied to inter- rather than intra-communal encounters. Such encounters can be hostile, but Husserl does not have an essentially antagonist picture of the political like Carl Schmitt, who defines it by the friend/enemy distinction. Rather, his approach has to be understood in line with his discussion of the home-world alien-world encounter, in which the confrontation with a different set of norms doesn't simply allow for a new perspective on one's own way of life but also motivates one to aim for truth common to all (Steinbock 1995; Zahavi 1996). In this sense, Husserl speaks of "the political" as the "most general" (Husserl 1973c, 411) in the relation of communities/nations/states and argues that communal life can expand and become political insofar as it strives for a "universal practice" (Husserl 1973c, 226). The political, for Husserl, thus seems to involve a cosmopolitan idea of aiming at communicatively interrelated communities (Husserl 1993, 10–11).[7]

3. Outlook

Let us distinguish three strands in the reception of Husserl's political philosophy: One group of Husserl scholars have explored and creatively expanded on Husserl's ideas on the state, community, and home- and alien-world(s) (Otaka 1932; Schuhmann 1988; Hart 1992; Steinbock 1995; Drummond 2000; Gniazdowski 2006; Miettinen 2023). Another group of scholars has expressed reservations about whether Husserlian phenomenology for methodological reasons allows for genuine political thought at all (Adorno 1940; Habermas 1971; Guenther 2020). And finally, there is a group of scholars who have used analyses or methods that Husserl developed in a non-political context—such as his analyses of experience, the body, or habitualization—and employed them in a politicizing and critical manner (Heinämaa 2003, 2022; Oksala 2016; Rodemeyer 2017, 2022; Wehrle 2021).

One particularly influential reading found in the first group is that of Karl Schuhmann, who, in his book *Husserl's Staatsphilosophie* (*Husserl's Philosophy of the State*) from 1988, presented a detailed overview and interpretation of Husserl's published and unpublished notes on the topic. Schuhmann's basic thesis is that the state would prima facie have no place in Husserl's intersubjective teleology. To put it differently, in the development from instinctive communities to communities of will, culminating in the community of love, the state would not occupy a specific eidetically necessary stage or form of communalization (*Vergemeinschaftung*). At the same time, however, it is undeniable—also for Husserl—that 'the state' or states are facts. Schuhmann therefore concludes that the state only has one purpose: to order conflicts and thereby prevent the worst "collisions of purpose" (Schuhmann 1988, 45). This makes it a sort of "external superior force which provides, vis-à-vis the divergent strivings of individual monads, the guarantee of their 'conformability' *Übereinstimmbarkeit*" (Schuhmann 1988, 45). On this reading, the state would become obsolete and "wither away" (Schuhmann 1988, 159–60) on the way to the community of love. This thesis is further elaborated by Hart (1992), who sees a kind of communitarian anarchism in Husserl's political philosophy of community.

It is true that Husserl occasionally speculates about how strong the state should be and whether humanity essentially needs a state in its development toward an ethical community.

But he also describes the teleological end goal of a "truly humane world-people [*Weltvolk*]" in terms of a supranational "world state" (Husserl 1989, 57–59). Furthermore, Husserl employs a peculiar terminology evoking strong political connotations. He speaks of a "communist" community of wills (Husserl 1989, 53) when describing cases in which the community members are united freely in the pursuit of a common goal. His key example is the community of philosophers or mathematicians. In contrast to this, he speaks of an "imperialist" organization of wills (Husserl 1989, 53), in which the community is pervaded and governed by one organized will that demands subordination. His example here is the monastic community or the community of priests in the *civitas dei* (Husserl 1989, 90). Although one can detect a slight preference for the "communist" model of free association and organization in Husserl, the "imperialist" model remains just as much an option in how to organize communities in Husserl's very general reflections on the topic. An interpretation heading toward a communitarian/communist anarchism should not ignore this. In any case, one should avoid hasty political conclusions based on this terminology. More careful studies of Husserl's philosophy of the state and international relations are still needed (Miettinen 2023; Szanto 2023).

The second strand of reception builds on the often repeated—and, meanwhile, often refuted—criticism that Husserl's 'philosophy of consciousness' and his transcendental approach would make it impossible to tackle the problems of intersubjectivity, sociality, and history in a satisfactory manner and would therefore also be "unable to treat the political life, ethics, gender, ecology, and so forth" (cf. Steinbock 1995, 23, who names Habermas and Luhmann as two famous proponents of this criticism). In what has become known as 'critical phenomenology' today, the criticism of Husserl has become more nuanced and differentiated and largely avoids the "caricature of phenomenology as a philosophy that is too subjective and too trapped inside first-person perspective to be able to offer any purchase on ethical or political struggles" (Salamon 2018, 11). Nevertheless, a certain tendency to distance oneself from the 'classical' Husserl in favor of Merleau-Ponty or some other existential phenomenologist still seems *de rigueur* when seeking to establish one's critical and political credentials (cf. Rodemeyer 2022, who points to Guenther as an example of this tendency).

Finally, a third strand draws ideas for political and critical inquiries in parts of Husserl's oeuvre that is decoupled from his own political ideas. One example is the feminist investigations undertaken by Heinämaa (2003), Rodemeyer (2017), Oksala (2016), and Wehrle (2021). Other examples can be found in the volume on *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology*, in which several prominent Husserlian concepts are discussed, including 'Horizons,' 'The Körper/Leib Distinction,' 'The Natural Attitude,' and 'Operative Intentionality' and in which one can also find a productive use of methodological concepts such as the *epoché* and the phenomenological and eidetic reductions (Davis 2020). As Rodemeyer has claimed, "Husserl's phenomenology, and especially his discussions of horizons, foreground/background, and the lifeworld, is already critical" (2022, 98).

Something similar might be said about Husserl's writings on sociality and community: While, at first glance, Husserl's analyses of community and its possible forms rarely transcend or question the societal and political order of his time and while they clearly prioritize agreement over disagreement and valorize harmony and consensus over conflict and dissensus, his meticulous analysis of its communicative and generative constitution reveals its fragility, as well as its openness to change and constant reconfiguration. If one wants to re-politicize Husserl's work on social ontology, it might consequently be better to bet on the transcendental Husserl than on Husserl the Platonist.[8]

Notes

1 All English translations of the original German in this chapter are our own.
2 This often-cited quote (following Schuhmann's original citation) stems from a three-line letter from 1935, in which Husserl characterizes either his pending talks or his manuscripts as "completely unpolitical," and it probably alludes to negotiations with the *Cercle philosophique* to save his manuscripts. Given the political circumstances, Husserl's hope for political asylum in Prague and, consequently, the precautions he had to take, we find it problematic to use this quote as a comprehensive self-characterization of his work (cf. Husserl 1994e, 244–45; Husserl 1994c, 329).
3 Husserl never mentions the death of his son Wolfgang on the battlefield 1917, but it is obvious that this caused a re-evaluation of his enthusiasm for the German cause, as did the rising antisemitism shortly after WWI.
4 Husserl, in a response to Arnold Metzger, who sent him his book *Die Phänomenologie der Revolution. Eine politische Schrift über den Marxismus und die liebende Gemeinschaft.* Cf. also Husserl's letter to the social democrat Adolf Grimme from 1932, in which he praises his "strong belief in idealism" (Husserl 1994b, 94).
5 Husserl calls Scheler a "genius of pose" who "unfortunately wants to reform the catholic ecclesiastical philosophy by basing it on phenomenology instead of Aristotle" (Husserl 1994b, 24).
6 This is especially evident in Husserl's *Three Lectures on Fichte's Ideal of Humanity* (Husserl 1987, 267–93), which he delivered to soldiers in 1917. Cf. also Hart (1995).
7 To be sure, and this is a topic we can only allude to here, Husserl's Eurocentric perspective influences his universalism as well as his internationalism. For example, the "Patagonians" (exemplary for someone very far away from Europe and already a perplexing issue for Kant) seem to be on the fringes of what Husserl calls the interactional unity (*Verkehrseinheit*) of humanity (Husserl 1973b, 219).
8 Thanks to Sara Heinämaa and Timo Miettinen for helpful comments. Dan Zahavi acknowledges support from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (Grant Agreement No. 832940) and from the Carlsberg Foundation (Grant ID: CF18-1107).

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2

MAX SCHELER

The Politics of Ressentiment

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1. Introduction

As demonstrated by some of his earliest published writings such as *Arbeit und Ethik* (*Work and Ethics*) ([1899] 1971), Max Scheler was, from the outset, deeply concerned with the political and cultural climate of Germany and remained so until the end of his life. In fact, Scheler's interest in politics was not merely academic, and for a time during the war, he held a governmental position in the office of war propaganda (Mader 1995). While his commitment to German and European politics never wavered, Scheler's political thought followed a tumultuous path that began with a nationalistic defense of German aggression during the first years of the Great War and ended with a reversal of this position wherein he defended the eternal idea of peace and warned of the rise of fascism throughout Europe. Yet, despite the dramatic changes in his political thought and aims, one notion in particular remained central to his approach throughout his life: the notion of ressentiment. My task in this chapter is to trace Scheler's use of ressentiment through the distinct stages of his political thought.

Following Nietzsche's account of ressentiment in his *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Scheler understands ressentiment as a type of value reversal that elevates a lower value type over higher value types by virtue of a negation of the higher values. I demonstrate here that Scheler makes use of the sense of value reversal entailed in the notion of ressentiment in at least two different senses. In his earlier political writings, especially those written during the first years of World War I, Scheler used the value reversal accomplished by cultural forms of the feeling of ressentiment as a means by which to justify political violence. The Great War was, for Scheler, a just war because it would serve as the action necessary to reverse the value reversal being imposed on the German people and consequently bring about a cultural renewal for both Germany and Europe in general. In his later political writings, Scheler would become quite critical of this approach and the apparent justification for the use of violence. His attention would turn rather to the way in which the toxic feeling of ressentiment seeks to negate the value of the political altogether. Political activity was, for Scheler, the process whereby power is spiritualized: that is, the way by which power comes to be directed and channeled by cultural values. The negation of the value of this

activity through a politics of ressentiment serves to elevate the base and violent expressions of power and cultivate as a consequence the call for the despot, for a leader unchecked by political norms and values. It is in this later analysis that we find the means to critique and clarify cultural trends that give rise to the call for the authoritarian personality and end of democratic rule.

2. The Meaning and Structure of Ressentiment

Scheler (1955, 37) had considered Nietzsche's "discovery" of the feeling of ressentiment as the source of value judgment to be one of the most important and penetrating insights of the modern era.[1] Scheler's own analysis of ressentiment quite closely followed the analysis Nietzsche had given in his *Genealogy of Morals*. Both thinkers had argued that modern morality suffered from poisonous infliction of ressentiment. Yet they diverged quite dramatically in respect to the root cause of this infliction. Nietzsche maintained that the Judeo-Christian notion of love was responsible for sense of ressentiment in modern morality. In his treatment of ressentiment, Scheler (1955, 106) attempted to show that Nietzsche was deeply mistaken about the notion of Christian love and that the modern notion of love—namely, humanitarian love—was responsible for the introduction of ressentiment into modern morality and values. My interest here is not in examining who was right in this debate concerning Christian love and morality, but rather the description both thinkers provided of the meaning and structure of ressentiment.

The formal structure, as Scheler (1955, 59) calls it, of ressentiment is a value reversal wherein a lower value is elevated by virtue of the negation or devaluation of a higher value. For Nietzsche, this value reversal can be found at the origin of the value of evil. The value judgments of good and bad originated in the spontaneous response to particular types of actions associated with certain types of persons. Those actions associated with so-called aristocratic person types were considered good by virtue of their ability to create a qualitative difference from merely common or ordinary acts, a difference Nietzsche referred to as a "pathos of difference" (1989, 26). At the origin of modern morality, there is the ancient hierarchy of values that places the good—namely, the powerful aristocratic type of activity—over the bad and common, the activity of the weaker slave or priestly types. According to Nietzsche, the slave type is only able to overcome this inferior value position through the act of ressentiment and the introduction of a slave morality. What was once considered good is negated and taken as evil. By virtue of this value negation, what was originally taken as 'bad' becomes the good. The use of moral values as a means to elevate one group of persons over another was the moment in history, for Nietzsche, when humans truly became "interesting animals" (1989, 33).

Scheler's account of the modern reversal of values is not genealogical but rather phenomenological. In his magnum opus in ethics, *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik* (*Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*), Scheler ([1913] 1980) attempted to show that there is an objective order of values and that this order is demonstrated through the preferring of certain values over others by virtue of their value depth. From the lower to higher values, the objective order is as follows: pleasure, utility, life, culture, and the holy. All experience is, for Scheler, value laden, and the experience of value necessarily precedes any knowledge of the world. The human being is thus being pulled and repelled in accordance with how objects are given as having either positive or negative

value. The relation humans have to value is intentional, and objects are always given as having a particular value. Scheler calls love the intention wherein values are originally disclosed and further describes love as a movement from higher to lower values, a movement that is drawn to ever-greater value depth. Critical to his treatment for ressentiment is Scheler's distinction between feelings and feeling-states. Feelings are, for Scheler, intentional acts and concern the disclosure of value. Feeling-states are, in contrast, reactions to the disclosure of value. For instance, anger is a feeling-state one has in reaction to a perceived devaluation of oneself or another person.[2]

Anger is not the disclosure of the value of a person but the reaction to the mistreatment of one. According to Scheler, there are two basic feelings: love and hate. Whereas love is the original disclosure of value, hate is the intentional act wherein a positive value is negated. Ressentiment, by virtue of its basic structure, is an intentional act—an act in which a lower value is promoted over a higher value. Hence, ressentiment is not a feeling-state but rather a feeling or, more precisely, the feeling of hate.

Scheler's (1955, 128–31) early treatment of ressentiment focused on the value reversal wherein the value of utility is elevated over the value of life. The elevation of the value of utility is the defining feature of the modern worldview and what has allowed the rise of late capitalism, the mechanization of nature, and the predominance of the classic liberal notion of individualism. Although Scheler would continue to change his focus on where to locate the value reversal of ressentiment, he understood a central task of his work to overcome the modern value reversal: an attempt to overcome the destructive social-political consequences of the growing cultural dominance of the value of utility.

For both Nietzsche and Scheler, the reason a cultural reversal in values is able to succeed lies in its ability to disguise the act of negation and masks itself under a cloak of positive valuation. In Nietzsche's account, slave morality appears to be an embrace of the meek, an apparent positive step in ending aristocratic oppression. For Scheler, the rise of utility through the devaluation of life is masked by the modern love of humanity, an apparent embrace of all persons regardless of race, gender, or culture.[3] In other words, the deceptive nature of ressentiment makes it appear as if it were an act of love while, in fact, it is an act of hate. The illusionary value-givenness is the most distinctive accomplishment of the act of ressentiment (Scheler 1955, 66). It is precisely because of the deceptive nature of ressentiment appearing as a positive act of valuation that makes a direct critique impossible. In order to reveal the value deception, it is necessary to address its psychological roots.

"The point of departure" (Scheler 1955, 38) for ressentiment begins with the need for revenge. As Joseph Butler (1827, 125) noted in his sermon on resentment, it is "natural" for a human to feel some "emotion of mind" in response to some injury to feeling of injustice. The origin of ressentiment lies then in a felt or perceived sense of injustice, and the need for revenge springs from the desire to rectify the problem. In this respect, ressentiment is not inconsistent with good will (Butler 1827). If a person is able to act immediately and directly to address and right the wrong, the need for revenge dissipates, and the feeling of ressentiment never takes hold. The feeling of ressentiment only arises when a person is unable to take revenge, unable because the person feels a lack of power to do so. Powerlessness is, hence, one of the key psychological roots of ressentiment. Since the injured person is unable to take action to rectify the perceived injustice, they have no choice but to resort to the moral sphere to take revenge. It is not merely the action of the other person that is negated or criticized, but the very value of the person themselves. Through the act of ressentiment, morality becomes weaponized, and moral judgment becomes the means to restore justice.

The second essential aspect of ressentiment is the feeling of envy. Again, ressentiment is an act by which values are reversed in order to elevate a lower value over a higher value. Prior to the act of ressentiment, there is a felt value hierarchy between two persons, between the person strong enough to carry out the harm and the person powerless to act in response. The powerless person thus envies the power the other has. This feeling of envy is, for Scheler (1955, 45), no ordinary sense of envy. It is a feeling of existential envy. The 'weaker' or impotent person envies not merely the act the person committed but the being of the person. For this reason, the act of revenge must target the value of the person themselves. It is also possible that the target of this revenge is not simply an individual person; it can also target an entire group of persons. Through the act of ressentiment, a person or group of persons are able to overcome both the sense of impotency and envy. The use of moral value empowers the person to take revenge and feel morally superior for it. The psychological roots of ressentiment help explain the sense of moral if not righteous indignation that often accompanies the feeling of ressentiment. They also help clarify the possible means by which to address the feeling of ressentiment. It would be important to analyze not only why a person or group of persons feels harmed but also why they feel powerless. The destructive nature of ressentiment can only be addressed by addressing the psychological origins fueling it.

3. War and Ressentiment

Prior to the outbreak of World War I, Scheler had primarily been concerned with the articulation of the particular value structure of a culture and the social perversions of the objective rank order of values, addressing the political sphere only indirectly. The Great War provided Scheler with the opportunity to step into the political arena in a direct and influential manner. Scheler was certainly not alone amongst either the leading intellectuals or his fellow phenomenologists in his enthusiastic support of German aggression.[4] At this time, Scheler had lost his university teaching privileges and was forced to earn a living through private lectures and publications. The early years of the war were some of Scheler's most prolific, and he wrote extensively in support of the war. His main publication, *Der Genius des Krieges und der Deutsche Krieg* (*The Genius of War and the German War*) ([1915] 1982), was, according to the historian Jeffrey Verhey (2000), the most popular and reviewed work in Germany upon its publication. The purpose of these wartime writings was twofold: to demonstrate that (1) war makes an invaluable contribution to the growth and development of a people and their culture and (2) German aggression was morally justified and consequently would serve as the means by which to reawaken the unique value of both the German people and the idea of Europe. The notion of ressentiment played a central role in achieving the latter.

The Genius of War and the German War was published just a year after Scheler published his works on sympathy and his theory of value, both of which establish the love of persons as the most profound act and moral obligation. There is, however, no contradiction between works dedicated to the value of love and those dedicated to the value of war. In fact, Scheler goes so far as to write that "war is the greatest aid of the light, holy, and beautiful genius of love" ([1916] 1982, 280). The so-called genius of war lies in its unique ability to awaken a people from its "leaden sleep" ([1915] 1982, 12) in order that they are able to recognize the significance of their history and value. As a means to remain consistent with his value theory, Scheler examines the genius of value in accord with the order of values, examining the relation that war has to life, culture, and the holy.

The "true root" ([1915] 1982, 31) of any war, according to Scheler, lies in the nature of life itself. Life in any of its forms, which includes the life of a people, is a dynamic process of becoming, growth, and unfolding. War is simply the outcome of the vital expansion of people coming into conflict with the vital growth of other peoples. As Scheler argued in his work on ressentiment, life grows through an overcoming that necessarily entails a sacrifice (1955, 76). Scheler expressed great regret that he could not join in the war efforts directly due to his health and age, dedicating his work on the war to "his friends in the fields" ([1915] 1982, 8). The heroic sacrifices soldiers make contribute directly to the continued growth and expansion of their people, lifegiving to the life of a people. War serves as a reminder of the willingness to sacrifice, a reminder of the value of the life of a people. War also makes a similar contribution to the continued growth of the culture of a people. It is only in war that the history of a people is brought to lived experience, a process by which a people collectively are placed into contact with the creative resources responsible for this history. Scheler ([1915] 1982, 48) goes so far to say that the greatest written works of history are all the direct consequences of war. The growth of a culture lies in the insights of great intellects, and war serves as both a reminder of these ingenious insights and an inspiration for novel ones.

Once Scheler provided an analysis of the contributions war can make to the growth of the life and culture of a people, his attention turned directly to the Great War and whether it ought to be considered a just war. Only a just war brings about a positive contribution. According to Scheler, there are two conditions that must be met in order for a war to be just. First, the threat posed must be both imminent and serious, and secondly, it must correspond to the genuine collective will of the people (Scheler [1915] 1982, 101). Scheler thought there was overwhelming evidence to satisfy the second condition, appealing to the popularity the war appeared to have across Germany at the time. The more difficult task was to satisfy the first condition. The imminent and serious threat was not a military invasion but a spiritual one. In his work on ressentiment, Scheler had argued that the modern worldview harbored a value reversal that placed utility over life. This value reversal posed a threat to both Germany and Europe because it threatened to destroy their unique value structures. The elevation of utility over life necessarily places the value of society over the communal bonds of a people.[5] All relations become mere contractual agreements.[6] A culture is not carried on through contractual relations but through the shared experiences of a people. In *The Genius of War and the German War*, Scheler focused primarily on how the promotion of utility over life had bolstered the rise of late capitalism, which thrives in any cultural environment that treats its people as self-interested individuals and not members of a community sharing historical bonds. As a type of ressentiment, the late capitalism of the modern worldview conceals its destructive and hegemonic nature under the apparent positive guise of greater international relations and the erasure of national borders that create only division amongst the world's people. Yet, for Scheler, the promise of greater international trade and commerce across borders was the deceptive means by which to replace one cultural ethos with another. An introduction of a new ethos for any culture would be the death of that culture; 1914 was the culmination of the growing cultural tensions that would threaten both Germany and Europe. "That is the great enormity of the world historical situation: that this unprecedented war is the *beginning* of Europe's new birth or the *beginning of its demise*! There is no third option" (Scheler [1915] 1982, 182).

Scheler's analysis of the dangerous cultural ethos of modernity in his earlier treatment of ressentiment was described as a value reversal permeating different aspects of the European

culture such as religion, economics, and science. In his wartime writings, this ethos becomes personified in the country of England, the "motherland of late capitalism" ([1915] 1982, 54). Scheler goes so far as to conclude *The Genius of War and the German War* with a list of 52 different forms of the reduction of cultural values to the value of utility in "English thinking" (249–50). It was England that had waged a silent spiritual war against Germany and Europe, and it was this war that justified a political war. Germany was merely defending itself against the colonial and hegemonic aspirations of England.[7]

These wartime writings were the only time Scheler defended the use of violence as a means to reverse the value reversal brought about through the act of ressentiment. It was a relatively short-lived political thought but one that contributed to a war that was responsible for the deaths of thousands upon thousands of people. Before the war officially ended, Scheler had withdrawn his enthusiastic support and turned his attention to a different resource in search of the possibility of a cultural renewal.[8] This new resource was the Catholic Church and its notion of solidarity, which he sought to capture with his notion of Christian democracy ([1917] 1954, 382). His turn to the Church was also short lived as he grew very disillusioned with the real political potential of the Church due to its "passivity" (Scheler 1990, 103). Nonetheless, it was the religious phase of Scheler's work that allowed him to rethink his use of ressentiment in the justification of violence and, in particular, his own hatred of the English people. He had argued that a new beginning for Germany and Europe would have to begin with a sense of collective guilt (Scheler [1918] 1954, 416). Although Scheler does not speak explicitly of his own guilt for how his work may have contributed to the great loss of life during the war, he is quite critical of his approach in *The Genius of War and the German War* as an example of ressentiment thinking. For instance, he refers to his work as a model of "protesting thought" ([1919] 1963, 205), a manner of thinking that arrives at its goal and task through a protest against others. A telling sign of the act of ressentiment is the moral degradation of others in order to promote one's own moral value. England was Scheler's victim. The lesson that Scheler would learn from his moral failings at this time would direct his attention away from the justification of violence and make use of ressentiment as a means to avoid war and open up a path toward peace.

4. Politics and Ressentiment

The first phase of Scheler's political thought is characterized by the search to discover a resource that could reverse the value reversal of the modern ethos. His turns to both the war and the Church were motivated by the hope that the deeper values of the European culture and the holy would inspire a cultural renewal and overcome the feeling of ressentiment that had infected the German people and Europe. The second phase of Scheler's thought takes place in the context of the Weimar Republic and the parliamentary democracy. This phase was haunted by the specter of a second world war and the threat of greater "destruction, explosion, blood, and tears" (Scheler [1928] 1976, 153). It is also marked by a significant shift in Scheler's understanding of spirit and the power that values can wield. The utter failure of the war and his disappointment with the Church had shown Scheler that the deeper spiritual values are powerless on their own to direct the course of a culture and history. Ideals and values only have power when they become realized in and through the basic life-drives of a people. Politics is the activity whereby the drive for power comes to be directed by deeper spiritual values, a process he calls the spiritualization of power. Although Scheler remains very much concerned with the value reversal of modernity and the promotion of

the lower value of utility, his focus in respect to ressentiment is the manner in which this feeling devalues the activity of politics and attempts to negate the process of spiritualization. The result of this form of value negation is that power comes to be directed by the lower values, bringing an end to democratic rule and sowing the seeds of despotism. Had Scheler lived long enough, he would have witnessed all his greatest fears coming true: the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the rise of the Third Reich.

Scheler was developing his later political thought in conjunction with a myriad of new projects such as the sociology of knowledge, philosophical anthropology, metaphysics, and history. All these different projects were understood to be complementary and different ways to describe the interplay of the two basic movements of life and spirit.[9] The human being as finite person is the intersection of these two movements and the being who thus has the task of unifying them. In the human being, the movement of life is expressed in three distinct life-drives—nutrition, sex, and power—and consequently related to three basic social institutions: namely, the economy, the family, and politics. The institutional forms of these drives are determined by the dominant ideals and values of a culture. In the movement from lower to higher values, the spiritualization of power follows the tendency from the power to might to the power of right, from physical power to spiritual power (Scheler 1990, 93–94). However, if there is a perversion in the order of values and the lower values takes precedence, power moves in the opposite direction and takes on impersonal expressions such as violence and oppression. The movement of life and thus the drive for power are fundamental aspects of the individual and of a people. It is not a question of whether power is being spiritualized but a question of how—of whether power is being directed by the higher or lower values.

In his earlier work on ressentiment, Scheler had warned of "situations" ([1912] 1955, 52) in which the psychic roots of ressentiment were cultivated and bolstered. Given the economic and cultural depression experienced after the war, it was, for Scheler, not surprising that the feeling of ressentiment would enter the political climate of postwar Germany. Not only had Germany suffered an embarrassing defeat, but it was also forced to make devastating concessions in the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. This situation would foster both the need for revenge and a sense of impotence, the two basic ingredients in the feeling of ressentiment. As an act of value negation, the feeling of ressentiment permeating the political arena in Germany sought to negate and devalue the value of political activity altogether.

There are three distinct ways in which the value of politics was demeaned during this time, according to Scheler. The first and most dangerous was the rise of political indifference. The deceptive nature of ressentiment lies in its ability to mask a value negation behind an apparent positive valuation. The indifference rising amongst the students and working groups was rooted in a feeling of powerlessness, a feeling that there was nothing they could do politically that would change the depressed state of Germany. Yet, rather than admit this sense of powerlessness, politics is transformed into an activity that is damaging to the person's "soul." In his essay *Von zwei deutschen Krankheiten* (*The Two German Illnesses*), Scheler refers to this protection of one's inner sacred life as "false interiority" ([1919] 1963, 208). Disguised as a spiritual move inward, the retreat to the purity of one's soul only signals a feeling of deep powerless to do anything in the 'outside' world. "Those who disdain politics because it presupposes a striving for power and say that 'a political song is a nasty song,' that politics 'spoils character,' indicate only that they have a weak character, that they prefer to avoid their duty" (Scheler 1990, 72). The direct connection Scheler makes between this form of political indifference and the rise of the despot springs