Transcendence and the Overcoming of Values: Heidegger’s Critique of Scheler


Parvis Emad’s book is, at first reading, simply an essay on Heidegger’s critique of Scheler.¹ The book is subtitled ‘His Critique of Intentionality’, but Heidegger’s critique of intentionality on Emad’s presentation of it has only one foil—Scheler; Husserl’s theory of intentionality is not considered. We are not even invited to judge the extent to which Heidegger’s discussion of intentionality would also be effective against his former teacher. Similarly, although the Neo-Kantian and Nietzschean accounts of values are considered, Emad’s inquiry into them is subordinated to an attempt to discover the principles which could then be applied against Scheler. Although we know that Heidegger did not accept Scheler’s account of values—Emad identifies Heidegger’s call in The Letter on Humanism “to think against values”² as directed specifically against Scheler—Heidegger did not provide a detailed examination of Scheler’s account of values. The book attempts to reconstruct that critique.

Emad’s presentation of Scheler’s views on phenomenology and the act is of the highest quality and as a treatment of Heidegger and Scheler Heidegger and the Phenomenology of Values ranks alongside, though it is very different in character from, the work of his colleague at DePaul University, Manfred Frings.³ One cannot say that Emad is attempting to give either a balanced or a complete portrait of the relation of Heidegger and Scheler. For one thing, Emad is too severe on Scheler. We find in his book little trace of the Scheler whom, on his death in 1928, Heidegger
called "the strongest philosophical power... in all of present-day philosophy." Of course, it has to be said that Scheler's ontology never seemed to match the skill of his descriptions, and his rich awareness of the fullness of life was not accompanied by an awareness of its historicity. Scheler's weaknesses are Heidegger's strengths; that is why Heidegger's criticisms of Scheler are so devastating. But the inspiration that Scheler gave to Heidegger and to Merleau-Ponty should not be forgotten.

And yet we would misjudge the importance of Emad's book if we were to suppose that it was simply a monograph on Heidegger's position vis-à-vis a somewhat neglected philosopher, albeit one whose importance Heidegger himself was always ready to acknowledge. First of all, the dual themes of intentionality and value are of far from limited interest. Emad himself draws attention to the prevalence of the notion of value and his essay is all the more welcome as Mongis' book on Heidegger's critique of the notion of value is insufficiently known in the English-speaking world. Second, in attempting to reconstruct a Heideggerian critique of Scheler, Emad is led to a consideration of how Heidegger practices critique. It is here especially that Emad shows that he belongs among that growing community of readers of Heidegger who are no longer overlooking the transformation of thinking that Heidegger calls for. Emad does not assimilate Heidegger's critique of Scheler to the standard models of philosophical critique. By appealing to the notions of 'destruction' and 'overcoming', he explores the nature of Heidegger's relation to metaphysics. Thus, Emad's reconstruction of Heidegger's critique of Scheler's accounts of values raises in a forceful manner the question of the overcoming of metaphysics, precisely because, as a reconstruction, we are not able simply to repeat Heidegger's words, but have to think for ourselves.

Emad begins with Heidegger's critique of Scheler's account of intentionality because, with the publication of the first volumes of the Gesamtausgabe, we are here on solid ground. The distinctive feature of Scheler's notion of intentionality is its reliance on the concepts of act, of person and of the spheres of value. It was already clear from Being and Time that Heidegger would have us call into question the unexamined presuppositions of these notions. Emad dutifully rehearses the claim that the notion of person is inherited from Augustine, Calvin, Zwingli, and Pascal, and thus has theological implications that Scheler should have explored (HPV 19). But only in 1978 did we learn that, in the 1928 lecture course Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik, the last course he delivered at Marburg, Heidegger referred to Scheler's misunderstanding of transcendence. It is this evidence that enables Emad to bring