Scheler's concept of the Person

I'd like to begin by at looking, very briefly, at some of Scheler's prefatory remarks to his *Formalismus*. As Scheler makes clear in the preface to the first edition, his aim in the *Formalismus* is "to establish a strictly scientific and positive foundation [Grundlegung] for philosophical ethics." Given this aim, I have to admit that our approach to the text is, in essence, a disservice to the work as a whole. Our own goal is, of course, tied to the overall groudlaying at work in the text, but we will elide over the entire first part of the *Formalismus*, which offers a thorough-going critique both of any formal ethics but also a critique of all consequentialist (or teleological) ethical theories. However, we are focused – at least as one of our two goals as we read this text – on the crux of the issue in the *Formalismus*, that is, the concept of person that Scheler articulates herein. As he says in the preface to the second edition, "the spirit behind my ethics is one of rigid ethical absolutism and objectivism. My position may in another respect be called "ethical intuitionism" and "non-formal apriorism." The principle outlined in this work, according to which *all values*, including all possible values of things and non-personal organizations and groupings, *are subordinated to values of the person..." Scheler offers a theory of ethics that seeks to establish the dignity of the person while not at once falling into a depersonalizing formalism characteristic of Kantian ethics and those ethical systems after Kant with the "implicit material assumption that the person is basically nothing but a logical subject of rational acts..." For this reason, I think we can say with some assurance that, as we focus our regard to the concept of person here, we are focusing on the central issue in the work.

As I've insinuated, though, our goal is complex when reading this text. We are not merely reading Scheler. We are reading Scheler after Husserl. Or, to put the matter another way, we are reading Scheler also to understand the essential connection of this work to Husserl's phenomenology. Scheler, himself, asserts such a connection in the preface to the first edition. "I owe to the significant works of Edmund Husserl," he writes, "the methodological consciousness of the unity and sense of the phenomenological attitude, which binds together the coeditors of the *Jahrbuch*, men who otherwise vastly differ both in world view and on philosophical matters." Hence we are interested in clarifying this "phenomenological attitude" at work in this investigation.

In regard to this latter task, let's turn to section 6.A.2 "Person and the Ego [das Ich] of Transcendental Apperception," precisely pages 380 and following. Before we look in more detail at the distinction Scheler is drawing between the I and Person, I think it is worthwhile to note Scheler's explicit discussion of the phenomenological reduction in this paragraph. Scheler asserts hypothetically at the bottom of page 380 and following:

> If (by means of a phenomenological reduction) we set aside this executing agent along with its reality and character, we have only those different act-essences – e.g., judging, loving, hating, willing, as well as inner and out perception – of which only one has an ego corresponding to it,

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3xxiii (emphasis mine).

4371.

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namely, the act-essence of inner perception. Here again no executing agent is required for these acts, and not just because we have set aside the individual executing agent. Disregarding individual act-executing agents, we examine the infinite fullness of existing lawful relations.\(^6\)

Whereupon Scheler then goes on to catalogue various lawful noetic-noematic relations. This, then, leads to a question which Scheler identifies as emblematic of this sort of stance. I want to skip over this question for the moment and jump to the second sentence of next paragraph, where again Scheler asserts another hypothetical:

For if we perform a phenomenological reduction with regard to objects, as we did with regard to acts, and if in doing so we set aside the reality or the non-reality \([\text{Wirklichkeit und Unwirklichkeit}]\) of objects in order to study their essential interconnections and the meaning of their plain whatness, i.e., their formal and non-formal whatness as based on special regions of objects, e.g., the region of values and the region of extant objects (or resistance as the phenomenal and objective correlate of striving) \(7\) [then we are faced with this problem]

Again, let’s just skip over this problem for the moment. We’ll come back to them, but let’s examine what Scheler is up to here. I want, in other words, to examine the limited acceptance of the phenomenological reduction by Max Scheler in this work. It’s worth noting that this section ostensibly offers a critique of the Kantian conception of the ego as the locus of transcendental apperception. "The ego cannot be made a condition of an object in any sense of the term,"\(^8\) confidently argues earlier in the chapter. Of course, the Kantian position is that transcendental apperception \(qua\) transcendental ego is precisely this condition. Yet in the passages by Scheler that we just quoted, we seem now to have turned from Kant to Husserl. And now, if we pay special attention to the hypothetical construction of these sentences, we see that Scheler does not fully accept the Husserlian conception of phenomenological reduction. I don’t want to argue that Scheler rejects outright the phenomenological method articulated by Husserl. For instance, he says earlier in Part I, on page 65:

Their \textit{phenomenological analysis} [referring here to intentional acts of whatever quality belonging to man], which consists essentially in setting aside both the specific organizations of the bearer of acts and all positing of real objects so that the \textit{essence} of these \textit{act-classes} and their \textit{contents} can be discovered, [...\textit{their phenomenological analysis}] is distinguished from all psychology and anthropology as the phenomenological analysis of thinking is distinguished from the psychology of thinking. A \textit{spiritual} level also exists for this analysis, one that has nothing to do with the sphere of the sensible or the sphere of the vital or of the lived body \([\text{Leib}]\)...\(^9\)

In other words, phenomenological analysis is to be distinguished from any sort of analysis germane to the positive sciences – but most especially from analyses of a psychology and or an anthropology. Remember, though, that for Husserl the epoché and reduction are the means by which to obtain the apodictic field of transcendental subjectivity. And recall also, that Husserl distinguishes this method of reduction from the method of eidetic description. By putting out of play the position takings occurring straightforwardly in daily (naïve) experience (wherein the being-sense of the intended objectivity in consciousness has the predicate as

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\(^6\) 380-1 (underlining mine).
\(^7\) 381 (underlining mine).
\(^8\) 375.
\(^9\) 65.
real, non-real, fictive, ideal, etc.), the phenomenological investigates opens up a field of research into the noetic-noematic relations going on anonymously by transcendental subjectivity. This is not the method of eidetic description. Hence let us also recall, that the method of eidetic reduction is one that supplements the reduction insofar as it brings the insights obtained by means of the phenomenological reduction to a level of scientific cognition. "We come to the methodological insight," Husserl tells us in the Fourth Meditation, "that along with the phenomenological reduction the basic form of all particular transcendental methods is eidetic intuition, indeed that both determine completely the legitimate sense of a transcendental phenomenology."10

Clearly, Scheler accepts the method of eidetic description. Yet the hypothetical character of his assertions above highlight a certain with the reduction, itself, at least as articulated in the writings we've read by Husserl.11

Now we can turn to the two problems associated with the two passages we've just quoted in order to clarify the source of Scheler's discomfort. First off, the issue can be seen in some respects to be a terminological one. Scheler makes clear that the person is not the same as the I. As he says in section b. on page 386 and following, and I'm telescoping two paragraphs together into one quote:

The "ego," as we have shown, is an object in every sense of the term... In contrast to this, an act is never an object.... If an act can therefore never be an object, then the person who lives in the execution of acts [die in ihrem Aktvollzug lebende Person] can a fortiori never by an object. The only and exclusive kind of givenness of the person is his execution of acts (included the execution of acts reflecting on acts). It is through this execution of acts that the person experiences himself [sich erlebt] at the same time. Or, if we are concerned with other persons, the person is experienced in terms of post-execution, coexecution, or pre-execution of acts. In these cases of the execution of acts of other persons, there is no objectification.12

The ego is, in other words, a psychological or an anthropological concept, since it is the object of a reflection of spiritual activity per se. The person qua person, whether my own person or another, is not nor can be objectified in principle.13 Looking now at the two problems associated with the two passages we've been examining, there is at root a unitary issue: the problem of personality. However, the problem is not a simple problem of the givenness of person. With a static analysis of act-essence, "this question has nothing to do with the one who executes such acts or with a real being that executes them."14 Hence in the preliminary reduction to to the universal structures of transcendental experience (2nd CM), the foundation of all acts (i.e., the person) is, itself, overlooked. On the other hand, with the reduction to the essence of objectivity as such, the corresponding problem, itself, remains out of view. For "a world (as essence) corresponds to the person (as essence).15

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10 Husserl. Cartesian Meditations IV, modified 72.
11 It is likely that Scheler had only the Logical Investigations, "Philosophy as Rigorous Science," and Ideas I as his guide — in addition, of course, to personal conversations with Husserl.
12 387.
13 It is worth noting that Husserl’s theory of empathy also rejects the experience of the other as essentially an objectification of the other.
14 381.
15 381.